

From Sovereignty to Solidarity:
First Nations and Indigenous Women Shaping Global Futures
First Nations, Indigenous Women's Statement
Women Deliver Conference 2026, Narrm (Melbourne)

Preamble

We, First Nations and Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse, and intersex people from across the lands, waters, oceans, and skies of the world, affirm that we are descendants of sovereign Peoples whose authority, knowledge systems, cultural intelligence and governance structures predate modern nation states. Our relationships to land, waters, and all living beings who are our kin are not symbolic. They are foundational to our lores, cultural practices, spirituality, and ways of life. They are living expressions of justice, reciprocity, responsibility, and intergenerational care.

We affirm the inherent rights of our children and young people to their Indigenous identity. These rights were stripped from previous generations through genocidal state actions. Their futures, languages, cultures, and wellbeing are our highest priority.

Yet we continue to live in the enduring shadow of colonisation and imperialism, displaced from our tribal lands, waters and air, and from our lived realities and relationships with the natural world. At a time of escalating climate crisis, the world urgently needs a return to the ways of being, knowing and relating that sustain life and honour our shared humanity.

Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse, and intersex people continue to experience disproportionate harm, including violence, racism, trafficking, disappearance, militarisation, war, occupation, environmental dispossession, climate injustice, and systemic exclusion and marginalisation from decision making. Indigenous women continue to be murdered, go missing, and be exploited. This is a global failure of governments to protect us.

This statement affirms that decolonisation, sovereignty, and self determination are not aspirational. They are inherent rights. Guided by international human rights standards, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and General Recommendation 39 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, we assert the principle of free, prior, and informed consent in all developments affecting us, our lands, waters, and futures.

A: Our Priorities

A.1. Realising Sovereignty and Self Determination

We affirm that Indigenous Peoples are rights holders, Nations, and sovereign authorities, not stakeholders within external systems.

We affirm our right to determine our political status and pursue our economic, social, and cultural development.

For Indigenous women, this requires:

A.1.1 Full participation in governance at all levels, through our Indigenous governance systems and equitable representation within government systems

A.1.2 Recognition of Indigenous law, cultural authority, and decision making systems

A.1.3 Equitable representation in treaty processes and state negotiations

A.1.4 Women led truth telling processes that shift public narratives and advance treaty outcomes

A.2. Ending All Forms of Violence Against Indigenous Women and Children

Violence against Indigenous women and children is a human rights crisis and a legacy of colonisation and racist patriarchy.

We prioritise:

A.2.1 Culturally grounded prevention and response systems

A.2.2 Survivor led justice, healing, and trauma responses led by Indigenous women

A.2.3 Protection of Indigenous women human rights defenders. These are our land and water protectors, cultural knowledge holders, language keepers, community leaders, caregivers, and advocates who defend our rights, territories, and futures. They are not criminals. They are our warriors and protectors of Mother Earth. They must be protected from violence, criminalisation, surveillance, and retaliation by states and corporations

A.2.4 Ending child marriage and the criminalisation of our children. Legal accountability must reflect developmental responsibility and must not punish children as adults

A.2.5 Accountability and redress for state and institutional failures across health, justice, housing, education and child welfare systems

A.3. Decolonisation as Structural Transformation

Decolonisation is not symbolic or historical. It is a present structural requirement.

It requires:

A.3.1 Return of land, waters, and decision making authority

A.3.2 Dismantling extractive systems and state sanctioned developments that pollute our lands (without free, prior and informed consent)

A.3.3 Legal recognition of our spiritual relationship with land, including personhood for nature

A.3.4 Restoration of Indigenous governance systems as primary

A.3.5 Removal of barriers to Indigenous women's authority within our Nations

A.3.6 Indigenous women's control over funding, systems, and service delivery

A.4. Economic Justice and Resource Sovereignty

Indigenous women must have equitable access to:

A.4.1 Land, oceanic, and resource rights

A.4.2 Capital, investment, and economic opportunities

A.4.3 Leadership in sustainable, regenerative economies

Economic justice must reject extractive models and support Indigenous women led systems. All Indigenous focused initiatives must be designed, delivered, and funded by Indigenous women and girls, with direct, sustainable, and core funding, not through third party intermediaries. We require our own funding mechanisms to invest in our futures.

