

**Oral statement of Mme Musanga Timani Chimène, indigenous woman from the  
Democratic Republic of Congo.  
55th Session of the CEDAW Committee, 8 July 2013**

Madame Chair,

My name is Musanga Timani Chimène, an indigenous Pygmy woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo and I represent 15 NGOs that work with indigenous peoples and which developed an alternative report on the situation of indigenous women in the DRC. We regret that the DRC periodic report does not contain information on the rights of indigenous women. This is despite the fact that indigenous women face numerous forms of discrimination and live in conditions of extreme vulnerability. Indigenous women of the DRC are victims of discrimination that is largely due to their gender, but also their ethnicity and often their poverty.

Our report looks at the situation of indigenous peoples in the DRC and considers their dispossession from their ancestral lands and the threat this poses to the fundamental link that indigenous peoples maintain with their lands. These are essential for their culture, way of life and survival. Loss of ancestral lands has had, and continues to have, particularly devastating effects on indigenous women. One of the central roles of indigenous women is feeding and caring for their families. Yet they are deprived of the means to do so and are thus forced to live in very precarious conditions that leave them exposed to exploitation and violence. To this day, the government has failed to adopt measures to protect the rights of indigenous women and peoples to their land.

The report also looks at the discrimination faced by indigenous women in the field of education, health and public and political participation. It is worth noting first the absence of disaggregated data on the situation of indigenous women in these fields. In the field of education, indigenous children do not benefit from an equal access to education and even less so in the case of indigenous Pygmy girls. This limited access to education is partially due to lack of education facilities in indigenous villages. If they exist, they are very far from the villages. Indigenous girls who have to travel long distance to attend school are often victims of sexual harassment from teachers, face sexual attacks while travelling to school and are often victims of insults from other non-indigenous children. In terms of health, indigenous women do not have

access to health services in their villages and their access to clean water is almost inexistent. Indigenous women face very high levels of child and maternal mortality and are often victims of sexual attacks sometimes based on beliefs that sexual relations with an indigenous Pygmy woman cures backache. The loss of their ancestral lands furthermore prevents them from caring for their family through traditional medicine and from transmitting traditional knowledge in this respect.

Lastly, while no indigenous person is represented at the Senate or the National Assembly, this representation remains out of reach for indigenous women. Their illiteracy rate is close to 100% and the prejudice against them renders their election highly unlikely in the absence of the adoption of special measures by the government. They are normally not consulted on public and political matters and regarding decisions that affect their ancestral lands.

We urge the government of the DRC to urgently adopt special measures to allow for a better socio-economic integration of indigenous women in the Congolese society, in compliance with their rights.

I thank you for your attention.