



Indigenous women's experiences of intersecting forms of discrimination and violences

Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas – ECMIA

The Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas – ECMIA, has represented the voices of organized indigenous women from North, South, and Central America for more than 25 years. We address the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women to contribute to today's General Discussion on the topic of **“Equality and non-discrimination with a focus on indigenous women and girls and intersecting forms of discrimination”**.

As Indigenous women and girls, we experience different forms of discrimination. Over the last 25 years, we have increasingly expressed how these intersecting forms of discrimination are embedded in the settler-state structures, which systematically affect our ability to exercise our rights and realize our dreams. In our many years of advocacy for the defense of our collective and individual rights in different international arenas, we have continuously stated that our futures are defined, at the very least, by three key factors: our gender, our socioeconomic status, and our indigenous identity. However, today we recognize that other factors come into play.

In the States where we live, discrimination for being women, poor and indigenous is an ever-present legacy of colonialism and the imposition of Christian-Western culture and values. It is also the consequence of pervasive patriarchy. As indigenous women, discrimination, particularly based on our indigenous identity, has historically been detrimental to our rights. It is entrenched in the structures of our societies, and it permeates every sector, field, and context where we move or participate in, especially within the State. Indigenous traits, language, cultural practices, and traditional knowledge are a cause for exclusion, derision, contempt, lack of respect and neglect, and a lack of access to services.

The media plays a powerful role in the production and institutionalization of negative stereotypes of indigenous peoples, specifically of indigenous women in a particularly virulent way. This is accepted and reproduced by society in general, showing a long-standing rejection of indigenous peoples and what we represent: the female other. Despite campaigns and advocacy in international bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and particular recommendations on the representation of indigenous women in the media, we continue to witness violently racist mocking representations and hear discriminatory opinions about us.

The enormous influence of discrimination based on indigenous identity and racism also severely impacts indigenous self-identification. Many young women and girls reject their indigenous ancestry to accommodate and “fit in” mainstream society and to be able to make a living, especially when they migrate to other countries or urban areas. Indigenous mothers choose not to teach their children their indigenous language to make them less targetable of discriminatory practices and discourse.

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However, discrimination transcends our indigenous identity. We are discriminated against for our sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant status, geographic location, disability status, economic situation, among other factors. These multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are vital factors that define the lives of indigenous women and girls. The more discrimination present in our lives, the more significant structural barriers we face to live the life we want. They directly impact our possibility to gain and retain access to education, justice, healthcare, employment, social protection, political participation, personal safety, among others. Our fundamental human rights, such as access to health, which must include reproductive health and mental health services, and protection against gender-based violence, are impacted by discrimination.

It is clear that racism and other forms of discrimination indigenous women and girls face throughout their lives are closely related to the violence that we experience in our bodies and territories.

We are exposed to greater violence as traditional transmitters and guardians of our cultures, practices, knowledge, worldviews, institutions, and values. We represent the continuity of our peoples, so attempts have been made to wipe our cultures out through forced sterilization, assimilation, murder, etc. We have been systematically murdered in Canada and the United States. We have been sterilized against our will in Peru and Canada. We have been raped and murdered, targeted as terrorists and radicals in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, etc. We have been murdered to steal our land in practically every country of the region, our girls and young women have been forcibly assimilated through boarding schools in the United States and Canada.

We use the word violence in the plural to emphasize that we experience multiple forms of violences as collective and individual beings. Violences crosscut every aspect of our lives: our mental health, our self-esteem, our bodily integrity, our freedom, our sexual freedom, our reproductive health, our community, etc. We cannot imagine non-discrimination against indigenous women without addressing violences against us.

Therefore, at the moment of drafting the General Recommendation on Indigenous Women and Girls, we suggest that the Committee takes into consideration:

1. Indigenous women suffer from a very specific form of discrimination for being indigenous that, combined with other intersecting forms of discrimination, harms our ability **to exercise our rights and can be life-threatening.**
2. Indigenous women face intersecting forms of discrimination that are closely related to the different forms of violences that we experience: gender-based violence, cultural violence, spiritual violence, structural violence, etc.
3. The factors that impact our collective rights as indigenous peoples – such as the expansion of extractive industries, the militarization of our territories,

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the lack of commitment to processes of free prior and informed consent, etc. – are important to analyze how discrimination and violences impact the lives of indigenous women and girls in particular.

4. The exercise of our right to non-discrimination, in particular as indigenous women and girls, has an impact on the continuity of our cultures and the transmission of indigenous traditional knowledge, including language, medicine, textile manufacture and art, protection of biodiversity, etc.

5. Intersecting forms of discrimination are structural barriers that impede reaching a more equal society, where indigenous women and girls can have equal access to the services and opportunities that are offered to the majority of the people.

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