

**INTER  
MUN**  
2024



UNITED NATIONS



# UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**BACKGROUND - TOPIC 1**

**“INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND CULTURAL  
PRESERVATION”**

# WELCOME

Greetings delegate,

Welcome to the General Assembly of the 2024 Jesuit School System's Model United Nations (INTERMUN) presented by Instituto Cultural Tampico.

The Committee Chair expresses profound gratitude for your esteemed participation in our committee and your keen interest in the selected topic to discuss this year. With grand desire we hope this experience will be beneficial for your learning, leading and working aptitudes, as we expect it to be a pleasant experience.

The topic that the Chair chose this year are the Indigenous Rights and Cultural Preservation.

The Chair of the General Assembly encourages you to discuss with prudent and valuable arguments about the violated rights of indigenous communities and the eradication of their ethnic culture.

We once again extend our sincere appreciation for your invaluable contribution to this committee. We extend our best wishes and deepest thanks.

Sincerely

-The General Assembly's Chair.

*President: Valeria Salinas de la Garza  
Secretary: Andrea Cavazos Alexander  
Moderator: Ximena Orta Ortega*

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# HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

The General Assembly established in 1945 acts as the main organ of the Organization of the United Nations carrying a central role as the chief deliberative policymaking and in important processes like the setting and codification of international laws, crossing through pillars and organs of the UN regarding political, legal, economic, social and humanitarian matters. Provides a forum for the discussion of international issues, searching for resolutions through the UN pillars; Human rights, Peace and security, and development.

Each of the 193 Member States in the Assembly has one vote. Votes taken on designated important issues – such as recommendations on peace and security, the election of Security Council and Economic and Social Council members, and budgetary questions – require a two-thirds majority of Member States, but other questions are decided by a simple majority. That said, following informal consultations among Member States during which proposals are negotiated, the majority of resolutions are adopted without a vote.

Through a committee made in 1965 called Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the GA monitors the performance and development of the UN Peacekeeping.

Regular meetings are from September to December each year, and thereafter meetings from January to August, including outstanding reports from the Fourth and Fifth Committees.

There has been a sustained effort to make the work of the General Assembly more focused and relevant. This was first identified as a priority during the 58th session, and efforts continued at subsequent sessions to streamline the agenda, improve the practices and working methods of the Main Committees, enhance the role of the General Committee, strengthen the role and authority of the President and examine the Assembly's role in the process of selecting the Secretary-General.

# INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced. The land and natural resources on which they depend are inextricably linked to their identities, cultures, livelihoods, as well as their physical and spiritual well-being. They often subscribe to their customary leaders and organizations for representation that are distinct or separate from those of the mainstream society or culture. Many Indigenous Peoples still maintain a language distinct from the official language or languages of the country or region in which they reside; however, many have also lost their languages or on the precipice of extinction due to eviction from their lands and/or relocation to other territories, and in. They speak more than 4,000 of the world's 7,000 languages though some estimates indicate that more than half of the world's languages are at risk of becoming extinct by 2100.

There are 476 million Indigenous people around the world and spread across more than 90 countries. They belong to more than 5,000 different Indigenous peoples and speak more than 4,000 languages. Indigenous people represent about 5% of the world's population. The vast majority of them – 70% – live in Asia.

Although they have different customs and cultures, they face the same harsh realities: eviction from their ancestral lands, being denied the opportunity to express their culture, physical attacks and treatment as second-class citizens.

Indigenous peoples are often marginalized and face discrimination in countries' legal systems, leaving them even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. Indigenous human rights defenders who speak out face intimidation and violence, often supported by the state. In addition, individuals may be physically attacked and killed just for belonging to an Indigenous people.

Peaceful efforts by Indigenous Peoples to maintain their cultural identity or exercise control over their traditional lands, which are often rich in resources and biodiversity, have led to accusations of treason or terrorism.

Discrimination is the reason why Indigenous peoples make up 15% of the world's extreme poor. Globally, they also suffer higher rates of landlessness, malnutrition and internal displacement than other groups.

Amnesty International has worked to defend the rights of Indigenous peoples in all regions of the world and demands that states apply and develop urgently needed laws to protect their lands, cultures and livelihoods.

