**CEDAW – General Discussion for the drafting of a general recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls.**

**24 June 2021**

**Ms. Anne Nuorgam, Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

***“Effective participation, consultation and consent of indigenous women and girls in political and public life”***

Historically, indigenous peoples have been marginalized by dominant societies and have often faced assimilation and cultural genocide. They continue to be hurt by the effects of colonization, lack of ownership of their lands and territories and cruel forms of social and institutional racism. And, I would argue that indigenous women have been the most affected.

Indigenous women face barriers to access health services, education, employment and protection. They are often subjected to social stereotypes and excluded from participation in the social and political life of their communities as well as other decision marking levels. Inequality and discrimination affect indigenous women economic and financial autonomy.

In spite of the specific challenges facing indigenous women, they are not simply victims but are in fact survivors – who have much to contribute to societies and come both to national and international debates with valuable advice about the great issues facing humanity such as climate change. Indigenous women also have a great role to play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, protecting biodiversity and promoting cultural diversity. They are active agents of change, who can influence their futures, cultures, and heritages. Therefore, it is essential to understand the realities faced by indigenous women.

Through the years, indigenous women have organized at local, national and international levels to address the specific issues and challenges they faced. At the United Nations, indigenous women were active participants and contributors during the more than two decades of negotiations for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007 by the General Assembly. Indigenous women participated in the discussions to establish the UN mechanisms on indigenous peoples, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In 2014, indigenous women actively participated in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples that adopted an outcome document that contains references to key issues to promote the rights of indigenous women on empowerment and full participation in decision-making processes, the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination, and the collection of disaggregated data. The outcome document also called on the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Status of Women to take specific action on indigenous women. At the time, Member States recommitted themselves to upholding the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, indigenous women have taken roles and responsibilities to lead these processes in conjunction with indigenous men.

These are clear examples of meaningful participation of indigenous women in decision making processes to ensure that their concerns and aspirations be reflected.

Yet often indigenous women’s contribution to the struggle of indigenous peoples is not recognized or acknowledged.

Indigenous women live in different countries all around the world in distinct circumstances. Often, state laws, policies, programs, and practices do not respect and ensure the rights of women, and even less those of indigenous women. Discrimination or violence against indigenous women, structural and institutional inequality or violation of their human rights have been perceive as “normal” even within their own communities. These circumstances vary depending on the situation and specific circumstances but persist.

Patriarchy, racism and discrimination are central factors in indigenous women’s limited access to political participation. Similarly, indigenous women’s fears and low self-esteem, their inexperience in participating in assemblies or forums, the lack of accessible information, and the fact that political participation is not institutionalized among indigenous women.

The political participation and representation of indigenous women in decision-making at the national and local levels is key to guaranteeing their rights and accounting for their experiences and demands. Therefore, States should build on the rights recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Articles No. 4 and No. 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to ensure that indigenous women and girls participate in matters that affect their rights and representation. Further, States should take specific measures to protect the political participation of indigenous women and girls to participate in and access customary governance bodies and decision-making processes.

Indigenous women’s participation in political and public life is still invisible due to the lack of reliable, up-to-date statistics disaggregated by ethnicity and gender.

The following strategies should be considered to overcome these challenges:

1. Support indigenous women’s participation at local, national, regional and global levels, via their interaction between organizations as well as with State institutions, and the UN system.
2. Promote leadership training based on principles, values and methodologies pertinent to indigenous women’s realities and cultural worldview.
3. Promote partnerships among and between indigenous women’s organizations and academic institutions, for exchange and discussion in summits, forums, and meetings as well as networks and virtual platforms.
4. Support intergenerational exchange between indigenous women and the younger generation to support them to continue their struggle as well as promote their participation.
5. Promote the empowerment of indigenous women, by highlighting the accomplishments of those who have reached positions of power. Their experience will encourage other indigenous women to participate in politics as well as serve as role models for the younger generation.
6. Value, appreciate and recognize indigenous women’s capacities, so their experience serves to promote equality and social justice, value diversity and cultures.

The Permanent Forum welcomes that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is organizing this virtual day of general discussion on the rights of indigenous women and girls, organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Further, the Permanent Forum is highly committed to this process and looking forward to contributing meaningfully to this effort.

The adoption of a general recommendation on indigenous women by CEDAW, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international instruments, will be a milestone in response to indigenous women’s struggle.

In that vein, we reiterate that the general recommendation on indigenous women must consider issues related to the individual and collective rights to equality, non-discrimination, and self-determination; social and economic rights, including the rights to decent work and to land, territory, and resources; the right to water and food; cultural rights; civil and political rights; and the right to live free of any form of violence.

Thank you