

**STATEMENT  
TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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**Agenda Item 3 (b)**

**"Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men"**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

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INDIAN CONFEDERATION OF INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES, North East Zone (ICITP-NEZ)  
GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE NETWORK: WOMEN FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE (GENCC)**

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**EXPERT PANEL: GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE  
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Climate, biodiversity, biospheric evolution and balance are natural processes which though they might appear to be inextricably linked to human social intervention really only interact with the physical and chemical, eventually the biological extrusions of these. Markets are a complex and sophisticated human artifact, one that follows routes which, though they might derive from the natural condition of humanity and the world seek to or at least perceive themselves as isolated from interdependence on these. So too human rights. This is perhaps the fundamental problem with the market regime in climate change, even of the human rights discourse on the problematique, and in fact of the entire socio-economic basis of the society we have constructed.

In the market context, the world is seen as a dead object or a complex of dead objects which might with no more than or at least primarily and perhaps purely fiscal consequence, be tugged around and altered, transmuted, transformed and transmogrified with impunity. The carbon market is the present epitome of such a conceptualization of the world and despite the natural (disastrous) outcomes of the approach, there appears an obstinacy in the persistence in this course that smacks of panic and despair. The political powers and economic movers of the human civilization we know seem to have decided that if we can't survive their way we might as well not survive at all.

A similar attitude appears to prevail in the context of human rights and therefore gender justice. Like the "desirable" natural progressions of the biosphere these are required to be attained without impeding or in any way disturbing the premium artifact, the market and its prosperity, no matter the fundamental incompatibility between the well understood and increasing scarcity of "wealth producing" (or even survival permitting) resources or the means employed to acquiring and retaining private access to these.

Centuries of producing avoidable human misery and resource extinction, the current bio-sphere crisis, its depletion and contamination to the point which makes life as we understand it difficult if not shortly impossible to sustain, have not been enough to teach us or at least the powers that be of the incontrovertible conflict between the

goals of unlimited wealth accumulation for a few and of human justice and equity. And in this case as in that of the disregard paid except in extraction, to the resources of the biosphere, there is a stubborn blindness to evidence and a resultant insistence on paths previously trod despite all the clear evidence that this will not work; this will not do.

Most at fault in the so-called developing countries and in countries undergoing “transition” are the policies imposed or insinuated by International Financing Agencies on behalf of their corporate clients and the governments that serve these interests, of continued alienation of natural resources from the realm of the commons, from small holders and from communally held trust to the realm of the “public” or government controlled and the private or corporatized whether the corporates be profit making entities or ostensibly not for profit organizations with their own agenda, acting on “global” imperatives rather than in solidarity with local communities. There is no logic that can, in the situation of land, water and other natural resource scarcity that, we are told by the phenomenal pace of prices rising as well as by the burgeoning millions we can see for ourselves who are deprived of the minimum modicum of these needed for survival, justify the continued taking away of these resources from the poor in order to give them away or sell them or the services they support, cheaply to the rich.

This is what is being done today in the name of liberalization, globalization, the “free” market and even, absurdly the achievement of the MDGs, post-war reconstruction, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Policy makers are convinced, in the staring face of evidence to the exact contrary, that by giving away priceless assets to private profiteers, we are helping the poor to get richer; by entrusting the injured biosphere to those hands that devastated it in the first place, we are saving the world. The “Restructuralization” of economies are nothing less than a grab mechanism for private companies and individuals to tear into first, as the thin edge of the wedge, the “inefficient” government owned or public services in which the poor of the nation have invested for decades (by taxes and by a host of other measures) in order to ensure essential services at reasonable prices, and eventually twisting the arm of the same government (supposedly pledged to

protect most and first the weakest and poorest of the country) to far exceed its domain (governments notions of its own eminence notwithstanding) by appropriating and re-appropriating through hastily contrived and pushed through laws and policies, the lands, waters, natural and cultural resources which are the sovereign ownership of its peoples to private ownership of individuals and corporations.

All manner of development and CDM projects, the latest being REDD are, as such programmes have always been, used to take away peoples access and control over these natural resources. The drive to substitute “cleaner” forms of energy such as hydro power use massive quantities of lands for reservoir, channels and other constructions, whereas experience has shown us time and time again that these monstrous temples to man’s intellectual hubris perform on an average at less than 50 per cent of their anticipated capacity on power delivery alone, not to mention actually worsening water and hydrology flows in the areas they affect. Plantations whether for carbon storage or for agro fuels destroy vast acreage and consume immense quantities of ground water desperately needed for drinking, for food production by marginal farmers and for retaining both microclimate and biodiversity by the environment if we may be allowed the privilege of personifying this concept.

