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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: empowerment of indigenous women

Interactive dialogue on the focus area: empowerment of indigenous women

Chair’s summary

1. On 16 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on the focus area on the empowerment of indigenous women. The Chair of the Commission, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, made an introductory statement and moderated the dialogue. Ministers and high-level officials from 14 Member States, nine invited speakers and eight representatives from non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system contributed to the dialogue. The dialogue concluded with closing comments by the Chair, in which he provided highlights of the dialogue.

Key message: empowering indigenous women is an opportunity

2. Participants unanimously expressed appreciation for the Commission’s focus on the empowerment of indigenous women and girls, recognizing it as an important milestone in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples and an important follow-up to the commitments undertaken by Member States in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, held in 2014, as well as the pledge in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind.

3. Participants called for further attention to be given to this topic, including as a priority theme at a future session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Participants highlighted that although indigenous women and girls face special



challenges and discrimination, they should not be portrayed as victims. Indigenous women are active change agents. They have an essential role in passing on indigenous cultures and languages to future generations. A significant proportion of global cultural and linguistic diversity resides with them; they actively contribute to international processes and are champions of sustainability. Indigenous women are part of the solution to many of the challenges that societies, and women within those societies, face worldwide.

Indigenous women's participation in decision-making processes

4. Participants recognized that indigenous women remain severely underrepresented in political processes at the national and local levels and highlighted that for any nation that wishes to claim democratic inclusivity, it is important to give a voice to all segments of society, especially those who do not enjoy full participation, such as indigenous women.

5. Participants provided examples of good practice, such as the active participation of indigenous women in political processes in parliament, deep societal reforms, the inclusion of women in provincial councils through quotas and the direct election of tribal and rural women. Participants highlighted the role of education as an important vehicle for enhancing political participation, as well as the roles of the media, academia and employment in strengthening indigenous women's participation in public life.

6. Speakers emphasized the need to ensure indigenous women's access to land and right to land ownership as key drivers of empowerment. Participants called for greater support for the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, which supports representatives to participate in international dialogues.

Violence against indigenous women and girls

7. Participants recognized that violence against women was a prevailing challenge for all societies and that indigenous women confront specific challenges. Such violence ranges from sexual violence and domestic violence to labour exploitation and trafficking in situations of displacement during armed conflicts. Obstetric violence in medical settings was mentioned. Intersecting dimensions of inequality, for example, indigenous identity with disability, created a greater risk of violence and discrimination. Participants noted that indigenous women were subject to violence, exploitation and harassment by non-indigenous people. There are also harmful practices that are passed across generations in indigenous societies, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. A comprehensive approach to addressing such violence is therefore required.

8. Participants recognized the vulnerable situation of indigenous women with disabilities. Indigenous women can benefit from the existing global commitments, such as those in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, that provide a strong basis for action and cooperation, including South-South cooperation. The need for more and better disaggregated data to better understand the uniqueness of the challenges was widely supported. Participants highlighted the role of men, particularly the need for masculinity to be defined in non-violent terms, and for men to share responsibility for family life and reproductive health.

Indigenous women's economic opportunities

9. Participants noted that indigenous women experience rapid changes to their livelihoods and increasing poverty owing to loss of land, water and forests, unpaid care work and exploitation as migrants. However, participants highlighted some strengths and assets, including traditional knowledge, intellectual property benefits that can be accrued by indigenous communities, the attractiveness of artefacts and textiles and other traditional objects produced by indigenous women and the possibility of marketing such products domestically and internationally. In some countries, indigenous women benefited from cooperatives, which support the production, packaging and marketing of agricultural produce. An inclusive procurement policy that ensures the participation of indigenous women was cited as another example.

The impact of climate change on the empowerment of indigenous women and their responses

10. Participants highlighted that climate change was particularly pressing for indigenous women because of their connection to the land and natural resources, as well as their dependency on traditional livelihoods. Many indigenous women live in very fragile ecosystems, such as small island developing States, highlands, arctic regions subject to extreme weather and areas near deserts, and so suffer disproportionately from the impact of climate change.

11. Some participants called for solutions to the climate change crisis to be developed in partnership with indigenous populations and indigenous women. Careful attention must be paid to the links between human rights, indigenous people and women's rights in advancing solutions to climate change in order to prevent solutions from infringing on the rights of indigenous populations, including women.
