

Committee: Human Rights Council (HRC)
Issue: Protecting the rights of indigenous populations
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I- Introduction

More than 370 million people in 70 countries ranging from the South Pacific to the Arctic are considered to be indigenous. The World Health Organization defines indigenous populations as “communities that live within, or are attached to, geographically distinct traditional habitats or ancestral territories, and who identify themselves as being part of a distinct cultural group, descended from groups present in the area before modern states were created and current borders defined”. The distinctive qualities of indigenous people include having unique traditions and different characteristics from the majority of the society they live in. Consequently, indigenous peoples can be considered to a certain extent, minorities. They are a cultural group deeply connected to the land they inhabit and to their natural environment. Often, the rights of indigenous peoples are violated by the non-permitted usage of their territories. Another important issue is the cultural survival of these groups. Since they are mostly minorities, they are not always able to protect their rights of exercising their beliefs, protecting their lands and sustaining their cultures. Therefore an international initiative must be taken to aid indigenous peoples in their struggle to protect their rights.

II- Involved Countries and Organizations

Canada

Canada hosts an estimated number of 1.4 million indigenous peoples. They are made up of three main categories: Inuit, First Nations and Metis. However, there are about 100 sub-categories of these communities. Due to this high number and variety of indigenous peoples, Canada is among the countries which have been working on this issue for a long time. The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) is a body recognized by the government. It works with United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to help sustain the rights of indigenous peoples.

Australia

According to the Australian Museum Website, “indigenous Australians are not one group; Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders throughout Australia have different thoughts, ideas and beliefs”. Although the government of Australia tries to improve life for its indigenous populations, recent reports such as the one published by Oxfam show that they have failed to do so.

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a non-governmental organization that works with indigenous peoples themselves to help protect their rights.

ILO

The international labor organization has been working on this issue for nearly a century. It has created the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention that is the only treaty that deals solely with the rights of indigenous peoples.

III- Focused Overview of the Issue

1) Indigenous Peoples and the Environment

Indigenous land makes up an estimated 80 percent of the earth's biodiversity. These lands are facing biodiversity loss due to industrialization. This issue is a primary aspect of the topic at hand. Environmental issues should be addressed in resolutions since the environment carries vital importance to the indigenous peoples.

2) Political action

Other than local governments, indigenous people's rights are protected by international entities such as the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples Issues (UNPFII); the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Since these organizations are exclusively focused on protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, it would be sensible to work in cooperation with them to tackle the issue.

3) Communication strategies

Radio is an important tool of communication due to its universality and accessibility. Using it as a way of sharing indigenous voices is very essential to ensure cultural continuity. Raising public awareness is a major part in this issue therefore communication networks such as the radio should not be undermined.

4) Extractive industries

Indigenous peoples' territories are very well taken care of because of the indigenous culture of being deeply connected with the land. However, since indigenous peoples are often minorities they do not get to have a say in what will become of their territories. Governments operate in their territories without their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). This is another very important aspect of this issue. It must be made sure that indigenous peoples get to keep and rightfully practice their rights over their land.

IV- Key Vocabulary

Indigenous: As mentioned above, the term indigenous covers the idea of being located in an area before it was colonized. Indigenous populations are natives. Indigenous populations are strongly connected to their culture and past, they have their own traditions, beliefs, cultures then the rest of the society.

Heritage: Oxford dictionaries define heritage as "Valued objects and qualities such as historic buildings and cultural traditions that have been passed down from previous generations."

Ethnic Group: An ethnic group is a group of people, who share the same cultural background and descent. Ethnic groups share a common language, religion, tradition, culture, lifestyle.

Ethnocide: Ethnocide is a cultural genocide. Ethnocide is the attempt to eradicate the culture of a group of people,

Cultural Resources: They are constructions, buildings, structures, objects which provide clear evidence that there was previous human activity, likely revealing the culture of a population.

Cultural Heritage: Cultural heritage proves legacy. UNESCO defines cultural heritage as "the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations."

Traditional Knowledge: Traditional knowledge is the skills and knowledge that is passed through generations. They define a community.

V- Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
1923-1925	First international involvement
1981	Martinez Cobo study
1982	Working group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP)
1989	International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169
1993	International Year of World's Indigenous People
1994	International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples
2000	Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
2001	Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2005	Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples
2007	Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)
13 September 2007	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
23-24 September 2014	World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP)

VI- Past Resolutions and Treaties

[A/RES/70/232](#) - Rights of indigenous peoples (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 23 December 2015)

[A/RES/69/159](#) - Rights of Indigenous Peoples (18 December 2014)

[A/RES/68/149](#) - Rights of Indigenous Peoples (18 December 2013)

[A/RES/67/153](#) - Rights of indigenous peoples (20 December 2012)

[A/RES/66/142](#) - Rights of indigenous peoples (19 December 2011)

[A/RES/65/198](#) - Indigenous Issues (21 December 2010)

[A/RES/63/161](#) - Indigenous Issues (18 December 2008)

[A/RES/61/295](#) - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (13 September 2007)

[A/RES/59/174](#) - Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (20 December 2004)

[A/RES/58/158](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (22 December 2003)

[A/RES/57/193](#) - Indigenous people and issues (18 December 2002)

[A/RES/57/192](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/57/191](#) - Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

[A/RES/56/140](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/55/80](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/54/150](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/53/130](#) - UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

[A/RES/53/129](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/52/108](#) - International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/51/78](#) -International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/50/157](#)- Programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/50/156](#)- United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

[A/RES/49/214](#) -International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/48/163](#)- International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

[A/RES/47/75](#)- International Year for the World's Indigenous People, 1993

[A/RES/46/128](#) -International Year for the World's Indigenous People

VII- Possible Solutions

Raising public awareness and educating the public is crucial in the implementation of indigenous rights.

Regarding the Max Planck UN yearbook 11, a solution “regarding positive promotion would be to have a dedicated law or system for IP in every country” since every member state has different indigenous populations and cultures with various and different needs for protection. These laws and regulations could obey international objectives. The regulations must aim to reduce the inequality between indigenous populations and the rest of the community.

Another action that could be taken could be about protecting the natural heritage of indigenous populations. Governments don't take action when they face with threats regarding indigenous territories. It might also be important to give more ownership rights so that indigenous communities and their territories are legally protected. However you should keep in mind that it is quite difficult to prove ownership over land that belongs to indigenous people since there is no true evidence.



An indigenous Maori and his Ta moko distinct face tattoo, a form of TCE (all credits to Jimmy Nelson)

IX- Useful Links

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/fs9Rev.2.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/08/protecting-rights-and-dignity-of-indigenous-peoples-is-protecting-everyones-rights-un/>

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html>

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/official-documents-2.html> (for old UN resolutions)

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/issues>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/12/australian-governments-have-failed-indigenous-peoples-says-oxfam>

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Indigenous peoples | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, www.unesco.org/new/en/indigenous-peoples/.

“ILO.” *Indigenous and tribal peoples (Indigenous and tribal peoples)*, www.ilo.org/global/topics/indigenous-tribal/lang--en/index.htm.