

## Statement by the Hereditary Chief of the Lenca Indigenous People<sup>1</sup>

12<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, Geneva 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

Empowered women can do extraordinary things. Women built my kingdom during the ice age, and as a descendant, I am here today.

The Lenca people, were established by the jaguar women of the Taulepa clan during the ice age. We had many languages brought by climate refugees, when settled with us.

Today, as we face global change again, we are still here, the difference is that now, after the death of my grandmother in 2015, I am the last speaker of the language of those jaguar women. The Lenca people are aware and deeply concerned about this and have taken the following actions.

In 1997, we established the Lenca office and made tribal laws to for our cultural development. Our office operates from exile for safety.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, this year, the Lenca chief and the local government of Quelepa in eastern El Salvador, signed a formal treaty for cultural work. This comes to show that when central governments cannot or will not engage, the local governments can and will.

Perhaps the most powerful item to highlight today is the efforts made by the Lenca people in the mountain of Nahuaterique, Honduras, where this October, it declared an indigenous autonomous government, approved by the Hereditary chief. The newly formed government has made Lenca languages and girls empowerment priority. We are now developing a learning kit that can be used where there is no internet and other modern technologies.

Our work is not an easy task, because while the Lenca authority signs treaties on one side, on the other side of the border, the Lenca people faces threats and sometimes assassination, just for the simple reason of defending their mountains, rivers and ways of life.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lenca is the first nation of today's El Salvador and Honduras, with a diaspora around the world

As I conclude my statement, I congratulate this committee and the efforts made by the UN . I also recomend that the states of El Salvador and Honduras, support us by allowing the lena system to be our legal and lawful framework within our lands and communities, without prejudice to the national legislations. Thank you.