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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement* submitted by Women's Federation
for World Peace International, Soroptimist International,
Universal Peace Federation, non-governmental organizations
in general consultative status, National Alliance of Women's
Organizations, Widows Rights International, non-
governmental organizations in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Advocacy for Indigenous Women and the Right to Self Determination

Statement submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, with important input from its Youth Human Rights Internship Program, and co-signed by: Soroptimist and Nobel Laureate, Maureen Maguire in her personal capacity, Universal Peace Federation and Widows Rights International.

OHCHR and the Human Rights Council are to be commended for the priority given to the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite the progress, we find an issue of violence against indigenous women in Canada, which has very alarmingly deteriorated during the pandemic. Recent statistics by the Canadian Homicide Prevention Initiative show that indigenous women represent 21% of female population and are eight times more likely to be a victim of intimate partner homicides than non-indigenous women in Canada.

We welcome the important work done during the annual half-day panel, held by the Human Rights Council on 28th September 2021, covering the rights of indigenous peoples which discussed the issues faced by them during the pandemic, and the specific focus on the rights to participation. Also, we commend Canada and various United Nations agencies and entities for their efforts in helping indigenous communities recover from the pandemic. We seek to highlight the negative consequences of the pandemic which has seriously elevated violence against indigenous women.

We appeal to you to continue to work directly with indigenous women to enable their stories to be told and for them to become agents of change, designers of their own future, and not merely victims for inspection. We strongly appeal for the security of indigenous women, and their right to be free from any form of discrimination against their race or their gender. They are three times more likely to experience sexual violence, and more so with displacement and dispossession. Indigenous women are still facing violence at a systematic rate -and any action made today by the Council could contribute to break this cycle.

It is crucial to recognize that the pandemic has had a devastating effect on Indigenous communities increasing rates of domestic abuse. The Native Women's Association of Canada found that in May 2020, 17% of Indigenous women experienced violence in the past three months, compared to 10% reporting violence from their spouse over the past five years, since 2014. We can see how the pandemic has increased the violence faced by Indigenous women and the continuing effects of Canada's colonial past. Colonialism has created an intergenerational trauma in indigenous communities including barriers that prevent Indigenous women from seeking help post violent or traumatic experiences, which still prevails.

Indigenous peoples in Canada have systematically faced the effects of years of economic marginalisation and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. This includes poverty and homelessness, which has made women more vulnerable, especially to violence. The pandemic has exacerbated these pre-existing socio economic inequalities and contributed to indigenous women being at a higher risk of Covid-19 infection. Lifting these women out of dire socio-economic conditions is central to ensure their protection. We commend the panel for highlighting this increase by the pandemic of challenges faced by Indigenous peoples such as poverty, access to health, remote educational opportunities, food insecurity and discrimination. However, it is important to recognise the specific impact on Indigenous women and girls.

Gender plays a very important role in the experiences of indigenous discrimination in Canada. Some important points were made by the panelist Ms. Megan Davis, Chair of the

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, during the panel discussion. We commend Ms. Davis noting in the initial report the failures that have occurred in legal systems to help prevent violence against indigenous women even before the pandemic. Also, she recalls article 22 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which she notes affirms the duty of the state to take measures to ensure that indigenous women enjoy full protection, and guarantees, against all forms of violence and discrimination. We appeal to the council to work with the Canadian government to help enable the protection of Indigenous women and girls, also in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Indigenous women can be the hope for the future. They can be agents of change and their skills and experience can be transformed into expertise, advocacy, and leadership if guided properly. It would be important to involve Indigenous women in governance and decision making, both alongside the Canadian government and in the international community. A better collaboration between NGO and local government would accelerate these adaptations.

While the media has had a significant role to play in bringing attention to the cases of rampant violence against the indigenous populations, still many of the experiences of violence to indigenous women are left out of media reports. We urge for more steps to be taken. Even today Indigenous women are going missing, their whereabouts unknown to their families and communities. Additionally, it is evident that the pandemic and its aftermath have brought new challenges in ensuring the safety of Indigenous women. Universal access to security is essential in ensuring their prosperity and capacity to contribute. We call upon the media to continuing to shed light on this discrimination, and to frame it in a responsible and respectful way.

In conclusion, advocating for the rights of indigenous women and their right to self-determination is not only a moral imperative but also essential for building a just and inclusive society. By recognizing and respecting their unique cultures, knowledge systems, and traditions, we can create an environment where indigenous women can thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond. Empowering indigenous women to exercise their right to self-determination involves addressing the structural barriers they face, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. It requires actively involving them in decision-making processes that affect their lives and ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

In our collective efforts to advocate for the rights of indigenous women and their right to self-determination, we must work collaboratively with indigenous communities, organizations, and leaders. We must amplify their voices, center their experiences, and ensure that their rights are upheld and protected.
