

## **Building Bridges**

Beatriz Schulthess

Coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples Program of the Earth Council

*Beatriz Schulthess has been active since 1977 in negotiations within the United Nations system on issues related to indigenous peoples, women, and children's rights. She was appointed as an advisor on indigenous issues to the Secretary General of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and was responsible for promoting UNCED among indigenous peoples and coordinating their participation in the Earth Summit and the parallel NGO Forum. Currently, Ms. Schulthess is the coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples Program of the Earth Council.*

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With gratitude to our Creator and Mother Earth, I feel honored to be invited here by the Boston Research Center and to be able to contribute with all of you to the celebration of women.

I think we have an important role as women in taking this Earth Charter Benchmark and making it our own. We must reflect on it ourselves, word by word, and bring it to the attention of diverse numbers of women. We must urge them also to express how they feel about its contents and the way in which it fits their conception of life.

We have perhaps an even more important role in this process. We must take concrete actions to support what is said in the Charter.

When we say that the Earth Charter has embodied values embraced by women from all over the world, to me this means that we have to create or rediscover new relationships among women of different cultures and social sectors of society. This assumes respect and understanding for different religious beliefs, different cultures, and different social structures and practices.

As an indigenous woman, I would like to share with you some of the aspects of our values. Our vision of the universe corresponds to our values, which are based on our spirituality.

Spirituality is a strong basis for all indigenous societies, and I would like to add here that our societies are in constant evolution. We adopt new technologies, we send our children to schools, we adopt different economic trends, but we also have our own economic systems which we would like to keep. I can give you a small example from where I come from in the Andean region.

We have small economic systems for our communities which serve only our communities. These are not expansionist economic systems. They are based on the way

we produce food. We want it to last a long time-until next harvest time so that it provides food security for our communities. And these types of practices, these kinds of economic systems, we would like to maintain even if we also have to adapt to new trends.

Our activities and livelihood are ruled by our application of the values of respect for all living beings, of community life, solidarity, dignity, and authenticity.

Presently, many people support a more "integral" framework, particularly when we talk about "sustainability," which is defined from an economic, social, cultural, ecological, and political perspective. "We must acknowledge in this process that this "integral" framework implies rescuing missing *values*. From an indigenous view of the universe, the "integral" framework is a wider framework. We incorporate the human family and pay special attention to the needs of present and future generations. We also integrate the animal, plant, and mineral families as beings from which we can learn and which deserve our respect as much as human beings.

We also integrate the spiritual world. For us, the earth is alive. It has its own entrails. It coughs. It spits. And it shakes. Where I live right now, we can very often feel it.

The earth nourishes all of those who live on it and in it, the way a mother feeds her children. That is where we women have a special connection with Mother Earth; not only indigenous people, but all women. We have children and we understand that there is a spiritual link which develops between a child and the mother. We have the same link with our Mother Earth. Therefore, we indigenous women agree with what is stated in this regard in the Earth Charter

I will share with you now a few other ideas which are of concern to indigenous people and which we have been working on in consultations. With respect to science and technology, there is a need to find mechanisms to reconcile and to harmonize all the different forms of acquiring knowledge which exist in our world. As Esmeralda said, this also implies protecting our intellectual property rights. I don't know exactly how this is to happen, but in order to prevent some of our knowledge from literally being stolen, it is necessary. Some of our practices are also being taken and re-adapted in some other system. We need to find a way to harmonize and to have a certain recognition for all these forms of knowledge.

Another area of concern is education. Elise mentioned this earlier when she called schools "boxes." That's exactly how we feel. We have a form of education in which apprenticeship begins for us from the day we are conceived. "We learn through the occurrences and realities of daily life-by observing and learning the language of plants, animals, and minerals.

Minerals are like archives for our wise peoples, and they can read them. We learn to understand the language of the clouds, of the wind, of water, and of fire. In our traditional educational system, with the help of our elders and nature, we are taught how to live and coexist through a profound respect for our environment.

This method of teaching is our university, where our people specialize also in medicine, astrology, and archaeology to become spiritual guides or political guides. Others deepen their knowledge and they become our scientists and also the keepers of our history.

Poverty is another issue I want to mention-and Susan already touched on it. We have seen the word "poverty" appearing in different international documents. It appears in national policies. I think because the world is spinning so fast, most of the people have not yet stopped to figure out what this is really all about.

In our view of the world, if we have our land, if we have our territory where we can have our food security, if we have a roof over our head, if we have our clothes, if we have our education, and, of course, if we have good health, maybe we don't think that we are poor. But, all that is said about us gives the world the impression that we are poor.

Finally, I would like to say that we are now in a period of time when our prophecies also say we have to share our knowledge with others. We have to share with others our way of doing things. And we are very open to doing this. I believe also -- I always have believed, in fact -- that the women's sector is actually the channel where we can do this: where we can build the bridges to break the walls and create new relationship systems.

This is why I am very happy to be here. I count very much on all of you.