

## Preface

Indigenous women have always been actively involved in the struggles for the rights of indigenous peoples at the local, national and international levels. In recognition of this role, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues<sup>1</sup> devoted its third session (2004)<sup>2</sup> to a discourse on the unique contributions made by indigenous women within their families, communities and nations.

While lauding their contributions, the Forum did express concern at the multiple forms of discrimination that indigenous women faced, based on their gender, race, ethnicity and low socio-economic status. This, the Forum noted, had led to a complex web of problems that must be tackled.

For example, globalization has presented new challenges and problems for indigenous women in many parts of the world. Indigenous women's roles are often eroded as their livelihood built on accessibility to natural resources disappears, ecosystems are depleted and others are transformed into cash economies. This has produced profound changes not only at the local level and within social and decision-making structures but within their families as well.

It is important, however, to recognize that indigenous women, like women everywhere else, are not a homogeneous group. They in fact represent a wide variety of cultures with different needs and concerns. Their particular concerns should therefore be central to the design of any policy or programme.

The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, at its February 2004 session, decided to establish a Task Force on Indigenous Women as a follow-up to recommendations emanating from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its third session. The Task Force is chaired by the Forum secretariat. The members of the Task Force are the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Africa, the International Labour Organi-

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<sup>1</sup> Established by Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/22 of 28 July 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The report of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on its third session is contained in *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 23 (E/2004/43)*.

zation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Health Organization and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Gender and Water of the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The main purpose of the Task Force on Indigenous Women is to integrate and strengthen gender mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations system that affects indigenous people, while highlighting the roles of indigenous women and the urgent need to address all the forms of discrimination that they face. This is an important challenge for the United Nations as well as for Member States.

The Task Force adopted a three-year programme of work. As part of its programme of activities, the Task Force has collected a series of good practices in addressing the problems that indigenous women face. On behalf of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, I am very pleased to share these case studies with you. I want to thank the United Nations organizations that submitted the case studies, namely, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Development Programme.

The case studies that have been drawn from Africa, Asia and Latin America show how important it is to strengthen local initiatives by systematically building solidarity, alliances and partnerships within and across borders while respecting the point of view of the poor and the underserved. The case studies show that indigenous women have succeeded in building on the victories of other human rights movements and are moving forward with the conviction that development can be theirs without sacrificing dignity, human rights and justice. The case studies further demonstrate that through gender mainstreaming as well as through programmes targeting women, much can be accomplished to improve the livelihoods of the very poor, to reduce gender discrimination and to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

I thank the secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United

Nations Secretariat for the compilation of these case studies, which are both informative and highly educative.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rachel Mayanga". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R'.

Rachel MAYANGA

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