

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CAUCUS STATEMENT
ON THE OVERALL REVIEW SESSION**

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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.