

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CAUCUS STATEMENT FOR THE INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE SEGMENT

12th United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development
20 April 2004, United Nations, New York, New York

Presented by:

*Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network/International Indian Treaty Council
&
Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Tebtebba Foundation*

Madam Chair, we the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus here at the CSD-12 reaffirm our relationship to Mother Earth and responsibility to future generations to raise our voices in solidarity to speak for the protection of water. We acknowledge that water connects and regulates Mother Earth as the sacred mat of life, which is the ocean. Protection of the ocean is fundamental as the ocean is where life begins and ends. We also understand how the air, the clouds, land cover, trees, and the heat of the sun along with freshwater systems connect to oceans and the oceans to the freshwaters. This is the cycle of life.

Our relationship with our lands, territories, and water is the fundamental physical, cultural and spiritual basis for our existence. This relationship to our Mother Earth requires us to conserve our freshwaters and oceans for the survival of present and future generations. We assert our role as caretakers with rights and responsibilities to defend and ensure the protection, availability and purity of water.

We recognize, honor and respect water as sacred and the sustainer of all life. Water is the source of life, it is far more than a human right, it is a right for all of nature, all plants and animals. Within many Indigenous cultures, our women are the traditional caretakers of water.

The Indigenous Peoples' Caucus felt the need to briefly share with you our cosmovision that are our guiding principles in any discussions concerning water and its holistic value to life. As Indigenous Peoples, we offer these fundamental principles to the delegates here in our deliberation and review of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Joint Plan of Implementation. (JPOI) Reaching the targets and goals for water and its linkages to sanitation and human settlements truly are the prerequisites for future discussions addressing other target areas such as poverty eradication, protection of the environment, economic and sustainable development and building healthy communities.

Since the early 1990's, the water systems and ecosystems of Mother Earth have been compounding in change. The earth is in an accelerating spiral of climate change and global warming. When combined with the continued production and release of toxic chemicals and greenhouse gases, unsustainable energy policies, and mining practices, all these combined, create a crisis in the natural environment and tremendous challenge for an industrialized society that is out of balance with the forces of nature.

We fully understand that only the guarantee for the world to have a continuous supply of freshwater is to ensure the integrity of nature and ecosystems from which water comes from. Many of our struggles around our rights to our ancestral territories were and are struggles to ensure that the sources of our waters are protected, that the water continues to flow as it should

and its purity is maintained. This is one of the key reasons why Indigenous Peoples in all parts of the world are against large dams and why we are stopping the entry of extractive industries, such as logging, mineral, oil and gas extraction in our lands. This is why we fully support the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams report which recommends democratization of decision-making including the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples. We also support the fully the recommendations of Dr. Emil Salim in his final report on the World Bank Extractive Industries Review to ban submarine tailings disposal and riverine tailings disposal and also to require free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

To adequately review where the world is at with meeting the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 7 and 8, and the WSSD Plan of Implementation, a thoroughly assessment of water management has to be done, that includes looking at all stressors and vulnerabilities that prevent the maintenance of a healthy water system. Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) mechanisms are an effective tool to begin these assessments, as well as coastal area and river basin management mechanisms. A healthy water system, including ground water and aquifer systems is a necessity for alleviating poverty and inspiring economic development.

Efforts towards implementing IWRM must include governance mechanisms that are transparent, open, inclusive, equitable and are accountable to all water users, stakeholders, and especially Indigenous Peoples, where Indigenous Peoples reside in the water basin area. During the assessment process, socio-economic and cultural indicators must be included within assessment models that take into consideration cumulative impacts to water management.

Indigenous Peoples have much to offer within IWRM. Indigenous Peoples' traditional systems of water management and use are based upon principles and practices that balance immediate needs with the needs of the environment and other living things, plants and animals, as well as other people, and consider the sustainability for future generations. Integrating this Indigenous Traditional Ecological Approach to IWRM would contribute to meeting the goals of the Millennium Development Goals. Indigenous Peoples have an important role in sustainable water resource management and management assessment tools. Our cultures and traditional knowledge are an integral part of humanity's heritage and cultural diversity. In this context, due respect must be given to Indigenous Peoples' rights. The continuing violation of our rights translates to the loss of these wholistic knowledge, management and governance systems on water and biodiversity conservation.

