



## **Women's Major Group Intervention**

Opening Plenary (OECPR)

Nov.29<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Thank you. I am Helen Hakena, speaking of the Women Major Group. I am from Bougainville, an island and an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea. We are a matrilineal culture – meaning our land is inherited through women. But that doesn't mean women govern. Men remain as chiefs and decision makers. For women, our land is vital. Together with our oceans, land provides us with almost all the food and resources we depend on. It is central to our cultural and community life.

Our island is fertile and we have lived here for generations in harmony with the environment. Yet, we have faced many challenges that impact particularly on women and girls. Bougainville suffered a 20-year war when one of the world's largest open pit mines, Panguna, destroyed our rivers, our land and environment and destroyed our communities.

I myself, leading my organization, Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, helped broker the peace and provided counselling to deal with the trauma our people suffered from the war. Till today we provide support to domestic violence survivors in a community that was torn apart by a war that was triggered by corporations' greed for profit. It is wrongful and misleading to suggest civil society organizations such as ours could in any way be the same as terrorist organizations as the executive director has just alleged. Unlike corporations that are rich and powerful with the ill-gotten gains from the mines, our strength comes from people's movements

and it is an insult to the solidarity of our communities, our Indigenous peoples and those who suffer the worst effect of profit-driven practices that has polluted our lands and waters.

In Bougainville, mines and logging produced hundreds of millions of dollars in profit, our island did not become prosperous. Less than 1% of the profits of the mine went to local communities. The mine polluted our water and re-directed our economy to servicing the mine and the foreign owners. Even now much of the population is exposed to mercury, used by artisanal miners, including pregnant women, to access the gold and we have a high rate of birth complications and deformities as a result.

The effects of pollution will outlive us. That is why UNEA-3 must not lose focus on reforming production systems that have harmful and pollutive substances and practices. This requires the dismantling of neoliberal policies that privilege a small handful of global private companies. These companies have too long been able to wreak havoc on the well-being of our planet and our people, with almost no transparency and accountability.

We envision more accountable and responsive State systems that make polluters pay and push the agenda towards sustainable consumption and production. A pollution free world also requires just and lasting peace across the globe as wars and conflict increase pollution of land, air and water through war machinery.

I know that it will take brave governments to hold corporations accountable, protect our rivers, our land from pollution. But it is possible. We have the wealth and we have the will to save our beautiful planet. We are also members of civil society, we are not terrorists and we don't want to be put in the same bag as them; that would be a very shortsighted view from civil society especially those of us who are accredited to the UN system fighting for people's rights and planetary health.