Indigenous Peoples can be identified according to certain characteristics:

- Most importantly, they self-identify as Indigenous peoples
- There is a historical link with those who inhabited a country or region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived
- They have a strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- They have distinct social, economic or political systems
- They have a distinct language, culture and beliefs
- They are marginalized and discriminated against by the state
- They maintain and develop their ancestral environments and systems as distinct peoples

Each of these characteristics may be more or less important depending on the situation. Indigenous Peoples are also known as First Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, or Native Peoples. In some countries there are specific terms such as Adivasis (India) or Janajatis (Nepal).

Indigenous Peoples have a special relationship with the land on which they have lived for generations, sometimes for tens of thousands of years. They possess crucial knowledge about how to manage natural resources sustainably and act as guardians or custodians of the land for the next generation. Losing their land means a loss of identity.

Indigenous Peoples' rights are laid out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is the central body within the UN system which deals with Indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. The Forum was established in 2000.

Indigenous peoples face exclusion and discrimination just because they identify as members of Indigenous groups. Discrimination impacts their everyday life, it restricts their rights to education, health care and housing.

All across the world, Indigenous peoples' life expectancy is up to 20 years lower compared to non-Indigenous people.

Indigenous peoples often rank highest for prison inmates, illiteracy and

unemployment. Globally, they suffer higher rates of poverty, landlessness, malnutrition and internal displacement.

Around the world, Indigenous Peoples have been denied self-determination – a binding principle in international law which refers to peoples' right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Instead, Indigenous Peoples have suffered violence and oppression by both colonizers and mainstream society.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Canada removed Indigenous children from their families and placed them in federally funded boarding schools, with the intent of assimilating them into broader Canadian society. At these "Indian Residential Schools", they were not allowed to speak their languages or express their cultural heritage and identities. As a result, "Aboriginal people were expected to have ceased to exist as a distinct people with their own governments, cultures, and identities". An estimated 150,000 First Nations children suffered abuse in these schools.

Aboriginal children in Australia were also forced to assimilate into white culture and were placed in institutions where they suffered abuse and neglect. These children are known as the "Stolen Generations".

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The rights of indigenous peoples' have been progressively given more attention by the UN system. Yet, indigenous peoples continue to be left behind and suffer disproportionately from climate change, environmental degradation, high levels of poverty, poor access to education, health, and broader human rights violations.

While representing over 6 percent of the worlds' population (476 million in some 90 countries), indigenous peoples are nearly three times as likely to be living in extreme poverty. They account for almost 19 percent of the extreme poor. Indigenous peoples have been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic and cultural consequences. Globally, there is a lack of disaggregated data on indigenous peoples. Where data exists, the situation is concerning.

Indigenous peoples live on all continents, from the Arctic to the Pacific, via Asia, Africa and the Americas. There is no singularly authoritative definition of indigenous peoples under international law and policy, and the Indigenous Declaration does not set out any definition. This decision was taken intentionally by the drafters based on the rationale that the identification of an indigenous people is the right of the people itself—the right of self-identification—and a fundamental element of the right to self-determination. Indigenous peoples' situations and contexts are highly variable; any single definition will not fully capture the full diversity of the indigenous peoples of the world. In fact, its articles 9 and 33 state that indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned, and that they have the right to determine their own identity.

Many indigenous peoples populated areas before the arrival of others and often retain distinct cultural and political characteristics, including autonomous political and legal structures, as well as a common experience of domination by others, especially non-indigenous groups, and a strong historical and ongoing connection to their lands, territories and resources, including when they practice nomadic lifestyles. While the legal status of indigenous peoples is distinct from that of minorities, they are often, though not always, in the minority in the States in which they reside.



Minorities and indigenous peoples have some similar rights under international law, although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is arguably more comprehensive than international legal instruments associated with minorities.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 65/198 of 21 December 2010, decided to organize a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, in order to share perspectives and best practices on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, including pursuing the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The World Conference was held on 22 September 2014 and in the afternoon of 23 September 2014 in New York. It resulted in a concise, action-oriented outcome document prepared on the basis of inclusive and open informal consultations with Member States and indigenous peoples.

