

*Oral Statement by the International Federation of University Women on the HRC 30
Annual half-day discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples*

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The International Federation of University Women expresses concern at the barriers indigenous girls and women face in regard to completing secondary and tertiary education. The education gap between indigenous peoples and mainstream populations remains critical: rates of enrolment retention, completion of and performance at primary school level are significantly lower and gender disparities are often further pronounced, preventing indigenous girls from accessing secondary and higher education. Indigenous educational deficits range from generalised exclusion to limited access to the upper levels of primary and secondary education, with admittance to higher education still being the exception.

In terms of accessing secondary and tertiary education, minority girls and women face the greatest challenges, both linguistically and logistically. The major shortcoming is that formal school systems rarely reflect the realities of indigenous livelihoods or traditional educational systems: many indigenous peoples have come to see formal school education as a way of assimilating them into mainstream society and eradicating their cultures, languages and ways of life. When indigenous school children are introduced only to the national discourse at the expense of their native discourse, they are in danger of losing part of their identity and heritage.

IFUW therefore calls upon governments, global policy makers, education sectors and civil society to build on existing legislation, develop and share best practices in indigenous education, in order that indigenous people are enabled to control their own education. Education can be a means to address two of the most fundamental concerns and rights of indigenous peoples: respect for their cultural and linguistic diversity. IFUW recommends that states ensure that quality intercultural education is provided with the aim of eliminating discrimination against girls and women indigenous peoples, including a recognition of non-traditional knowledge, accessible through creative non-traditional methods such as radio, mobile phones and other technology where necessary. Education based on a mother-tongue curriculum will enable girls to stay on in school past primary and into secondary and tertiary education, empowering girls and women to better realise their rights, determine their life outcomes and influence decision-making in households, communities and societies.