

## **UN Women statement on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

*2020 theme: COVID-19 and indigenous peoples' resilience*

The global COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated longstanding structural inequalities for the most marginalized, with indigenous women and girls some of the most affected. On the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples we consider not only the enormous challenges faced by indigenous women, many of which are now further compounded by the pandemic, but also the valuable accomplishments, leadership and resilience that they bring to the recovery.

Being born an indigenous girl can be a life sentence of poverty, exclusion and discrimination, largely rooted in the historical marginalization of indigenous communities and aggravated by overlapping circumstances such as race, ethnicity, disability and location. The [review and appraisal](#) of 25 years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reveals diverse forms of vulnerability faced by indigenous women and girls. These include large-scale land grabbing and dispossession – stemming from indigenous women's unequal access to and control over land and natural resources –, along with barriers to mobility, and limited access to justice and decision-making power in the household and community. Indigenous women also face challenges related to access to quality healthcare, such as disproportionate maternal mortality rates and fatal health issues resulting from environmental degradation; circumstances that make indigenous communities highly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

As governments around the world design and implement recovery measures, we need to bear in mind that, due to historical circumstances related to colonial and neo-colonial policies, indigenous women are less likely to be medically insured. They are therefore more likely to be affected by pre-existing conditions which can be exacerbated by the virus. Analysis of available survey data from 16 low and middle-income countries shows that indigenous women and adolescent girls are significantly less likely to benefit from health services and have worse maternal health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> In some contexts, indigenous women are twice as likely to die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth compared to non-indigenous women.<sup>2</sup>

Mandatory COVID-19 prevention measures have also created an environment that can worsen the situation of indigenous women in abusive relationships. Stay-at-home orders have revealed a shadow pandemic of domestic violence, with indigenous women significantly more likely to be affected than non-indigenous women. Restricted mobility has limited indigenous women's capacity to report violence and access legal services.

We have also prioritized indigenous women's economic empowerment, including financial support to their businesses, and adapted our strategies for the prevention of violence through collaborative efforts between indigenous women and governments to ensure the availability and accessibility of essential services. UN Women has been committed to providing ways for indigenous women to better support their communities' response to COVID-19. Our initiative

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF. Indigenous women's maternal health and maternal mortality. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-maternal-mortality>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

includes communication campaigns in indigenous languages, access to preventive equipment and the provision of mobile devices to enable access to important information.

At a time where COVID-19 has impacted every facet of life and all sectors of society, we recognize indigenous women and girls as indispensable agents of change in the face of emerging challenges. More than ever, it is time for us to learn from their resilience when confronted with adversity and for States to give them their rightful place as influential leaders. UN Women will continue working with indigenous women around the world to ensure that their voices and experiences are at the forefront of COVID-19 reconstruction and recovery plans.