Water quality and adequate water supply, wastewater, sanitation and waste disposal systems are essential to the health of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Among the many Indigenous Peoples communities worldwide, in both developing and developed countries, safe and adequate water supply and wastewater disposal facilities are lacking. An alarming number of Indigenous Peoples have unsafe drinking water, and the numbers are growing. There is a lack of the existence of community infrastructure programs to address the most immediate health threats, requiring the provision of clean water, basic sanitation facilities and safe housing.

Throughout Indigenous territories worldwide, Indigenous Peoples are experiencing increasing scarcity of fresh waters and the lack of access to water sources, including oceans. In these times of scarcity, governments are creating commercial interests in water that lead to inequities in distribution and prevent access to the life giving nature of water.

Over 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is found within Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories. Indigenous Peoples represent approximately 350 million individuals in the world and make up approximately 90% of the world's cultural diversity.

Underlying the water crisis is a governance crisis and a cultural crisis.

An ethical framework based upon respect for life-giving water and its cultural manifestations is of critical importance for water policy and use. When water is disrespected, misused and poorly managed, Indigenous Peoples see the life threatening impacts on all of creation, all populations and human settlements.

With all this said, Madam Chair, Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and sovereignty, application of traditional knowledge, and cultural practices to protect the water are being disregarded, violated and disrespected. Already there are eruptions of serious disputes within and among States and Indigenous Peoples and local communities over water.

Indigenous traditional knowledge developed over the millennia is undermined by an over-reliance on relatively recent and narrowly defined western scientific methods, standards and technologies. Indigenous Peoples support the implementation of strong measures to allow the full contribution by Indigenous Peoples to share our experiences, knowledge and concerns.

Economic globalization constitutes one of the main obstacles for the both the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the protection of water resources. Transnational corporations and industrialized countries impose their global agenda on the negotiations and agreements of the United Nations system, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and other bodies which reduce the rights enshrined in national constitutions, international conventions and agreements. The regard of water mainly as an economic good, and no longer a basic human right, is what underpins programs on water privatization and full-cost recovery which is undoubtedly increasing mass poverty instead of reducing it. This makes the achievement of the MDG goals more elusive each day.

We are highly critical of the role of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the water industry in promoting such concepts and programs and imposing public sector reform which has led to the privatization of water.

The world needs to reevaluate its relationship to the sacred nature of water. To many of our Indigenous Peoples, the nature of water represents peace. There is a need to develop education curricula about the sacredness of water and the linkage to peace.

Communities must declare all water sources as sacred sites.

As Indigenous Peoples, we respectfully demand governmental leaders to fully recognize our rights to self-determination, and to own, control and manage our ancestral lands territories, waters and other natural resources.

The Indigenous Peoples' Caucus, along with a network of Indigenous Peoples worldwide, stand united to follow and implement our knowledge, traditional laws and exercise our right to self-determination to preserve water, and thus to preserve life for all peoples and living beings.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CAUCUS STATEMENT ON THE OVERALL REVIEW SESSION

**12th United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development
21 April 2004, United Nations, New York, New York**

Presented by:

*Hilda Lini, Pacific Concerns Resource Centre &
Estebancio Castro, International Indian Treaty Council*

Human settlements, water and sanitation cover a complex of social and ecological inter-relationships, between peoples and Mother Earth. Human settlements are cultural homes that nurture the traditional knowledge and wisdom within our larger ecological home, Mother Earth. Water is a sacred element of this planet and it sustains all life. Sanitation standard determines the well-being, health and life of biodiversity and peoples.

Human settlements among Indigenous Peoples are characteristically self-sustaining communities, where peoples are not separate from their lands, territories and natural resources, including water. These provide for peoples' social, economic, religious, political needs and environments. This is a far cry from the urban concept of settlements as simply infrastructures and facilities.

