Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women

NGO Forum, UN Fourth World Conference on Women Huairou, Beijing, Peoples Republic of China

1. The Earth is our mother. From her we get our life, and our ability to live. It is our responsibility to care for our mother and in caring for our mother, we care for ourselves. Women, all females are a manifestation of Mother Earth in human form.

2. We, the daughters of Mother Earth, the Indigenous women present at the NGO Forum of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, have come together to collectively decide what we can do to bring about a world which we would like our children and our children's children to live in. We acknowledge and build upon earlier declarations which evolved from earlier meetings and conferences, like the 1990 Declaration of the Second International Indigenous Women's Conference, the Kari-Oca Declaration of 1992, and those of various regional conferences of Indigenous women, and the consultations and conferences done in preparation for this Beijing Conference.

3. This declaration is drafted in recognition of the existence of the UN Declaration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples, the Draft Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous peoples, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Cairo Declaration, and the Copenhagen Social Summit Declaration. While we agree with most of the provisions of ILO convention 169, we cannot endorse a Convention which allows national states to remove Indigenous peoples from their lands with military force.

4. We stand in unity behind this "1995 Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women" which is the fruit of our collective efforts to understand the world and our situation as Indigenous women, critique the Draft Platform for Action, and articulate our demands to the international community, the governments, and the NGO's.

5. We, the women of the original peoples of the world have struggled actively to defend our rights to self-determination and to our territories which have been invaded and colonized by powerful nations and interests. We have been and are continuing to suffer from multiple oppressions; as Indigenous peoples, as citizens of colonized and neo-colonial countries, as women, and as members of the poorer classes of society. In spite of this, we have been and continue to protect, transmit, and develop our Indigenous cosmovision, our science and technologies, our arts and culture, and our Indigenous socio- political economic systems, which are in harmony with the natural laws of mother earth. We still retain the ethical and esthetic values, the knowledge and philosophy, the spirituality, which conserves and nurtures Mother Earth. We are persisting in our struggles for self-determination and for our rights to our territories. This has been shown in our tenacity and capacity to withstand and survive the colonization happening in our lands in the last 500 years.

6. The "New World Order" which is engineered by those who have abused and raped Mother Earth, colonized, marginalized, and discriminated against us, is being imposed on us viciously. This is recolonization coming under the name of globalization and trade liberalization. The forces behind this are the rich industrialized nation-states, their transnational corporations, financial institutions which they control like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). They will cooperate and compete among themselves to the last frontiers of the world's natural resources located on our lands and waters.

7. The Final Agreement of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the establishment of the WTO has created new instruments for the appropriation and privatization of our community intellectual rights through the introduction of the trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS). This facilitates and legitimizes the piracy of our biological, cultural and intellectual resources, and heritage by transnational corporations. Our Indigenous values and practice of sharing knowledge among ourselves, and mutual exchange will become things of the past because we are being forced to play by the rules of the market.

8. Bioprospecting, which is nothing but the alienation of our invaluable intellectual and cultural heritage through scientific collection missions and ethnobotanical research, is another feature of recolonization. After colonizing our lands and appropriating our natural resources, they are now appropriating our human genetic resources, through the Human Genome Diversity Project. Their bid for the patenting of life forms is the ultimate colonization and commodification of everything we hold sacred. It won't matter anymore that we will disappear because we will be "immortalized" as "isolates of historic interest" by the Human Genome Diversity Project.

9. It is an imperative for us, as Indigenous peoples, to stand in their way, because it means more ethnocide and genocide for us. It will lead to the disappearance of the diverse biological and cultural resources in this world which we have sustained. It will cause the further erosion and destruction of our Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and culture. It will exacerbate the conflicts occurring on our lands and communities and our displacement form our ancestral territories.

Critique of the Beijing Draft Platform for Action

10. The Beijing Draft Platform for Action, unfortunately, is not critical at all of the New World Order." It does present a comprehensive list of issues confronting women and an even longer list of actions which governments, the UN and its agencies, multilateral financing institutions, and NGO's should do. It identifies "the persistent and increasing burden of poverty" as the number one critical concern. It acknowledges that "most of the goals of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies...have not been achieved." It also acknowledged that "in the past decade the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to the number of men."

11. However, it does not acknowledge that this poverty is caused by the same powerful nations and interests who have colonized us and are continuing to recolonize, homogenize, and impose their economic growth development model and monocultures on us. It does not present a coherent analysis of why is it that the goals of "equality, development, and peace," becomes more elusive to women each day in spite of three UN conferences on women since

1975. While it refers to structural adjustment programs (SAP), it only talks about mitigating its negative impacts, not questioning the basic framework undergirding SAPs. It even underscores the importance of trade liberalization and access to open and dynamic markets, which to us, pose the biggest threat to our rights to our territories, resources, intellectual and cultural heritage.

