



In light of the recent Fourth Women's World Conference in Beijing, and the international attention that is being focused on women's issues, we dedicate this issue to Indigenous women. In the context of the Beijing conference and the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples celebrated by the United Nations, Indigenous women raise their voices from all nations, peoples, organizations, and communities and call for the respect of Mother Earth, life, territory, self-determination, and communal intellectual rights. Through this calling, Indigenous women also seek to gather forces for a better conservation of Indigenous philosophy; the ethical, esthetic, and spiritual values contained in the vision of our ancestors. Women, along with giving birth to the new generations, are the guardians and those responsible for transmitting, developing, and protecting the values which identify us as peoples. This is why women have played such an important role in historical struggles for life, although that role is almost never acknowledged.

In the Beijing conference, despite the limited access for our voices, we Indigenous women made a declaration to the international community in which we expressed our opposition to all forms of social injustice, and all types of violence and discrimination which affect our communities. We denounced the re-colonization and the threat to the ecological equilibrium in our communities, which under the name of globalization, creates conditions for wealthy nations to once again invade our territories to exploit the resources that, thus far, we have managed to preserve. We spoke out against accords and entities such as GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which help create the instruments for the appropriation and privatization of our communal intellectual property. We denounced the "pirating" of ancestral resources by transnational companies in this age of "neoliberalism." Under such models, our values and communal exchange practices will become a thing of the past, substituted with the greed required by the rules of the free Market. We are even witnessing the appropriation of our genetic inheritance, under the name of the Human Genome Diversity Project. In the mean time, our rivers, the air we breathe, and the land we live on are continuously fouled, leading to the slow death of our Mother Earth.

In the effort to sustain our families, we have had to incorporate non-Indigenous ways, but we strive to remain in harmony with the environment. We choose consciously to stimulate those economic activities that strengthen our peoples, understanding that our communities depend mainly on traditional systems of production like fishing, hunting, family agriculture, and small crafts enterprises.

The movement of Indigenous women today confronts all sorts of serious threats as it places itself in the path of powerful and destructive forces. It is urgent, considering the current situation, to develop better methods of communication between Indigenous women so as to coordinate effective actions in the defense of our peoples. Along with this, our double, vital role as reproducers and preservers of our people must be strengthened. Faced with this historical, transcendental mission, we should seek inspiration and wisdom in our ancestors for our journey to the next millennium. We should look for strength, courage, and determination in the future, which is the future of our communities, organizations, and our peoples, and their right to exist in dignity.

In this issue, in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous women have contributed articles, we explore the ways that Indigenous women have participated in the broader Indian movements in Latin America, the specific organizations and programs that have focused on women's needs and activities, and, by means of interviews, the point of view of native women themselves; how they envision their role in native and national society, and the hardships they must endure when they try and change those roles.

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