Reviewer’s report

Title: PAHO’s Health of the Indigenous Peoples Initiative - A Broken Promise in Latin America

Version: 2 Date: 24 April 2009

Reviewer: Anne-Emanuelle Birn

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This article covers an important topic which is certainly relevant to the journal’s readership. However, the argument is marred by a number of weaknesses.

1) Major Revisions

The article makes vast generalizations about the entire region of Latin America. While this reader concurs in the general finding, it is necessary to provide concrete EXAMPLES (in countries or sub-regions) of the ways in which indigenous populations have been oppressed and ignored. Each section or point should have specific country or regional illustrations of the consequences of the lack of attention to health and mental health. There is some information about indigenous-non-indigenous health disparities, that should be cited:

For example, in El Salvador, 95% of water sources that are used by indigenous populations are contaminated (PAHO 2002). In Mexico, almost 90% of indigenous communities live in extreme poverty (Castro, Erviti, and Leyva 2007).

The poor health status of many indigenous populations is compounded by lack of access to health care. Throughout the Americas, 40% of indigenous groups do not receive health services for geographical and economic reasons, and often there are large cultural, linguistic and social barriers to care (Montenegro and Stephans 2006).

Also, certain counter-examples are important to mention:

What about efforts in Evo Morales’s Bolivia regarding the interculturalidad approach?

Are there examples from New Zealand, Canada or other regions with indigenous populations regarding how societies can and should address mental health problems?

2) Minor revisions. There is considerable repetition in the paper. For example, cutting the repetition in the background section would allow for more discussion of specific country or regional cases.

Mental health issues sometimes come and go in the discussion--please be consistent.
3) Discretionary revisions: given the oppressive treatment of people with mental health problems in the past (e.g. imprisonment in psychiatric hospitals, official neglect of mental health historically is a complicated issue and needs to be discussed as such.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.