Violence, forced assimilation, abuse. Despite all the positive developments in international human rights standard-setting, indigenous peoples continue to face serious human rights abuses on a day-to-day basis. Issues of violence and brutality, continuing assimilation policies, marginalization, dispossession of land, forced removal or relocation, denial of land rights, impacts of large-scale development, abuses by military forces and armed conflict, and a host of other abuses, are a reality for indigenous communities around the world. Examples of violence and brutality have been heard from every corner of the world, most often perpetrated against indigenous persons who are defending their rights and their lands, territories and communities.

Conservation programmes—based on the concept of excluding human beings from the environment and natural resources (i.e. forced evictions and other harms)—have negative consequences on the rights of indigenous peoples and fail to recognize their natural custodianship of the environment and ecosystems. As such, there is an urgent need for dialogue between States and indigenous peoples to reach binding agreements that will acknowledge the legitimate interests of wildlife conservation but also recognize and guarantee communities' rights under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

## **Indigenous Women and Children**

Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable, as are indigenous youth, who are disproportionately impacted by lack of access to education and employment opportunities, decision making and access to justice. T

the semi-autonomous status and/or social exclusion of indigenous communities has led to inadequate mechanisms to address gender-based violence, which tends to be higher than national averages in many countries.

From India to Peru, Indigenous women have higher rates of maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and are more likely to suffer violence.

Indigenous women are less likely to use health care facilities when pregnant because of discrimination and mistreatment; and so, they are more likely to die giving birth. For example, in Panama and Russia, Indigenous women are about six times more likely to die in childbirth than women from the non-Indigenous population. The birth rate for Amerindian adolescent girls is twice that of the general Guyanese population. In Kenya, Maasai women are twice as likely to have had no antenatal care, and in Namibia, San women are ten times more likely to give birth without skilled attendance.

In a horrifying violation of their human rights, more than 2,000 poor Indigenous and campesino women were allegedly sterilized without their consent by state authorities in Peru in the 1990s. On 22 January 2014, the Public Prosecutors office in Lima closed their case and denied them justice.

In some countries, Indigenous women suffer disproportionately from domestic violence as they bear the brunt of frustration and anger, resulting from deep-seated discrimination affecting the wider community.

Indigenous children are also vulnerable to abuse. In southern Africa, the children of the San, and other Indigenous peoples find it hard to access education. In south-east Asia, most women and girls trafficked across state borders are from Indigenous communities.

An indigenous woman is more likely to be raped, with some estimates showing that more than one in three indigenous women are raped during their lifetime

## **Indigenous Land Rights**

While Indigenous Peoples own, occupy, or use a quarter of the world's surface area. Indigenous Peoples conserve 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity and recent studies reveal that forestlands under collective IP and local community stewardship hold at least one quarter of all tropical and subtropical forest above-ground carbon They hold vital ancestral knowledge and expertise on how to adapt, mitigate, and reduce climate and disaster risks.

Although some Indigenous peoples are self-governing many still come under the ultimate authority of central governments who control their lands and resources. Despite that, Indigenous peoples, ranging from the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, of North America, to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples have demonstrated extraordinarily good governance.

Much of the land occupied by Indigenous Peoples is under customary ownership, yet many governments recognize only a fraction of this land as formally or legally belonging to Indigenous Peoples. Even when Indigenous territories and lands are recognized, protection of boundaries or use and exploitation of natural resources are often inadequate. Insecure land tenure is a driver of conflict, environmental degradation, and weak economic and social development. This threatens cultural survival and vital knowledge systems – loss in these areas increasing risks of fragility, biodiversity loss, and degraded One Health (or ecological and animal health) systems which threaten the ecosystem services upon which we all depend.

Improving security of land tenure, strengthening governance, promoting public investments in quality and culturally appropriate service provision, and supporting Indigenous systems for resilience and livelihoods are critical to reducing the multidimensional aspects of poverty while contributing to sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The World Bank works with Indigenous Peoples and governments to ensure that broader development programs reflect the voices and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous peoples continue to face threats, especially to their land rights (from natural resource extraction, infrastructure projects, large scale agriculture and conservation). In some instances there is a heightened risk of statelessness, particularly for those indigenous peoples whose traditional lands cross national borders.

Indigenous Peoples' land ownership rights are recognized under international law. States cannot relocate Indigenous Peoples without their free, prior and informed consent and without offering them adequate compensation.

The land that Indigenous Peoples live on is home to over 80% of our planet's biodiversity and rich in natural resources, such as oil, gas, timber and minerals. However these lands are routinely appropriated, sold, leased or simply plundered and polluted by governments and private companies.

