

December 10, 2019

International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) Statement in the High-Level Segment

The women of the Indigenous Caucus at COP25 have prepared this statement in honour of Gender Day.

Colonialism, hand-in-hand with patriarchy attempted to dismantle powerful Indigenous womanhoods. As nation-states developed, our women were displaced and made vulnerable -- settlers mined our land, stole our land, and broke down our women, dismantling traditional gender relations where matriarchies and matrilineal societies once flourished.

But Indigenous women are powerful. Many of our traditional societies were led by our women, and today many of our social movements, governments, and climate movements across the globe are being led by our women.

The traditional knowledge of Indigenous people is alive today because of Indigenous women. And this knowledge is closely interwoven in the way we use and manage our resources. However, this traditional knowledge is not only being threatened by climate change but also by how governments act on climate change.

We know that where resource extraction exists, violence against Indigenous women is normalized and intensified. Resource extraction is destroying Mother Earth, and poisoning our water. Our forests are the lungs of Mother Earth, and they bring life, balance, and teachings. Our forests are being destroyed by fossil fuel extraction, clear cutting, and the increase in forest fires due to rising temperatures. We need the land, water, and forests to maintain our teachings, our languages, and ways of being. Resource extraction is extracting our humanity, and violating our right to live sustainably on the land.

Governments and corporations talk about solutions, but they do not want to talk about us. It is Indigenous women that contribute the least to climate change, yet we feel the greatest burden because we are dependent on the land and live in regions of the world where climate change has the greatest negative impacts.

If our mothers and grandmothers were state negotiators, we would have solved climate issues a long time ago. And if we are going to have any chance, we will need to follow the powerful selfless leadership of our Indigenous mothers and grandmothers.

The negative effects of climate change will continue to happen in our communities, yet we do not see our rights being represented in the documents we talk about here at COP. So we have a challenge to governments: get your acts together and ensure human rights and Indigenous rights are central to the COP 25 discussions. Otherwise, what will we be teaching our children about in seven generations?

In the Gunadule Nation of Panama, it is believed that in each thread of the fabric we weave, we find our female ancestors. Weaving fabric is a powerful form of communication for my people, and within it we find the meaning of life. In daily life, Indigenous women find harmony with the Nabgwana, Pachamama (Mother Earth) and it is from their strength that we create new dreams, and redefine our societies. We believe the voice of the Earth is feminine, and it is from that voice that Indigenous peoples have received the gift to live in harmony with the land.

As Indigenous women, we are powerful, and we will continue to protect our Mother.