



International Indian Treaty Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD FINDS VIOLATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IMPACTING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN RIO YAQUI SONORA MEXICO

Geneva Switzerland, June 21, 2015: In a history-making finding issued on June 8th, 2015 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) responded to violations of the rights of Yaqui children in Sonora caused by the use of highly restricted and banned pesticides presented by the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and its affiliates in Mexico. The CRC, the treaty monitoring body for United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, reviewed the compliance of Mexico as a State Party to the Convention on May 19 and 20 during its 69th session.

Paragraphs 51 and 52 of the CRC's Concluding Observations addressing Mexico, presented under the subheading "Environmental Health", expressed concern "*that the State party has not taken sufficient measures to address air, water, soil and electromagnetic pollution, which gravely impact on children and maternal health. The import and use of pesticides or chemicals banned or restricted for use in third countries, which particularly affect indigenous children in the state of Sonora, is also a reason of deep concern.*"

The CRC specifically recommended that Mexico:

(a) Assess the impact of air, water, soil and electromagnetic pollution on children and maternal health as a basis to design a well-resourced strategy at federal, state and local levels, in consultation with all communities and especially indigenous peoples, to remedy the situation and drastically decrease the exposure to pollutants;

(b) Prohibit the import and use of any pesticides or chemicals that have been banned or restricted for use in exporting countries;

(c) Further examine and adapt its legislative framework to ensure the legal accountability of business enterprises involved in activities having a negative impact on the environment, in the light of its general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights.

The violations presented to the CRC by IITC focused on Mexico's import and use of pesticides which have been banned, unregistered or highly restricted in the United States, the European Union and other exporting countries due to their well-known deadly health impacts. These include reproductive abnormalities, childhood cancers and severe birth defects. Since 2001, IITC has worked with Yaqui community members and the Yaqui Traditional Authorities to collect over 80 testimonies documenting disease, disabilities, injuries and over 25 deaths tied to pesticide exposure. IITC's written submission to the CRC included 39 testimonies specific to children and mothers. IITC's submission also called the attention of the Committee to Article 29 of the UN *Declaration* which stipulates that States shall "take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of Indigenous Peoples without their Free Prior and Informed Consent" and ensure the implementation of "programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health" of the affected Indigenous Peoples.

IITC Executive Director Andrea Carmen, Francisco Villegas Paredes and traditional midwife Aurelia Espinoza Buitimea, from the Yaqui Nation in Arizona US and Sonora Mexico, attended the session for IITC. Mr. Villegas

and Mrs. Espinoza are also members of the community organization *Jittoa Bat Nataka Weria* based in Vicam, Rio Yaqui, one of the most affected communities in the region.

Andrea Carmen underscored the historic significance of the CRC's recommendations: "This is the first time that we have seen the Committee specifically comment on Environmental Health as an aspect of States' compliance with Article 24 of the Convention which addresses child and maternal health including the impacts of environmental pollution. The Committee's recommendations will have far reaching impacts, not only in Rio Yaqui and other parts of Mexico, but for Indigenous Peoples in many other countries. IITC, along with the Committee, will continue to monitor Mexico's compliance with these important recommendations which can save the lives and protect the health lives of a many of our children".

The full text of the CRC Concluding Observations addressing Mexico's report can be downloaded from the CRC web page:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/MEX/INT_CRC_COC_MEX_20804_E.pdf.

IITC's full submission for the CRC review of Mexico can be downloaded at:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/MEX/INT_CRC_NGO_MEX_20330_E.pdf .

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The International Indian Treaty Council is an organization of Indigenous Peoples from North, Central, South America, the Arctic, Pacific and Caribbean in General Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.