Many Indigenous Peoples have been uprooted from their land due to discriminatory policies or armed conflict. Indigenous land rights activists face violence and even murder when they seek to defend their lands.

Human rights abuses related to their land rights and culture, have prompted growing numbers of Indigenous Peoples to leave their traditional lands for towns and cities. Cut off from resources and traditions vital to their welfare and survival, many Indigenous Peoples face even greater marginalization, poverty, disease and violence – and sometimes, extinction as a people.

This has resulted in the displacement of millions of indigenous peoples, and caused conflicts and a sharp increase in attacks, killings and criminalisation of indigenous peoples, including increasing threats and assassinations of human rights defenders. This also includes harassment and reprisals against indigenous representatives, including for participating in UN fora.

This calls for reinvigorated efforts to address the negative legacy of historical injustices, discrimination, and assimilation that indigenous peoples have been subjected to over centuries.

### **Discrimination Over Indigenous People**

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Indigenous peoples frequently raise concerns about systemic discrimination and outright racism from the State and its authorities. This discrimination manifests itself in a number of ways such as frequent and unnecessary questioning by the police, condescending attitudes of teachers to students or rudeness from a receptionist in a government office. At their most extreme, these forms of discrimination lead to gross violations of human rights, such as murder, rape and other forms of violence or intimidation. These forms of discrimination are often either difficult to quantify and verify or are simply not documented by the authorities, or not disaggregated based on ethnicity.

More than 86 percent of Indigenous peoples work in the informal economy and are nearly three times as likely to be living in extreme poverty. They are more

likely to suffer from malnutrition, and often lack adequate social protection and economic resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected their lives, causing them to suffer even more from poverty, illness, and discrimination.

The life expectancy of Indigenous peoples is as much as 20 years lower than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Often lacking adequate healthcare and information, they are more likely to get diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV.

Forty seven percent of all Indigenous peoples in employment have no formal education. This number is even wider for women.

## **Indigenous Rights**

Over the last 30 years, Indigenous Peoples' rights have been increasingly recognized through the adoption of international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2016, the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) in 2021 and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention from 1991. At the same time, global institutional mechanisms have been created to promote Indigenous peoples' rights such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNSR).

Indigenous rights include both group rights, or collective rights, and individual rights. Historically, Western society has emphasized individual rights and freedoms—seeking, basically, to protect the individual from abuses by the state or other powers. Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms predominantly protects individual rights, although section 25 guarantees the protection of Aboriginal rights, and sections 16 and 23 protect some group language and cultural rights. Section 35 of the Constitution further recognizes and affirms Aboriginal rights.

In most Indigenous societies both collective and individual rights are recognized. Group rights, such as the right to practice culture and customs, the right to self-determination, the right to subsistence economies, the right to governance, and the right to land, protect the foundations of the society. They can be critical when these societies and cultures are threatened. The majority of the world's Indigenous populations seek state recognition of these collective rights in order to protect and strengthen their societies.

International human rights instruments, which have been designed principally by Western-liberal societies, have overlooked collective rights in favor of individual rights. However, with the emergence of the international Indigenous rights movement in the latter half of the twentieth century, policymakers have been obliged to balance individual rights with collective rights through new international instruments.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, G.A. Res. 61/295, was adopted on September 13, 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly, after more than thirty years of work and negotiations. One hundred and forty-three UN Member States voted to adopt the Declaration and four voted against. All four countries that voted “no” have since changed their positions and now support the Declaration.

The Declaration, made up of 26 preambular paragraphs and 46 operative articles, is a monumental statement of individual and collective rights created with the participation of the rights holders themselves – indigenous peoples. Though the Declaration is not legally binding on countries in and of itself, it sets the rules for the treatment of, and obligations of states toward, indigenous peoples and individuals. It can be used as a moral and political tool to guide countries’ laws, policies, and practices toward indigenous peoples and to interpret international human rights laws. In many provisions, the Declaration states customary international law – that is, the practices of countries they believe to be legally required. These elements of the Declaration are binding as customary international law.

### **Importance of Indigenous Culture Prevalence**

Living heritage is dynamic and has the capacity to change and evolve as it is passed on from generation to generation. It underpins our sense of identity and connects us to our past, each other and the wider world.