12. The clear bias of the New World Order for big industries, big agri-business corporations, etc., has meant the decimation of traditional livelihood and economic activities of Indigenous peoples like hunting, food gathering and harvesting, reindeer herding, subsistence agriculture, fishing, small handicraft businesses, etc. The non-economic activities of Indigenous women have been ignored and rendered invisible, although these sustain the existence of Indigenous peoples. Our dispossession from our territorial land and water base, upon which our existence and identity depends, must be addressed as a key problem. The Platform is very vague on this.

13. The critical areas of concern it has identified are also critical for Indigenous women. While it correctly identifies unequal access to education and health as areas of concern, it does not question the basic Western orientation of the prevailing education and health systems. It does not reflect the fact that these systems have perpetuated the discrimination against Indigenous peoples. It also does not acknowledge the role of Western media, education, and religion, in eroding the cultural diversity which exists among Indigenous peoples. These Western systems hasten ethnocide. It does not give proper recognition and importance to Indigenous health care systems and the role of its practitioners.

14. The violence and sexual trafficking of Indigenous women and the increasing numbers of Indigenous women becoming labor exports, has been aggravated by the perpetuation of an economic growth development model which is export- oriented, import-dependent, and mired in foreign debt. Military operations conducted on Indigenous peoples lands use rape, sexual-slavery, and sexual trafficking of Indigenous women, to further subjugate Indigenous peoples. The development of tourism to attract foreign capital has also led to the commodification of Indigenous women and the dramatic increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS. This reality is not addressed by the Platform. Domestic violence and the increasing suicide rates among Indigenous women, especially those who are in highly industrialized countries are caused by psychological alienation and assimilationist policies characteristic of these countries.

15. While it talks about the effects of persecution and armed conflict, it does not acknowledge that many of these armed conflicts are occurring on Indigenous peoples lands. These armed conflicts are the result of the aggressive actions of transnational corporations and governments to appropriate the remaining resources on Indigenous peoples territories despite the assertion of Indigenous peoples to their right to control these resources. It does not recognize that the resolution of armed conflict, especially those happening on Indigenous peoples lands, lies in the recognition of our rights to self- determination and to our lands and waters. The phrase "internally displaced" in the text is bracketed, when in fact, this is the reality for many Indigenous peoples all over the world.

16. Its recommended 'strategic objectives' and actions focus on ensuring women's equal access and full participation in decision-making, equal status, equal pay, and integrating and mainstreaming gender perspectives and analysis. These objectives are hollow and meaningless if the inequality between nations, races, classes, and genders, are not

challenged at the same time. Equal pay and equal status in the so-called First World is made possible because of the perpetuation of a development model which is not only non-sustainable but causes the increasing violation of the human rights of women, Indigenous peoples, and nations elsewhere. The Platform's overemphasis of gender discrimination and gender equality depoliticizes the issues confronting Indigenous women.

Indigenous Women's Proposals and Demands

17. Within the context of our understanding of our situation and our critique of the "New World Order" and of the Beijing Draft Platform for Action, we present the following demands.

18. That all governments and international non-governmental and governmental organizations recognize the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination, and enshrine the historical, political, social, cultural, economic, and religious rights of the Indigenous peoples in their constitutions and legal systems.

Recognize And Respect Our Rights To Self Determination

19. That the governments amend the ILO Convention 169 to remove the section which allows nations states to remove Indigenous peoples from their lands through military force, and thereafter ratify and implement it.

20. That the 1994 Final Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples be adopted and ratified by governments without any revisions and reservations. That the full participation of Indigenous peoples in the open-ended working group of the Commission of Human Rights to further elaborate on the draft will be ensured.

21. That the "s" in term Indigenous 'peoples' be put in all United Nations documents, declarations, and conventions. That, hereafter, we will not be referred to as ethnic minorities or cultural communities but as Indigenous peoples.

Recognize And Respect Our Right To Our Territories, And Right To Development, Education, and Health

22. We demand that the international community and governments recognize and respect our rights to our territories. This includes our right to decide what to do with our lands and territories and to develop in an integrated, sustainable way, according to our own cosmovision.

23. We urge the governments who are opening up our territories to foreign investors especially to mining corporations, to respect these rights. Full disclosure of development projects and investments to be put into our territories should be done. We should be fully involved in making decisions on these matters. Indigenous Peoples' lands which have been ravaged by mining corporations, or which have become dumping sites of toxic, radioactive and hazardous wastes, should be rehabilitated by the corporations or the governments which allowed this devastation.

24. That the governments, international organizations and NGO's assume their responsibility

to alter their policies and allocate resources for the inter-cultural and bilingual educational system and the development of Indigenous health care systems according to our cultural principles and cosmovision. That books, audio and video materials, etc. be screened and purged of discriminatory, racist, and sexist content.

25. That the governments implement realistic policies which will solve the problem of illiteracy among Indigenous and peasant women, providing them access to inter-cultural and bilingual education which respects Indigenous cosmologies, promotes non-sexist formative education which puts women and men in touch with the land.