For Indigenous hunters, gatherers, nomads, farmers, herders, fishers and pastoralists, a continuing relationship and access to their natural homelands provide for their livelihood and food security. They follow patterns of human settlement, which are appropriate for their natural environments.

Related to human settlement, water is a critical source of life. In many Indigenous societies, their relationship to the life-giving qualities of water permeates their culture and spiritual values. Indigenous Peoples' systems of water management and use are based upon principles and practices that balance immediate needs with the needs of the environment and other living things, plants and animals, as well as other people, and the sustainability for future generations. Indigenous Peoples have an important role in sustainable water resource management and their knowledge is an integral part of humanity's heritage and cultural diversity.

Sufficient attention must be paid at this meeting to reviewing the overall concepts of governance, practice of sustainable livelihood, integrated land-use planning and resource management to ensure that the long-term diversity and health of ecosystems continue to nurture human settlements, including the well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

The demands of free trade agreements that promote the privatization of Indigenous lands and territories have forced many Indigenous Peoples to migrate to urban areas for economic reasons. Within these pockets of urban cities, Indigenous Peoples are forced to join human settlements of poverty and to survive in isolation, away from family support, a community sense of belonging and their cultural values. The poverty of Indigenous Peoples is directly linked to the dispossession of their lands, territories and natural resources, which are essential for their security, livelihoods and well-being. The loss of land through government expropriation, forced resettlement and modernization have severely impacted them.

In this context, due respect must be given to the Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and sovereignty over essential life-sustaining elements. Government policies are restricting access to their lands and territories, violating their right to sustainable livelihoods, water sources

and appropriate housing. These policies directly undermine the goal of human security, poverty alleviation and housing for all, leading to the deep impoverishment of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Peoples from every region of the world are concerned that ecosystems, including water systems, have been compounding in change and are in crisis. Over centuries, commercialization and privatisation of land and water contradicts Indigenous perspectives that water is inseparable from land and peoples. Oceans and water sources continue to be polluted with chemicals, pesticides, sewage, disease, radioactive contamination, and waste dumping.

The mineral extraction industry has left many Indigenous communities with contaminated and depleted water resources. This has resulted in the destruction of ecological landscapes, disrupted family cohesiveness and caused the loss of food security. It has destroyed the sacredness of many lands, territories and natural resources.

Indigenous Peoples and local communities have also suffered disproportionately from the impacts of large-scale damming, which continues to cause river diversion, flooding, seasonal inversion of flows, shoreline erosion and the devastation of Indigenous trap-line cultures.

These projects, which are mainly built in partnership between local/state governments and the World Bank or transnational corporations, have adversely affected vast areas of fragile environments. Transporting, bottling and diverting water from its natural flow, appropriates inherent rights to the access and benefits of water, to private corporations at the expense of Indigenous and local custodians, the primary users in its conservation and management.

For many Indigenous Peoples worldwide, safe and adequate water supply and waste disposal facilities are lacking. There is a lack of community infrastructure programs to address the most immediate health threats, basic sanitation facilities and safe housing, all requiring the provision of clean water.

When the spiritual links to water are disregarded, violated, disrespected, misused and poorly managed, Indigenous Peoples witness the life threatening impacts on all of creation.

Global warming, climate change and the rising sea level all pose significant threats to Indigenous and local communities from every region of the world. It is increasing desertification, drying up the subterranean water resources, and causing the extinction of precious flora and fauna.

Already there are eruptions of serious disputes within and among states, Indigenous Peoples and local communities over water.

Indigenous Peoples continue to become environmental refugees and innocent victims of mining, logging, conflicts, warfare, the nuclear weapons industry, military bases, racial and political systems on their own lands and territories.

Within the action plan on human settlements, the implementation of integrated land-use planning and natural resource base management strategies continues to be weak, with slow progress being made in the mapping and demarcation of Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories towards security of tenure and legal protection.

Indigenous Peoples urge the Commission on Sustainable Development to give high priority to this activity.