Indigenous peoples hold a rich diversity of living heritage, including practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that continue to be relevant and provide meaning in everyday life. The practice and transmission of this heritage contributes to the ongoing vitality, strength and wellbeing of communities.

Indigenous languages are a vehicle of living heritage. Taxonomies and classification systems can sometimes reveal unconventional and insightful ways of understanding the flora and fauna of complex natural environments. At the same time, such knowledge, encased in language, is often transmitted and expressed through a myriad of practices and expressions.

The disappearance of a language threatens the continued practice and transmission of living heritage and may result in the loss of vital cultural and ecological knowledge.

Indigenous Peoples have, over the course of generations, developed rich sets of knowledge about the natural world, health, technologies and techniques, rites and rituals and other cultural expressions. Culture is one of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum and is inextricably linked to Indigenous Peoples' identity, their traditional knowledge, their experiences with the natural environment and hence their territorial and cultural rights. Cultural practices, traditions and values of Indigenous Peoples – as long as they are in line with human rights principles – can play a critical and positive role in advancing and promoting gender equality and human rights. Although culture was not explicitly mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000, it has been widely acknowledged as a key element to be taken into account in order to achieve the development goals set by the international community.

### **Indigenous Communities Threaten with Extinction**

The importance of land and territories to Indigenous cultural identity cannot be stressed enough. However, Indigenous Peoples have continued to experience loss of access to lands, territories and natural resources. The result has been that Indigenous cultures today are threatened with extinction in many parts of the world. Due to the fact that they have been excluded from the decision-making and policy frameworks of nation-states in which they live and have been subjected to processes of domination and discrimination, their cultures have been viewed as being inferior, primitive, irrelevant, something to be eradicated or transformed.

90 per cent of all languages will disappear within 100 years. It is usually estimated that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 oral languages in the world today. Most of these languages are spoken by very few people, while a handful of them are spoken by an overwhelming majority of the world. About 97 percent of the world's population speaks 4 percent of its languages, while only 3 per cent speaks 96 per cent of them. A great majority of these languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, and many (if not most) of them are in danger of becoming extinct. Roughly 90 per cent of all existing languages may become extinct within the next 100 years.

Dying languages, damaging communities. While some Indigenous Peoples are successfully revitalizing languages, many others are fighting a losing battle, where languages are simply no longer passed from one generation to the next.

Most governments are aware of this language crisis but funding is often provided only for the recording of languages, while limited funds are diverted to language revitalization programmes. Language, furthermore, is not only a communication tool, it is often linked to the land or region traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples; it is an essential component of one's collective and individual identity and therefore provides a sense of belonging and community. When the language dies, that sense of community is damaged.

Traditional food lengthens life. It is now emerging that Indigenous Peoples' overall health, well-being and cultural continuity are directly related to their ability to consume their traditional foods and continue their traditional food practices. This realization has led to calls to governments to incorporate culture into the development of sustainable agriculture, food systems and related practices, policies and programmes that respect and support the well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

Value of traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge and traditional resources have been managed by indigenous and local communities since time immemorial, using customary law embedded in spiritual cosmology. A great deal of traditional knowledge, including customary laws and folklore, has been undermined and destroyed by colonizers and post-colonial states who imposed their own systems of law, knowledge and worldviews on indigenous people. Today, however, there is an increasing appreciation of the value and potential of traditional knowledge.

## **Relation Between Indigenous Communities and Environment**

Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of living. Nearly 70 million depend on forests for their livelihoods, and many more are farmers, hunter gatherers or pastoralists.

These communities thrive by living in harmony with their surroundings. Research shows that where Indigenous groups have control of the land, forests and biodiversity flourish.

Indigenous communities' contribution to fighting climate change are far greater than previously thought. Their forestlands store at least one quarter of all above-ground tropical forest carbon – about 55 trillion metric tonnes. This is equivalent to four times the total global carbon emissions in 2014. Given that data isn't available for all the lands native communities manage around the world, the actual impact is far greater.

From protecting the environment and tackling inequality, to ensuring peace and security, the Sustainable Development Goals won't be achieved without



Indigenous peoples. The United Nations General Assembly has asked countries to emphasize their rights when implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Indigenous peoples account for most of the world's cultural diversity. Throughout the world, there are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples occupying 20 percent of the earth's territory. It is also estimated that they represent as many as 5,000 different indigenous cultures. The indigenous peoples of the world therefore account for most of the world's cultural diversity, even though they constitute a numerical minority.

