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AMERICA/GUATEMALA - Indigenous Women: the poorest of the poor, marginalized and discriminated

Antigua (Agenzia Fides) - "Creating Opportunities" is a program launched by the international American NGO concerning public health, Population Council, in the Guatemalan province of Alta Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Sololá, Totonicapán, Quetzaltenango and Chiquimula, and addressed to girls between 8 and 18 years of age, with the objective of strengthening rural communities and creating "safe spaces" where they can come together and develop their self-esteem, skills, and plan the future. Launched in 2004, the program wants to break the cycle of poverty and make the girls realize their full potential. In Guatemala in fact, where 14 million people live, half of them in poverty, indigenous women are the poorest of the poor, and live marginalization and discrimination. According to official statistics, 40% of the country's population consists of indigenous, even if native groups and international NGOs argue that they are 60%. Among women there are 7 out of 10 maternal deaths, the highest teen pregnancy rate in rural areas of Latin America, with 114 mothers who are less than 20 per 1000 births. Only 26% of indigenous women who speak the native languages complete primary school, compared to 45% of boys and 62% of indigenous women who speak Spanish. According to the Population Council the Mayan girls are the most disadvantaged in the country, subject to early marriage, limited education, frequent pregnancies, social exclusion and chronic poverty. In addition the population in the country is growing at a dizzying rate: according to the recent report of The State of the World Population 2011, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), Guatemala has the highest fertility rate in Latin America. Guatemalan women between 15 and 49 have an average of 3.8 children, compared to the average of 2.2 across Latin America. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 14/11/2011)

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