That these justifications are couched in convoluted and incomprehensible jargon does not mean that they are too profound for ordinary people to understand, it just means that as always those who want to take us for a ride in our own bullock carts cannot afford to have us understand what they are up to until it is too late for us to stop them. That is the truth of the Clean Development Mechanism in all its aspects from the carbon market to Joint Implementation Programmes and Emissions Trading. We are being told that if we expect rich people and their profiteering companies not to continue to destroy our planet and all possibility of life as we know it on earth then we have to pay them for it, we have to let them keep making money out of not forcing us to die off as a species. In only slightly different circumstances and contexts this would be called blackmail.

Of course we are also expected to put our trust once more in those who have demonstrated till date no social or environmental conscience whatsoever, in that

there is to be an assumption, that if we pay off these blackmailers, they will indeed keep their word not to destroy what is left of the planet and our survival chances. Posited against their record and given the immense profits being made out of disaster, natural or other, does this not seem just a little too naïve, at a time when we can hardly afford such naïveté? Put baldly, it does of course sound ridiculous, but that is nevertheless what it is. It is after all a simple statement to make: “the emperor has no clothes”. It has been made and the whispers are already growing louder in the crowd around. A general outcry is coming; both preceding and with it possibly some of the most brutal and widespread outbreaks of violence and war, of conflict at all levels, sub-national, international, inter-sectoral, inter-ethnic, that can be imagined. The water wars are in full swing even if they are not named so: in the Middle East between Israel and the others, in Africa and in Asia between corporate agencies and peoples’ militancy, between different groups of people. Possibly elsewhere as well. Land wars are certainly on-going between corporate interests supported by obedient governments and peoples’ movements, in South America and in Asia. More are brewing. The commercial establishment cares only in that they want to sell more armaments and other necessities of war. To find convenient and inscrutable dumps and testing grounds for obsolete or untested technologies. And possibly engage in the range of reconstruction projects afterwards, with the bonus of cheap land available as people flee their homes and fields.

In the meantime, the commitments made in Rio de Janeiro now a quarter century ago (such as the “no harm” principle) and in Beijing around the same time (on equity and equality for instance) are withered and forgotten: Outside the hard core of environmental activists and indigenous peoples no one remembers the framing and compulsions of the conventions on conserving the earth for its peoples, with its diversity and natural abundance, for its future. Beijing too is remembered only within the confines of this commission’s hearings and the constant call for gender mainstreaming without fully addressing the radical restructuring it will entail.

To cap it all there is a particularly panic-inspired blind faith in the demi-gods of "science" and its "solutions", despite the fact that none of our experience leads us to verifiable grounds that such "science" (rather say technologies based on some

scraps of science and a whole lot of profit making motives) can or will "save" us. In the meantime from Green Europe gobbling up ergs from the Clean Development Mechanism, and an equally energy-obese United States of America which keeps going through the fossil fuels careless of tomorrow, engaging in humanly and environmentally exorbitant wars to feed its over weight economy, ignoring the even slight semblance of shame and veiling that the CDM offers the grossly voracious appetites of the rich to the "Power ON" of "India Shining" and no doubt China Greenly glowing which disguise or rather allow these aspiring nouveau richese in the global plutocracies an effective programme of internal offsetting : the poor and destitute to cover up the gluttonous consumption of the wealthy and the waste production of insatiable industrialization.

That even a rationalization of consumption and technologies genuinely directed at eliminating wasteful processes would save from a quarter to a third of our current energy needs at the global level and that small and inexpensive refinements would cut pollution by about the same do not find purchase in the current market: wastefulness makes too much money and disguises too much corruption for it to be easily disposed off by the bodies politic and economic. Which is why the marketing of, for instance, personal cars has increased in intensity around the world when we should really be cutting them out of production.

The human and ecological bankruptcy and tenuous rationalizations of these processes and paradigms are so evident as to be axiomatic: any organism that overfeeds suffers bluntly, from obesity and consequential disease, from the chronic to the acute to the accidental complicated by the former. In the now "post-colonial" globalized greed regimes cemented by the International Financing Institutions intensively peddling technological marvel toys flashily wrapped in consumerist values and lifestyles of the wannabe rich and famous we cannot fool ourselves any more that the Tatas, Birlas, Reliances of India, their clones in other developing countries and their hangers on are less exploitative and colonial in their attitudes and outcomes as the East India Company, it's like and heirs, ever was. Or that the world's poor are really the world's poor, put there and kept there by world scale economic and political processes. Expediently.