Land rights in law, but not in reality. Only a few countries recognize indigenous peoples' land rights, but even in those countries, land titling and demarcation procedures have often not been completed, suffer delays or are shelved because of changes in political leadership and policies. Even where indigenous peoples have legal title deeds to their lands, these lands are often leased out by the state as mining or logging concessions without consultation of indigenous peoples, let alone their free and prior informed consent. The lack of legal security of tenure remains a crucial issue for indigenous peoples almost everywhere.

Climate change, deforestation, pollution, development and loss of diversity are serious threats to indigenous peoples due to their dependence on the environment and the resources of the lands and territories. It causes the loss of traditional knowledge, disintegrating traditional governance structures and their cultures. This policy briefing provides examples of the holistic perspective of indigenous peoples on resource governance, land rights, mitigation of climate change impact on their environment and resilience-building through the use of their traditional knowledge. It also highlights the benefit of indigenous peoples' full participation, in particular, indigenous women in decision-making processes to prevent conflict. It notes the importance of upholding the rights of indigenous peoples as enshrined in international law and full respect for the right of indigenous peoples' decision not to engage in the global economy. Further, it points to the need to promote dialogue among indigenous peoples, local communities, scientists, including meteorologists and climate experts, policymakers, and other relevant actors, to enable co-production of knowledge, and sharing of sustainable strategies to overcome risks and strengthen resilience to climate change. Read more about it at UN/DESA Policy Brief #101: Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' Sustainability

# OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Committee Chair is to nurture a community of adept diplomats and future leaders with a forward-thinking vision, particularly in the realm of indigenous rights and cultural preservation. Engaging actively in our proceedings, delegates will acquire indispensable skills in diplomacy, critical analysis, and open-mindedness.

Within the framework of the General Assembly, our focus is on refining your abilities in crafting resolutions, engaging in debates, and fostering open-minded perspectives, all aimed at addressing the pressing questions the world poses to us. Delegates must comprehend the monumental responsibility they bear—the responsibility to regulate global interactions and work towards achieving equity and synergy among nations.

The General Assembly should focus on a worldwide culture of respect and preservation of indigenous culture, as well as the visibility of the discrimination indigenous people are subject to in the entire world.

Delegates, armed with capable and purposeful intent, possess the capacity to guide society toward a better world by employing distinguished diplomacy to solve problems. Demonstrating respect, presenting well-founded arguments, and sharing pertinent information in the forum, delegates will put forth proposals and requests shaped during the caucus, informed by acquired knowledge through thoughtful questioning.

The significant responsibility of approving the committee's resolutions is entrusted with confidence into your capable hands. Embracing this goal, we urge delegates to actively engage in discussions, broadening their perspectives throughout our deliberations. Through this process, we aspire to instill in each delegate a profound sense of responsibility towards the greater world and a commitment to fostering positive change, particularly in the realm of indigenous rights and cultural preservation.

- General Assembly's Chair

# COUNTRIES' BACKGROUNDS

## United States of America

The history of the United States government's treatment of Native Americans (also called Indigenous People) is a sad and cruel one filled with broken promises, forced removal from tribal lands, murderous conflict bordering on genocide and an adamant refusal to respect basic human rights. Presidents from Andrew Jackson to Ulysses Grant to Rutherford Hayes, to modern day presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon all supported legislation and rulemaking that diminished if not eliminated tribal control over land and denied them adequate health care, educational and housing support. The goal of presidential administrations and the Congress was to provide economic and financial opportunities to the "white man," while driving the Native Americans into extreme poverty.

Native Americans were not granted citizenship until 1924, even though these Indigenous People were the first settlers in the New World. Yet, greed, racism, cruelty and neglect on the part of the United States government and indeed the American people led to second class status for these first Americans. While some small steps have been taken to lift the Native Americans out of abject poverty and second class citizenship, there remains a long and difficult road ahead to correct the neglect and abuse that has affected so many Native American.

