

14th Session of The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Fourteenth Session, 21 April 2015
Agenda Item 3(c), Youth, self-harm and suicide

Madame Chairwomen,
Members of the Permanent Forum
Distinguished Brothers and Sisters, Representatives of the Indigenous Peoples' Nations

I'm speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Environmental Network, MADRE and a dozen Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and regional networks from North, Central and South America, Africa and Asia on the root causes of indigenous youth's self-harm and suicide.

In order to protect and promote the well-being of Indigenous Youth and prevent self-harm and suicide, we need to stop the destruction of Mother Earth. When we see governments, extractive industries and multinational corporations raping and destroying Mother Earth, it simultaneously destroys our hope for the future and diminishes our will to live. There is a direct corollary between the harm to Mother Earth, especially on our lands and territories, and Indigenous youth's self-harm and skyrocketing rates of suicide.

Furthermore, extractive industries and the burning of fossil fuels are causing climate change. We need the United Nations and governments to take real action on climate change.

We, therefore, respectfully submit the following

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the special theme of the 15th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues be Indigenous Peoples' Territories and Extractive Industries and that the UNPFII hold an expert meeting on Indigenous Peoples' Territories and Extractive Industries prior to the 15th Session.

2. That the States adopt a limitation on oil and fossil fuel extraction whereby 80% of all oil and fossil fuel reserves be left in the ground.
3. That the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the forthcoming Paris Accord implement and protect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and all other human rights instruments.
4. That the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the forthcoming Paris Accord include legally binding commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the source by 60-80% as recommended by the UN without false solutions to climate change which include carbon trading, carbon offsets, the Clean Development Mechanisms, REDD+, Carbon Capture and Storage, monoculture tree plantations and agrofuels.

Madame Chairwoman, our connection to the land is such that when we see mining companies ripping into the land, we find it physically painful within our own bodies. When fracking injects chemicals into the earth and poisons our waters, the women, children, youth and all Indigenous peoples are also poisoned by the toxic chemicals. When logging destroys entire forests and ecosystems and we see such death and destruction before our eyes, we begin to lose hope in humanity. The question of whether or not the future is even worth living for in the face of such destruction is put into our minds and hearts and many indigenous youth lose hope to the point of believing that self-harm and suicide is the only way out.

My own work against fracking in North Dakota has shown me and my reservation community first hand the urgency of the dire situation. This kind of extreme energy extraction negatively impacts the mental and spiritual health of our youth.

When I look into the eyes of my 1 year old daughter I see such hope and light for the future and I want that hope to always be with her. This is why our organizations are proposing these recommendations as a next step to help ensure that Indigenous Youth do not fall into the trap of self-harm and hopelessness, but rather, can fulfill the role as joyous and healthy guardians of Mother Earth.

In closing, I remind the United Nations that “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

Thank you.