

Our message to the governments of the Americas is simple: the lives of Indigenous women and girls matter.

Centuries of oppression and dispossession have denied the First Peoples of this hemisphere their fundamental human rights including rights to self-determination, culture, livelihood, health, economic development and security of the person.

In the midst of widespread marginalization, impoverishment and violent persecution, the Indigenous women of the Americas face an additional burden of gender discrimination and stereotyping that puts them at even greater risk of human rights violations.

Throughout the region, Indigenous women must struggle to provide for families whose means of subsistence and way of life has been torn apart by attacks on their cultures, destruction of the natural environment and the militarization of their lands.

Far too many Indigenous women also face devastatingly high levels of violence at the hands of their spouses and families, violent predators from the dominant society, and government forces and armed groups.

These same women must contend with discriminatory laws, policies and practices which deny them a meaningful role in decisions vital to their safety and well-being.

Entrenched discrimination and public indifference also deny Indigenous women adequate protection through the justice system and the assistance they need to escape poverty and violence.

Even in the wealthiest countries in the Americas, it has been clearly documented that discrimination and marginalization have put Indigenous women in much greater risk of violence than other women.¹

Today, we are at an important historical juncture in the long struggle for the human rights of Indigenous peoples. The adoption of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007 established minimum, universally applicable standards for the “survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.” Many states in the Americas are now engaged in discussion with Indigenous peoples on how to make these commitments a reality.

As organizations and individuals committed to the principles of human rights for all, we believe that ending violence and discrimination against Indigenous women should be an urgent priority for all governments in the Americas as they seek to fulfil their responsibilities toward Indigenous peoples.

¹ Amnesty International 2007. *Maze of Injustice – The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA* and Amnesty International 2004. *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*

On the occasion of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, we call on all governments in the region to publicly declare their commitment to working with Indigenous women to ensure effective protections for their rights, including:

- Preparing accurate, comprehensive reports on violations of Indigenous women's rights, including violence against Indigenous women.
- Developing protocols and policies and providing adequate resources to ensure that Indigenous women at risk of violence will get the help they need, including appropriate responses from police and medical services and access to culturally appropriate emergency and long-term shelter.
- Fully investigating all attacks on Indigenous women and their families and bringing those responsible to justice.
- Implementing international human rights standards for the realization of Indigenous peoples' rights including the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)

Amnesty International

International Indian Treaty Council

Native Women's Association of Canada

Indigenous Women's Network (USA and Canada)

Native Women's Advocacy Center, Inc. (USA)

Wayu Women Force (Colombia)

Consejo de Todas las Tierras (Chile)

Consejo Coordinador Nacional Indigena Salvadoreno (El Salvador)

Santa Lucia Indigenous Peoples (St. Lucia)

Juventud organizada par Vivir en equilibrio con Nanaguadole (Panama)

Wara Instituto Indigena (Brazil)

American Indian Women's Service League

Americans for Indian Opportunity

Mesa Nacional Indigena de Costa Rica

Red de Mujeres Indigenas sobre Biodiversidad de A.L.C. (Panama)

National Garifuna Council Belize

U-Kuxtal Masewal (The Maya Institute of Belize)