## Federal Republic of Nigeria

Throughout Nigeria, non-indigenes are forced to cope with state and local government policies and practices that exclude them from many of the material benefits of Nigerian citizenship. Such discrimination reflects a widespread belief among many Nigerians that state and local governments exist not to serve the interests of all their constituents, but only those of their indigenous populations. That understanding was evidenced in many of the interviews Human Rights Watch conducted with government officials in Kano, Kaduna and Plateau States.

The population of every state and local government in Nigeria is officially divided into two categories of citizens: those who are indigenes and those who are not. The indigenes of a place are those who can trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the community of people who originally settled there. Everyone else, no matter how long they or their families have lived in the place they call home, is and always will be a non-indigene.

## **Canada**

In May of 2021, Canadians were shocked at the discovery of the remains of 215 children at the site of a former school in British Columbia. The bodies belonged to Indigenous children, some believed to be as young as three years old, who went through Canada's state-sponsored "residential school" system. The schools, scattered across the country, were aimed at eradicating the culture and languages of the country's Indigenous populations.

The findings have brought the world's renewed attention to this shameful chapter of Canadian history, left deep wounds in hundreds of communities and sparked fresh demands for justice aimed at the Canadian government and the churches that ran the schools for decades.

The policies and actions that were enacted to colonize Indigenous Peoples in Canada have been described as constituting cultural genocide. When one considers the long-term consequences from the perspective of the social and environmental determinants of the health framework, the impacts of such policies on the physical and mental health of Indigenous Peoples go well beyond cultural loss.

## **State of Palestine**

The Indigenous Peoples of Palestine are the Bedouin Jahalin, al-Kaabneh, al-Azazmeh, al-Ramadin and al-Rshaida. Israel refrained from voting for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Peoples in Palestine live in a constant state of fear, caused by the demolition and confiscation of their property, as well as the restriction of their rights of circulation.

Following Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, the Jahalin Bedouin, together with four other tribes from the Negev Desert (al-Kaabneh, al-Azazmeh, al-Ramadin and al-Rshaida), took refuge in the West Bank, then under Jordanian rule. These tribes are traditionally semi-nomadic agro-pastoralists living in the rural areas around Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jericho and the Jordan Valley.

The situation of the Indigenous Palestinian Bedouin refugees of 1948, some 27,000 pastoral herders living under full Israeli military control in Area C, is currently a major humanitarian issue. Greatly at risk are 8,000 Bedouin (60% of whom are children) living in 46 small communities in the Jerusalem Periphery and some 4,500 pastoral herders in the Jordan Valley. Donor-funded humanitarian structures (shelters, goat pens, water tanks, schools, solar panels, toilets) continue to be deliberately targeted for demolition and confiscation.

## **United Arab Emirates**

Existing models of indigenous entrepreneurship focus more on the contextual settings of indigenous people. Consequently, less is known with regard to how these contexts may affect the national leadership vision, resulting policies for the indigenous population and associated outcomes.

A recent discussion has arisen on both mainstream and social media in the UAE about the Emirati identity. Although the concern about preserving the national identity has been there, this is the first time since 2008, the Year of the National Identity, that this discussion is back in full force.

Opinions ranged between discussing the fears around a new globalized generation and claiming that Emirateness takes over tribal belonging without providing evidence or clarity about rights and active citizenship in society. This is in a time when there are indications of the dominance of the local-level regulatory efforts, and the commercialisation of federal public services.

## **United Mexican States**

In Mexico, corruption has penetrated all layers of society. It is a problem that has a direct effect on the lives of individuals and communities, diverting resources that should be used to improve people's quality of life, public services, and justice systems. Moreover, corruption has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable individuals and communities, including indigenous peoples.

There are approximately 23.2 million indigenous people in Mexico, equivalent to almost 20 percent of its population. The country holds a historical debt towards them, as for many years they were excluded from national plans and their culture was not respected.

On 1 January 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), an indigenous armed organization, declared war on the Mexican Government, demanding “work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace.”

## **Republic of Ecuador**

The Indigenous population in Ecuador accounts for approximately 1.1 million people. Ecuador voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and has ratified ILO Convention 169. However, the Indigenous population does not have full guarantees of civil, political, cultural, and territorial rights, and are still facing a number of serious challenges, and there aren't any specific public policies in place to prevent and neutralize the risk of disappearance of Ecuador's Indigenous Peoples.

The public policies ensuring automatic or full guarantees of Indigenous rights in Ecuador, particularly civil and political, cultural and territorial, generally have not improved.