In the matter of intense and extensive biosphere change there is also the matter of a narrowing resource base to consider. Mainly due to cultural colonization, privatization of the biosphere resources and their primary use in profit making; the array of minerals, plants, animals and their products that are used by humans for all the different aspects of survival and social paraphernalia are reducing to a very narrow spectrum of varieties and species, each of them extracted and over used to exhaustion disbalancing their place in the world with other things, living or, as science perceives them, non living.

Simultaneously, there is a vastly greater number of humans with immensely more intensive demands on these resources. So instead of say a few million human beings using something like (at a minimum vulgar estimate) ten to twelve thousand varieties of plants and animals (including fish, insects etc) for food, medicine, shelter materials and clothing, there are a few billion using a couple of hundred varieties. These in turn support a strictly limited range of other life forms and so on, and themselves require a reducing range of minerals and other nutrients to support them, can survive in a narrowing band of temperatures, humidity conditions, soil types and the like. If this is not clearly suicidal, eco-cidal then it is difficult to know what would be.

Another of the key regimes which are envisaged or which, to be more correct the powers that be would have us believe envisages salvation of a sort is the protocol of "Technology Transfer" or as they would in the last COP have us call it, "Technology Cooperation". Well intended in some measure at its birth, the protocol recognizes that there are some technological advances which are under patent and property regimes, the intellectual and knowledge capital of the "developed" sectors i.e. the industrialized sectors of rich societies. The intent is simply put, to make these technologies available (at profitable prices) to those who are presently engaged in providing cheap products to these rich markets taking the burden of (and blame for) environmental contamination and depletion into their own "sovereign" territorial jurisdictions.

At the same time, indigenous and traditional knowledge, unpatented and therefore in the domain of the commons are in the process of being appropriated, privatized and commercially exploited by the multiplying business interests that scent really very big money in the coming climate events, if the scale of these is going to be anything like the hurricane, tsunami, floods droughts and epidemics we are enduring now with greater frequency and higher intensity of each incidence.

The construction industry, the pharmaceutical companies, food seed and fertilizer or pesticides corporations and most of all the Financiers that are even now acquiring through our governments, sole access and ownership of priceless lands and waters, exclusive jurisdiction over minerals, plants, animals and their parts down to sub-cellular structures, natural and cultural heritage, and with hideous irony, the “right to pollute” what they cannot directly acquire and put an electric fence around.

How this is going to solve the development or the climate crises is truly inexplicable when corporations have in innumerable real experiences refused to be held accountable for anything but their profits to anyone but their largest shareholders?

Anti-poor policies have always meant that women are the losers. When the commons are eroded, women go down. When the environment, water, land quality and availability is degraded or restricted, women suffer. When traditional societies and communities break up because of displacement, women lose most. In disasters, natural or human induced or aggravated, women are most deprived and least assisted. We know all this and have known it for a long time now. We also know that women are expected, individually and collectively to “cope”, to “make up” and “make up for” social and familial deficits, to “manage” somehow.

Moreover, violence and discrimination against women in already patriarchal societies or those which demonstrate a strong male preference can be expected to increase drastically. In times of hardship fewer women will have gone to school or will have access to health services and in the massive displacements and evictions of populations already occurring women are turning into another currency as they are trafficked around the world for every purpose from domestic to sexual labour as

virtual if not literal slaves. We can confidently if unhappily predict that all this is going to get a lot worse even if we take immediate and drastic steps to turn the situation around. If we do not take these steps the situations will only become so much worse so much sooner for so much longer.

We are also beginning to realize that without women and more, without a gender equitable and sensitive set of strategies, the environment is going to fall apart, climate and biodiversity, both aspects, one inextricably linked with the other, a “female”, non commercial, humane, diverse, locally autonomous approach to life and how we live it.

This at least is certain: if we are to have a Climate and Biodiversity regime that looks in honest and practical terms at the realities of the day and designs strategies and activities to actually meet the challenges we are already facing, if we are to have sustainable development and the implementation of governments’ commitments of human rights for all, even merely of MDGs, if eventually, we are going to survive at all, as a species or as a civilization, even as an integral part of the earth, gender equity, equality, is a foundational principle without which this cannot happen.

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