26. That the governments and international community implement health policies which guarantee accessible, appropriate, affordable, and quality services for Indigenous peoples and which respect and promote the reproductive health of Indigenous women. That budget allocations to health and other social services be increased to at least twenty percent of the national budget and that a significant amount of this goes to Indigenous peoples communities.

27. That the Indigenous health care systems and practices of Indigenous peoples be accorded the proper recognition and respect and the roles of Indigenous health practitioners and healers be further enhanced.

28. That the dumping of hazardous drugs, chemicals, and contraceptives on Indigenous peoples communities be stopped. We demand that coercive family planning services, like mass sterilization of Indigenous women and coercive abortion programs be stopped. That population policies like transmigration be condemned and halted.

29. We demand that uranium mining taking place in our lands and nuclear testing in our territories and waters be stopped. If no uranium mining is done then there will be no nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors, and nuclear accidents.

Stop Human Rights Violations And Violence Against Indigenous Women

30. That the United Nations create the necessary mechanisms to monitor the Indigenous peoples situation especially those facing the threat of extinction and human rights violations and to stop these ethnocidal and genocidal practices.

31. Call on all the Media and Communication Systems to realize that Indigenous women refuse to continue to be treated and considered as exotic, decorative, sexual objects, or study-objects, but instead to be recognized as human beings with their own thinking and feeling capabilities and abilities for personal development; spiritually, intellectually, and materially.

32. Demand for an investigation of the reported cases of sexual slavery and the rape of Indigenous women by the military men happening in areas of armed conflict, such as those within Karen territories in Burma, Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, etc. The perpetrators should be persecuted and the survivors be provided justice and rehabilitation and services.

33. Demand for an investigation of the forcible mass sterilization and anti-fertility programs done among Indigenous women. Identify which international and national agencies are

responsible for these and make them accountable.

34. That all acts of discrimination against Indigenous Women be considered and punished as a crime.

35. That the governments create juridical and social instruments adequate to protect women from domestic and state violence.

36. That Indigenous customary laws and justice systems which are supportive of women victims of violence be recognized and reinforced. That Indigenous laws, customs, and traditions which are discriminatory to women be eradicated.

37. That all internally displaced Indigenous peoples be allowed to return to their own communities and the necessary rehabilitation and support services be provided to them.

Recognize And Respect Our Rights To Our Intellectual And Cultural Heritage; Our Rights To Control The Biological Diversity In Our Territories

38. We demand that our inalienable rights to our intellectual and cultural heritage be recognized and respected. We will resist all processes seeking to destroy this heritage and alienate our resources and knowledge from us.

39. We demand that the western concept and practice of intellectual property rights as defined by the TRIPS in GATT, not be applied to Indigenous peoples communities and territories. We demand that the World Trade Organization recognize our intellectual and cultural rights and not allow the domain of private intellectual rights and corporate monopolies to violate these.

40. We call for a stop to the patenting of all life forms. This to us, is the ultimate commodification of life which we hold sacred.

41. We demand that the Human Genome Diversity Project be condemned and stopped. Those responsible for this project should be asked to make an accounting of all the genetic collections they have taken from Indigenous peoples and have these returned to the owners of these genes. The applications for patents to these genetic materials should be stopped and no applications, thereafter, should be accepted and processed. Indigenous peoples should be invited to participate in the ongoing discussions in UNESCO on the bioethics of the Human Genome.

42. We demand that governments at the local, regional, and national levels, recognize our intellectual community rights and support us in our defense of these rights, an obligation which they have undertaken as Parties to the Biodiversity Convention.

43. We will continue to freely use our biodiversity for meeting our local needs, while ensuring that the biodiversity base of our local economies will not be eroded. We will revitalize and rejuvenate our biological and cultural heritage and continue to be the guardians and custodians of our knowledge and biodiversity.

Ensure Political Participation Of Indigenous Women And Enhance Their Capabilities And Access To Resources

44. We demand equal political participation in the Indigenous and modern structures of socio-political structures and systems at all levels.

45. We will dialogue with non-Indigenous women's organizations and formations to implement a realistic plan of solidarity with us.

46. We ask that NGO's that work with Indigenous women be guided by principles of mutual respect and promote the full participation of Indigenous women in action and in articulating issues regarding Indigenous women and Indigenous peoples.

47. Call on the funding agencies and donor agencies that support and promote women's organizations and programs, to share space and financial resources in order to promote the development of Indigenous women.

48. We will work towards reinforcing our own organizations, enhancing communications between us, and gain the space that is rightfully ours, as members of specific identities (nations and cultures) within the Decade of Indigenous peoples and other institutions that represent governmental and non-governmental organizations.

49. We will work towards the holding of an International Conference of Indigenous Women which will be held as part of the celebration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples.

50. We give our sincere thanks to the Chinese Organizing Committee and the Chinese people for their efforts in hosting and providing hospitality to us.

Approved And Signed On 7 September 1995 At The Indigenous Women's Tent, Huairou, Beijing, China.