

## Earthkeepers: Working Group Indigenous Women

### Critical Areas of Concern III K

There has been a lack of understanding of the need to solicit the participation and unique perspective of indigenous women in the decision making process.

The unique role of indigenous women as carriers of wisdom and caretakers of the earth has not been fully recognized and acknowledged. Indigenous women have historically played a major role in the preservation of the environment and in generating systems for sustainable development. Indigenous women still practice their roles as caretakers of the Earth, the environment, and future generations. The voice of indigenous women has not been heard in international forums.

For indigenous peoples, the role of environment and development can not be considered apart from human rights. The destruction of the environment for development has violated the fundamental rights of indigenous women.

Indigenous women have been especially oppressed by the patriarchal European colonial systems. Indigenous women have been denied the right to practice their land based spiritual traditions, and have been denied access to and control of their traditional sacred sites. Their knowledge and wisdom has been devalued. Their spiritual and healing practices have been often been made illegal.

Major developments like hydro-electric dam projects and uranium mining and testing have been especially devastating for indigenous women and their communities. Diversion of major waterways and flooding of huge tracts of land is causing massive destruction of ancestral ecosystems, earth-based communities, food and medicinal plants. In fact whole cultures and traditions that are based on millennium old systems of interaction with the land are faced with destruction. Indigenous peoples have been particularly affected by the destructive byproducts of uranium mining and testing, with grave implications for future generations which are just now beginning to exhibit genetic consequences.