

International Indigenous Women's Forum

In preparation for the United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+ 5, over sixty Indigenous women participated in a preparatory meeting on June 1 & 2, 2000 in New York City. The International Indigenous Women's Forum on Beijing+5 included training and information sessions, workshops and strategy sessions.

Day one of the Forum was co-chaired by Vice-Chief Mary Jane Jim (Canada) and Rose Cunningham (Nicaragua), and the meeting was opened by Elder Lorraine Canoe. Dr. Larissa Behrendt (Australia) provided information on Indigenous Women, the United Nations and International Law, while Rose Cunningham provided an overview of the world conferences on women and Indigenous Peoples. Lea Nicholas-Mackenzie provided background information on the Beijing+5 Review, and Susana Fried from the United Nations Development Fund for Women informed the participants about the progress of negotiations and expectations for the upcoming United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5.

Carol Kalafatic from the International Indian Treaty Council shared information about the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while Vicky Tauli Corpuz (Philippines) and Tarcila Rivera (Peru) informed participants about the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Finally, Monica Aleman (Nicaragua) provided participants with an update on the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The remainder of Day one was spent in workshops on the following topics:

- Education and training, power and decision-making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- Human rights and the environment
- Poverty and the economy
- Health and violence

The workshop participants reviewed earlier declarations, the Beijing Platform, and other relevant materials in order to formulate strategies to address the issues at a local, national, regional or international level and build upon existing commitments.

Day two of the Forum was co-chaired by Vicky Tauli Corpuz (Philippines) and Angie Akee (Australia). During day two, the workshop participants reported back to the larger group, and shared strategies to lobby participants at the United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5. The remainder of the session was spent in discussions on formalizing the international network, in the form of the International Indigenous Women's Forum.

Over 100 Indigenous women at Beijing+5 attended a daily Indigenous Women's Caucus meeting which developed an Indigenous Women's Declaration. The Declaration addressed issues such as: poverty; the lack of culturally appropriate educational opportunities and health care; forced and coerced adoption of indigenous children; economic and environmental devastation suffered as a result of forced removal from ancestral lands, broken treaties, wars and land development policies; corporate claims on the natural resources of indigenous societies; and the need to adopt a declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous women also participated on panels organized by the Asian Human Rights Council and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO), spoke to the media at press conferences and interviews, lobbied governmental and non-governmental representatives, met with other caucuses such as the youth caucus and the various regional caucuses, and participated on the International Coordinating Committee of CONGO.

Beijing+ 5 resulted in a document entitled "Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action." Indigenous women who participated in the Beijing review process lobbied to ensure that Indigenous women would be included in the document.

Despite the lobby effort, Indigenous women were included in only six paragraphs in the section on "Actions and Initiatives to Overcome Obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action":

100 e. Address the barriers faced by women, particularly by indigenous and other marginalized women, in accessing and participating in politics and decision-making, including lack of training, women's double burden of unpaid work, negative societal attitudes and stereotypes;

103 g. Take concrete steps, as a priority and with their full voluntary participation, to address the impact of violence on indigenous women, in order to implement appropriate, effective programmes and services to eliminate all forms of violence;

106 a. Consider adopting, where appropriate, national legislation consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect the knowledge, innovations and practices of women in indigenous and local communities relating to traditional medicines, biodiversity and indigenous technologies;

126 d. bis. Undertake appropriate data collection and research on indigenous women, with their full participation, in order to foster

accessible, culturally and linguistically appropriate policies, programmes and services;

128 h. With the full voluntary participation of indigenous women, develop and implement educational and training programmes that respect their history, culture, spirituality, languages and aspirations and ensure their access to all levels of formal and non-formal education, including higher education;

129 d. Apply and support positive measures to give all women, particularly indigenous women, equal access to capacity-building and training programmes to enhance their participation in decision-making in all fields and at all levels;

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action contained eighteen commitments specifically directed at Indigenous women. Among these, one of the most significant was 230(o), which stated:

“Taking into account the need to ensure full respect for the human rights of indigenous people, consider a declaration on the rights of indigenous people for adoption by the General Assembly within the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People and encourage the participation of indigenous women in the working group elaborating the draft declaration, in accordance with the provisions for the participation of organizations of indigenous people.”

The United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+ 5 was meant to build upon and advance the Beijing commitments. In order to advance the Beijing commitment regarding the Draft Declaration, the Indigenous Women’s Caucus requested the inclusion of language urging Governments to adopt the Draft Declaration without further delay in its present form. Unfortunately, this issue was not included in the 2000 outcome documents, despite its overwhelming importance to Indigenous women.

However, despite these frustrations, the important achievement at Beijing+5 was to significantly raise the profile of Indigenous women and their concerns.