A key problem for the Waorani peoples revolves around the state 's persistent promotion of the exploitation of oil on their territory known as the Waorani Reserve and the Yasuní National Park. There is also an aggressive presence of large-scale mining on the Shuar territory.

Four events directly affected the living conditions and economic and social rights of Ecuador's Indigenous Peoples and nationalities in 2020: the aftermath of the great popular protest of October 2019; the unleashing of the COVID-19 pandemic; the rupture of the main oil pipeline and subsequent oil spill; and the political dispute surrounding the 2021 presidential and congressional elections.

## **Federative Republic of Brazil**

There are 896,917 Indigenous persons in Brazil, distributed among 305 ethnic groups. The principal indigenous ethnic group is the Tikúna, who comprise 6.8% of the total indigenous population.

There are around 274 languages. Among Indigenous persons over the age of five, only 37.4% speak an Indigenous language, while 76.9% speak Portuguese. It is estimated that there are 115 people living in isolation,<sup>1</sup> of which 28 are confirmed and the rest are in the process of being identified.

502,783 individuals out of the Indigenous population in Brazil live in rural zones and 315,180 in urban zones. A total of 505 Indigenous Lands have been identified, covering 12.5% of Brazilian territory (106.7 million hectares). The majority of these territories are concentrated in the Amazon.

Brazil is the country in South America with the largest known concentration of Indigenous Peoples in isolation in the states of Amapá Acre, Amazonas, Amapá, Acre, Amazonas, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, and Tocantins. Currently, there are 107 records of the presence of Indigenous Peoples in isolation in the Amazon region.

## **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

The Constitution recognises Venezuela as a multiethnic and multicultural society, and its basic provisions (Art. 9) establish that Indigenous languages are also official in the country. Indigenous Peoples in Venezuela account for 2.8% of the national population that accounts for around 32 million people. Nonetheless, other organizations believe that the indigenous population numbers over 1,5 million people.

There was a remarkable resurgence of peoples considered extinct and from other countries in the region in the 2011 Census.

Venezuela has adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ratified ILO Convention 169. However, Indigenous Peoples in the country keep struggling with a lack of demarcation of indigenous habitat and lands, illegal mining activities, and environmental degradation.

In 1999, the Constitution of Venezuela recognised the multiethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual character of Venezuelan society. The country has also enacted a set of laws set to develop the specific rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as the Law on Demarcation and Guarantee of the Habitat and Lands of Indigenous Peoples (2001), the Organic Law on Indigenous Peoples and Communities (2005), and the Indigenous Languages Act (2007), as well as several favorable provisions found in a number of Venezuelan legal norms.

The demarcation of indigenous territories continues to be the principal right pending resolution for Venezuela's Indigenous Peoples and communities. The Constitution's interim provisions obligated the state to demarcate indigenous territories within not more than two years. However, according to several reports from Indigenous Peoples and communities themselves, the number of lands provided did not surpass 13% of the total.

## **Republic of India**

In India, 705 ethnic groups are recognised as Scheduled Tribes. In central India, the Scheduled Tribes are usually referred to as Adivasis, which literally means Indigenous Peoples. With an estimated population of 104 million, they comprise 8.6% of the total population. There are, however, many more ethnic groups that would qualify for Scheduled Tribe status but are not officially recognised and consequently, the total populations of the Scheduled Tribes are higher than the official figure.

On the 13th of February 2019, India's Supreme Court ordered the eviction of an estimated 7,5 million indigenous and tribal peoples from their forests, making them squatters on their own ancestral lands. The decision was based on an appeal from several conservation organizations, who claimed that these peoples were the reason for deforestation and dwindling wildlife populations. However, this argument flies against overwhelming evidence that Indigenous Peoples and local communities have been achieving better, more sustainable, and more cost-effective conservation outcomes for centuries.

Since colonial times, the forest department held the rights to access, manage and govern all forest land and resources across India. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 changed that by reinstating the rights of communities to manage their local forests and resources on their own. India's Parliament understood that villages always managed local forests and resources sustainably; because the ecosystem held the key to a tribal way of life that embodied their customs, cultures, belief systems, communities and homes. The law ultimately made the gram sabha (village council) the statutory body that protects and manages the forest, because they know their communities and how to manage their local resources best.

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