

**Consultations between the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN
System-wide Coherence and Civil Society Organizations**

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Topic II - Gender equality: mainstreaming and institutional architecture

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I am Monica Aleman. I am Indigenous Miskita from the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. I am the Program Director of MADRE, an international women's human rights organization and the coordinator of FIMI, the International Indigenous Women's Forum. FIMI is a network of Indigenous women with constituents in every region. I hope that my remarks today will contribute toward bringing the perspective of Indigenous women to the important discussions of reforming the UN system and increasing its effectiveness for all women.

The current phase of UN reform provides us with an opportunity not only to create much-needed changes to promote coherence of the overall UN system, but to reaffirm core values of human rights and social justice by prioritizing the needs and perspectives of socially excluded groups, including women and Indigenous Peoples, in the process of UN reform.

Towards that end, I'd like to say a few words in support of the establishment of a United Nations Women's Agency--an Agency that would represent women constituents of every sector--an Agency whose work would be rooted in an understanding of the overlapping crises that women face on the basis of

elements of their identity beyond gender, including race, ethnicity, language, geography, religion, age, sexual orientation and class.

Such an Agency would not only represent the interests of women from different social sectors; but would invest in developing the skills and leadership capacity of women from different groups who would, in turn, represent their own needs and priorities within that Agency. Indigenous women must be part of the conceptualization, design, planning, and implementation of the Agency's work, in its headquarters and, especially, in its regional offices.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples and in particular, of Indigenous women cannot be seen or understood without considering the intersection of race, ethnicity, class and gender. As I call for the creation of a women's Agency within the United Nations, I call for its mandate to be based on an integrated understanding of women's needs based on that intersection.

The call for a Women's Agency does not negate the need for gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations. In order to defend—and advance—the closely tied agendas of the global women's movement and the international Indigenous women's movement, and for the sake of coherence within the UN system, we need three types of initiatives that work in concert: A UN Women's Agency, as I have described; a process of gender mainstreaming that transcends the limitations of its implementation to date, and strives to realize the potential of gender equality; and women-specific programming throughout the UN system. Women-specific programming would compliment the work of a centralized Women's Agency. That Agency

would, in turn, serve as a touchstone for programs, facilitating cohesion of goals, methods, and communication throughout the UN system.

Finally, to realize these objectives, which are critical to promoting and advancing the rights of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women around the world, I call on member states to devote a greater proportion of their budgetary commitments to programs that would promote gender equality in their own countries and to support the establishment of a Women's Agency within the UN system.