

# Strengthening Solidarity for Indigenous Women's Land Rights in 2016

**On the occasion of International Women's Day**, every 8<sup>th</sup> of March, AIPP joins hand with women and men across the globe in the spirit of solidarity in advancing gender equality and social justice for all.

We also take this opportunity to acknowledge indigenous women's invaluable contributions and roles in community welfare and development in all dimensions. In most indigenous communities, it is the women who serve as primary caregivers to children, elderly family members and the sick. It is the women who are the holders and teachers of the traditional knowledge passed down through generations. It is indigenous women who are the main food producers and managers of their natural resources and it is the women who have the knowledge to strengthen their community's resilience to the devastating effects of climate change.

We are at a critical time in history. Humanity has come to a crossroads as we are forced to decide whether to continue along the path of mass consumption and development aggression or if we are to recognise that the earth's resources are finite, and thereby change the way we treat mother earth by meeting the needs of people through a sustainable and equitable system. Indigenous Peoples have long been practicing sustainable resource management systems, which have (up until now) protected our ecosystems, and of which indigenous women have played a critical role.

Indigenous Peoples territories are among the richest in biodiversity, yet their collective rights over these lands, territories and resources, along with their resource management systems and sustainable livelihoods, are neither legally recognized nor protected. Relentless resource extraction and land grabbing continue to marginalize Indigenous Peoples, severely undermining their capacity to make significant contributions in combatting climate change and achieving sustainable development. Our future lies in the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as custodians of our planet and our goal is to secure all indigenous and community land rights everywhere through the current Global Call to Action<sup>1</sup>.

This goal, and the corresponding target of doubling the global area of land legally recognised as owned or controlled by Indigenous Peoples and local communities by 2020, cannot be realised without the parallel recognition of indigenous women's and local women's vital roles in these societies, and the global society as a whole. Indigenous women are increasingly vulnerable to the loss or degradation of land as their primary source of food and health security, and cultural integrity. The unrelenting extraction of the earth's resources and the corporate agenda which trades their natural environments for profit, have profound impacts on the physical, social and psychological aspects of indigenous women's lives.

Massive land alienation and land concession projects are taking place in the name of development in Cambodia, whilst large expanses of indigenous land in Indonesia are being turned into destructive large-scale rubber and palm oil plantations. In Sawarak, Malaysia, Iban women are facing forced evictions at the hands of the Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development (MAARDI). The indigenous Iban women have lost their essential food sources and raw materials that are needed to sustain their traditional livelihoods. The dispossession of their land is not only a deprivation of their right to land, but also the deprivation of their only familiar means of survival, culturally and physically.

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In India, roughly 3% of the *entire* population of 1.2 Billion people are being displaced by large infrastructure projects, including hydroelectric dams and extractive industries. The adivasi/tribal peoples are overrepresented amongst this displaced population. For the women of these indigenous communities, this displacement has led to the deterioration of their social status as they struggle to fulfil their traditional roles, as well as the burden of additional workloads, deteriorating health status and a rise in domestic violence. Indigenous women, like those from India and the Kui women from Preah Vihear in Cambodia, are transformed from landowners and self-sufficient farmers to low-paid labourers or factory workers struggling to earn a living wage.

These patterns are replicated across Asia, as two-thirds of the worlds Indigenous Peoples are facing the effects of an unjust global development system, which is blatantly disregarding their rights and welfare.

To make matters worse, there has been a disturbing trend towards violence, including murder, being inflicted upon women human rights defenders and land rights activists in recent decades. In 2002, a pregnant member of the Bplaan community in South Cotabato in the Philippines was executed along with her sons, for her opposition to a large scaled mining project, the Tampakan Copper-Gold Project. Juvy Capion was 28 years old when she was killed. Sadly, Juvy Capions story is not a one-off, and women human rights defenders are suffering at the hands of large-scale development projects, militarisation and gender-based violence. In 2015, there were three women human rights defenders who were reported as murdered in retaliation for their activism, in Asia alone<sup>2</sup>.

**On the occasion of International Women's Day 2016, we call upon States, civil society and indigenous communities to implement the following recommendations, in order to ensure indigenous women's rights to land and resources are recognised;**

- 1. Secure full and effective participation, including equitable representation of indigenous women, in decision-making bodies and processes that affect their rights as indigenous peoples and as women.**
- 2. Implement measures for the legal recognition and protection of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, including indigenous women, over their lands territories and natural resources.**
- 3. Recognize, protect and enhance the contributions and roles of indigenous women in natural resource management, as well as ensuring the equitable benefits and entitlements necessary to their wellbeing.**
- 4. Ensure effective grievance mechanisms that are accessible to indigenous women at the local and national levels, including resolution of all cases of Violence against Women and other human rights violations.**
- 5. Ensure the recognition and respect for rights to property of indigenous women, as well as equal rights to employment opportunities, benefits and culturally sensitive healthcare.**
- 6. Wholly implement the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and take all measures available to improve the economic and social conditions of indigenous women.**
- 7. Develop a participatory action plan to implement the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 5 on the empowerment of women and girls<sup>3</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> To join the Global Call to Action on Indigenous and Community Land Rights, please go to; <http://landrightsnow.org/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on **Violence Against Women Human Rights Defenders**, please go to [http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/thumbnails/image/whrd\\_infographic\\_-\\_final\\_web.jpg](http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/thumbnails/image/whrd_infographic_-_final_web.jpg)

<sup>3</sup> For more information: <http://www.aippnet.org/index.php/publication-sp-2697/indigenous-women/1507-briefing-paper-the-impacts-of-land-dispossession-on-indigenous-women>.