A.5. Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship

Indigenous women are frontline leaders in climate response.

We call for:

A.5.1 Recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems

A.5.2 Protection of lands, waters, food systems, and biodiversity

A.5.3 Resourcing for Indigenous led monitoring, mapping, and research. We are the scientists and experts documenting environmental degradation

A.5.4 Accountability for governments and industries, and protection for those who speak out and face risk

A.6. Health, Wellbeing, and Intergenerational Equity

Our wellbeing is holistic and intergenerational.

We prioritise:

A.6.1 Culturally grounded, gender just health systems

A.6.2 A call for full resourcing so Indigenous women can lead culturally grounded perinatal care on our lands, ensuring their authority, dignity, and reproductive justice

A.6.3 Healing from intergenerational trauma

A.6.4 Recognition of intersectional marginalisation, including Indigenous people with disabilities

A.6.5 Protection of bodily autonomy in all its expressions, free from criminalisation

A.6.6 Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including education, services and informed choice

A.6.7 Investment in children and young people as the foundation of intergenerational equity

A.7. Language, Culture, and Identity

Our languages are our birthright.

We prioritise:

A.7.1 Protection and revitalisation of our Mother tongues as first languages

A.7.2 Transmission of culture, identity, and knowledge across generations

A.7.3 Recognition and support of Indigenous sign languages as living languages of our Peoples including their use, teaching, and transmission across generations.

B: Our Strategies

B.1. Embedding Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse Leadership

We will strengthen:

B.1.1 Global networks and intergenerational leadership

B.1.2 Platforms that amplify our voices

B.1.3 Recognition of Indigenous gender systems and identities

B.2. Advancing Treaty and Constitutional Transformation

We will advocate for:

B.2.1 Treaty frameworks grounded in sovereignty and self determination

B.2.2 Independent accountability mechanisms

B.2.3 Government partnerships with Indigenous Peoples to deliver structural reform for intergenerational equity

B.3. Building Data Sovereignty and Evidence

We will:

B.3.1 Develop Indigenous led data systems

B.3.2 Accurately measure our realities

B.3.3 Use evidence to hold governments accountable

B.3.4 Maintain ownership and control of our data and our stories

B.4. Strengthening Solidarity Across Movements

We will build alliances across feminist, human rights, SOGIESC and climate movements, grounded in respect for Indigenous leadership and autonomy

B.5. Investing in Indigenous Women

We will advocate for:

B.5.1 Direct, long term funding

B.5.2 Trust based funding models

B.5.3 Removal of barriers to global financing

C: Calls to Action

C.1. To Governments

C.1.1 Recognise and uphold Indigenous sovereignty and self determination

C.1.2 Implement free, prior, and informed consent in all decision making

C.1.3 End criminalisation of Indigenous children and defenders

C.1.4 Protect Indigenous women, children, gender-diverse, intersex people and communities from violence, exploitation, and environmental harm

C.1.5 Ensure the repatriation of Indigenous ancestral remains and cultural artefacts to their rightful First Nations, including the return of items held in museums and institutions in accordance with Indigenous law and protocols

C.1.6 Partner with Indigenous Peoples to deliver system reform for intergenerational equity

C.1.7 Ensure full participation of Indigenous women in all decision making processes

C.1.8 Invest directly in Indigenous women led solutions

C.2. To Multilateral Institutions and Donors

C.2.1 Provide sustained, direct funding to Indigenous women led organisations

C.2.2 Align with Indigenous rights frameworks

C.2.3 Support Indigenous leadership in decision making spaces

C.3 To Civil Society and Global Movements

C.3.1 Centre Indigenous women's leadership

C.3.2 Build genuine partnerships grounded in justice and respect

C.3.3 Challenge systems of exclusion

C.4. To Ourselves

We commit to:

C.4.1 Uplifting one another across Peoples and movements

C.4.2 Protecting our knowledge systems, languages, and identities

C.4.3 Leading with integrity, courage, and collective responsibility

C.4.4 Ensuring global platforms prioritise Indigenous women's voices

Conclusion

From sovereignty to solidarity, we carry the strength of our ancestors and the futures of our children.

We are not asking for inclusion in systems that have harmed us.

We are transforming them.

We assert jurisdiction.

We uphold sovereignty of our lands, our bodies, and our futures.

We define justice.

We are ready.