



## Position Statement

### Indigenous Women of the Americas in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 outbreak came about in a context of generalized crisis related to serious drawbacks regarding our fundamental human rights as indigenous women and peoples. The Pandemic has not only exposed the existing inequalities within our societies from the North to the South of our continent but also exacerbated the multiple forms of violence that we face in the political, social, cultural, economic, physical, psychological, environmental, and spiritual arenas for being women and indigenous, having limited economic resources, and, in some cases, our migrant and displaced status. Persisting gaps in healthcare, education, economy and employment, justice and social protection show that indigenous women continue to be the pending agenda of the States and, therefore we are disproportionately exposed and unprotected from the negative impact of the expansion of the pandemic and its aftermath. Particularly, we are concerned about our elders who are the guardians of our languages, knowledge, and cultures.

The measures taken by the States to address the pandemic have been designed from and for privileged, urban and non-indigenous sectors, and have turned to be ineffective and inapplicable to respond to our realities. We cannot comply with measures such as frequent hand washing if we do not have access to water and indigenous girls and youth cannot attend virtual classes if we do not have internet coverage or electricity. The main reasons State measures are failing are a lack of political will, corruption, ignorance of the heterogeneity of our societies, lack of disaggregated data, as well as the lack of full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, including women and youth, in decision-making. While governments could consider the Pandemic as an opportunity to identify the neuralgic problems of the current political and economic systems and seek effective solutions to them, in some countries the state of emergency has been used to silence and repress social demands and, at the same time, allow the advancement of extractive activities that destroy our territories.

Today, most indigenous women live in urban areas where we depend on street trade, domestic work, and other informal jobs. To keep our subsistence activities, we have had to risk contagion and, in the worst case, suffer repression by the security forces. Likewise, the closure of traditional markets has left thousands of sisters without financial support and, in some countries, a decrease in economic activity has forced migrant and urban indigenous women and girls to go back to their communities, traveling long distances on foot, sleeping on the roads, with little food, without medical attention, and at the same time exposed to sexual violence. In communities where the economy of indigenous women depends on access to the market, the exchange of products

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and tourism, we report cases of girls and boys in critical situations of malnutrition due to food and water shortages. With some exceptions, economic support measures from States have not been aimed at supporting indigenous women and peoples.

Indigenous women have always been strong, but during this Pandemic, we are overloaded with responsibilities because we are the caretakers of our families, communities, territories, and the cultures of our peoples. Likewise, within our homes, both in cities and in rural communities or reservations, we see an increase in cases of domestic violence due to prolonged coexistence with aggressors, stress caused by social isolation, and economic uncertainty. Meanwhile, we continue to have limited or no access to relevant prevention services, and protection mechanisms.

Given the inaction of States, indigenous peoples and women resorted to establishing our own measures to protect us against the Pandemic and other threats. Under the legal framework of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, we have closed the territorial borders of our communities and reservations and we have also mobilized our policing institutions, such as tribal police, security, and guards, to enforce such measures. Faced with the lack of official data, our organizations are collecting information on the impact of COVID-19 and helping mitigate the spread of this disease. We have resorted to the means that we have at our disposal to inform in our indigenous languages on how to prevent contagion. Likewise, indigenous women put into practice our ancestral knowledge about medicine, health, and food to strengthen the immune system and prevent respiratory diseases. In different parts of the continent, wise women provide spiritual care and perform emergency ceremonies to ask for strength from the spirits and our ancestors.

Despite the obligation of States to uphold the collective and individual rights of indigenous women and peoples enshrined in international instruments such as the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Montevideo Consensus, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and ILO Convention 169, we still do not have real access to relevant public policies, programs, services and resources that are relevant to us. In the meantime, States refuse to recognize our knowledge, practices and contributions to finding solutions to world crises and to support our expressions of self-determinations.

Faced with this reality, the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas urges states and authorities to consider the following priority actions:

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1. Guarantee the **full, representative, informed, and effective participation** of indigenous women and our organizations in the design, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of effective measures to face this global health emergency and mitigate its effects in the post-crisis context.
2. **Disaggregate data** of people infected, recovered, and deceased by indigenous people, gender, age, and immigrant status. Furthermore, disseminate information on affected indigenous communities and peoples in urban and rural areas. Properly inform indigenous communities on the prevention, protection, and symptoms of the disease by COVID-19. Provide updates on State actions and, particularly, on measures to address the impact on indigenous peoples. Communications strategies must take into account the lack of access to the internet or electricity in many communities, as well as illiteracy. Invest and strengthen data collection and communication initiatives led by indigenous women and youth themselves and their organizations.
3. Establish **emergency funds, economic subsidies and other specific measures** for indigenous peoples that ensure access to basic needs during this State of Emergency and contribute to the resumption of economic activities in the medium and long term, with an emphasis on indigenous women and youth and with an intercultural and gender focus.
4. All indigenous women, youth, and girls, irrespective of their migrant and displaced status, should have access to **essential basic public services**, such as health, education, and social protection. Moreover, the delivery of services should be culturally relevant while respecting and supporting indigenous women and youth-led initiatives, particularly regarding the care of the members of their communities through traditional practices, such as spiritual, emotional, nutritional, indigenous medicinal approaches, or other mechanisms.
5. Coordinate with indigenous community organizations and leaders to establish, support, and strengthen strategies and mechanisms for the prevention, care, and protection of indigenous women, youth, and children **affected by violence**, including shelters run by indigenous women and surveillance networks. Considering cultural relevance and indigenous languages, inform on how to proceed in situations of gender-based violence, paying special attention to migrant and displaced indigenous women.
6. Strictly monitor the actions of the **military and police forces** when enforcing measures against COVID-19 with indigenous peoples, especially indigenous women and youth, to end all forms of repression and violences and ensure decent treatment.

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- We call on the immediate release of non-criminally charged indigenous migrants unjustly held in immigration detention centers, with particular attention to the United States ICE. Also, we call for the release of indigenous peoples' rights defenders unjustly held as political prisoners, and who are the highest risk of contagion.

Finally, we call indigenous peoples and women's networks and organizations, wise and elderly indigenous women, artists, parliamentarians, lawyers, communicators, defenders, academics, and traditional authorities to act in order to support and promote the implementation of the proposed actions and to keep tirelessly fight for life and the full exercise of our individual and collective rights to ensure the continuity and well-being of our peoples, avoiding a pandemic genocide.

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