



General Assembly

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Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian & Cultural

This group focuses on the rights people. It wants all people to be free to make their own choices. They believe that human rights are important and that they apply to every person in the world.

The members of this committee discuss human rights. They also encourage states to respect the rights of their citizens. During the year, they hear a lot of reports from experts and groups about the human rights records of states. Social issues are also important to this committee. Questions of crime prevention, drug control, youth, elderly and others are discussed.

This committee works closely with the Human Rights Council. They passed resolutions on the protection of children, how refugees should be treated, and ending racism.

Agenda Item 65 – Rights of indigenous peoples

Background

Throughout history, humans have moved around the world. They built towns and villages, engaged in gathering resources, and developed societies. Groups of humans coming to a new area would meet other humans. Sometimes the two groups would trade or intermarry. Sometimes they would work to achieve mutual goals. Other times the more forceful group or more technologically advanced group would term the others “savages” or “uncivilized”. They would marginalize them so they were not treated fairly.

When Columbus “discovered” the Americas in 1492 it began a new period in history. Many world powers began to explore the world. As they explored, they began to claim lands for their state. Often, they would send people from their own states to live in these “new” lands. They killed and/or pushed the original people out of the area. Over time, many groups felt pressure to assimilate and join the majority culture. Some did. Other people kept their independence, culture and language alive.

There is no accepted definition for indigenous peoples. However, generally, it is a minority group who identifies as indigenous and who is ethnically different from the majority population in the state. They usually do not hold a lot of power. Also, they usually have a different language, culture and beliefs from the dominant group. Indigenous groups sometimes have a strong connection to the land they live on. They keep their traditions alive and pass on those traditions to their children.

After hundreds of years of fighting for their rights, many states are finally acknowledging the rights of indigenous people within their borders.

Recent Developments

- The world is 5% indigenous. This is more than 350 million people. They belong to over 5000 different groups.
- Most indigenous people live in Asia (70%). But there are indigenous people in 90 states in the world.
- 22% of the world is land used by indigenous people. The land they live on has 80% of the world's biodiversity. Indigenous people play an important part in preserving the environment.
- Some states avoid the problem of consulting indigenous people by stating they do not have 'indigenous' people. China says that they have 55 ethnic minorities in China but that none of them are indigenous.
- Dominant ethnic groups in many African states did not recognize there were indigenous people in their states. From their perspective, they were all 'indigenous' since they all had ancestors from the area.
- Many groups in African nations have been identifying as indigenous. Their experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and connection to the land mirrors the experiences of other indigenous people around the world.
- States in Central Africa, as well as in Kenya and Namibia, have recognized indigenous populations.
- Guatemala has a large indigenous population. Almost 40% of the country identifies as indigenous.
- Indigenous people in Guatemala are almost 3 times poorer than non-indigenous people. Also, they are more likely to die earlier. Only 5% of them attend university.
- The United Nations is a forum for states to meet nation to nation. Indigenous people, however, are not part of a recognized world nation. If indigenous people are treated unfairly they cannot bring their issues to the International Court.
- The UN created the Permanent Forum on Indigenous People to help solve this problem of Indigenous not having a voice.
- Indigenous people are at greater risk when it comes to health. Many indigenous people live in rural or remote areas. Governments do not always provide an equal level of health services in these areas.
- In Australia, diabetes is a problem in many indigenous communities.
- In Canada, Inuit youth have a suicide rate 11 times the national average.
- In Panama, indigenous children are 3 times more likely to die during childbirth.
- Biopiracy is an issue many people in the indigenous community are concerned about. The problem stems from the differing ideas about what can be owned. Many indigenous people believe they are the stewards of the environment in their area. Scientists often see plants as 'natural' and cannot be owned by people. However, this does not recognize the work indigenous people put into protecting and nurturing the living things in their environment.

- An example of biopiracy is the following. Researchers asked indigenous what traditional treatments they used for malaria. The people showed them a plant: Quassia Amara. The researchers created a drug using the plant and patented it. The scientists believed they owned the drug. Many companies might think the patent from the plant belongs to them because they did the 'official' research. This ignores the work indigenous people did to care for the plant over hundreds of years.
- When Europeans arrived in the Americas, tomatoes were taken from central America, potatoes were taken from the Andes in South America and pumpkins were taken from North America. Now, these plants grow all around the world and feed millions of people.
- Biopiracy ignores the fact that indigenous people cultivated plants for hundreds of years. They protected, harvested, and chose the best specimens to reproduce. Indigenous people did not benefit from the work they put in – however companies can now patent the genes of plants they had no hand in nurturing.

UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples

- ✓ This declaration was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007. 143 states are parties
- ✓ It is not law. It is a standard that states should follow when dealing with indigenous people.

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples

- ✓ The Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur who reports on the human rights situation of indigenous people.
- ✓ In 2014 Ms. Victoria Tauli Corpuz was appointed to the position.

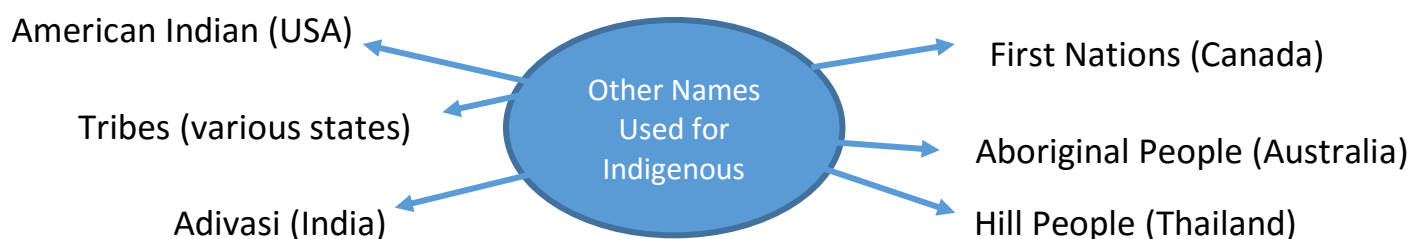
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

- ✓ The Economic and Social Council established this forum on 28 July 2000.
- ✓ It focuses on the economic, social and cultural life of indigenous people. It advises the Council.
- ✓ It also raises awareness about indigenous issues within the UN system.

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

- ✓ The Human Rights Council created this mechanism in 2007 to complete studies and research to advise the Human Rights Council.
- ✓ It is focused on research the Human Rights Council asks it to do. It reports to the council with advice.

Other Names Used for Indigenous People



Guiding Questions

1. What are the minority groups in your country? Would any of these people be considered indigenous? What are the problems affecting the minority populations in your country?
2. Has your country ever been a colonizer? How did it interact with indigenous people it met in the past? Has your country ever been colonized? How did the colonizers interact with the population already living there?
3. Read the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. How does the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples go beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
4. What are some reasons that states might have for not recognizing the rights of indigenous people?
5. Indigenous people are more at risk of social problems (poor health, access to education, access to water, drug addiction). Research some of the problems affecting indigenous people and possible solutions.
6. Many indigenous groups are spread over several states. How can states better work together to support indigenous people in these types of situations?
7. Indigenous people often live in remote areas and have a strong connection to the land. They often depend on the land to survive. How can governments work with indigenous people to become partners in environmental protection efforts?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. How does being a delegate from a different country help you understand this problem in your community?
10. How do the choices you make in your life help resolve this problem?

Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<i>United Nations Human Rights: Indigenous People</i>	http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/IndigenousPeoplesIndex.aspx	An overview of actions being taken to give a voice to indigenous people at the UN.
<i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People</i>	https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/512/07/PDF/N0651207.pdf?OpenElement	A best practice document that outlines all the rights of indigenous people.
<i>The World Conference on Indigenous People</i>	http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/indigenous/#&panel1-1	A website for a conference held in 2014 to bring governments and indigenous people together to discuss problems and solutions.
<i>Country Reports</i>	http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/CountryReports.aspx	Country reports by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people.
<i>Indigenous Peoples Fact Sheet</i>	http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf	A fact sheet that gives an overview of how indigenous people can be defined.
<i>Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i>	http://www.globalissues.org/article/693/rights-of-indigenous-people	An in depth look at many of the issues affecting indigenous people.
<i>Health of Indigenous Peoples</i>	http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs326/en/	A fact sheet by the World Health Organization detailing the health issues affecting indigenous people.
<i>The Sad Truth of Uncontacted Tribes</i>	http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140804-sad-truth-of-uncontacted-tribes	A BBC news story about indigenous people who do not have contact with the wider world.
<i>The Indigenous World</i>	http://www.iwgia.org/regions	An interactive map of indigenous people by regions of the world.