

Human Rights Council

Discussing the preservation of indigenous cultures and the rights of indigenous peoples



Forum:	Human Rights Council
Issue:	Discussing the preservation of indigenous cultures and the rights of indigenous peoples
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Introduction

The United Nations estimates that there are over 476 million Indigenous people in more than 90 countries, which is approximately 6.2 percent of the global population on the planet (United Nations). Such groups are hyper diverse, and they have different cultures, languages, traditional knowledge, and spiritual beliefs. Their relation to their ancestral territory is one of the factors that unite many of the Indigenous communities. Their cultures are not only significant to them they make our world super rich and diverse.

Although Indigenous people have always always existed, they have nonetheless been treated unfairly. They have been displaced off their territories and marginalized by prevailing cultures and language. In addition, they are not usually included in political and economic discussions which influence their lives. As a reaction, the United Nations came up with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people in 2007- a monumental move which formally acknowledged the rights of the Indigenous people to maintain their own cultures, to shape the destinies of their lands, as well as being part of decisions which concern them.

With such laws as UNDRIP, it is not easy to preserve the Indigenous cultures. International rules are not fully implemented in many countries, and such projects as large development projects, mining, and climate change continue to strain Indigenous ways of life. Globalization only contributes to the situation, frequently forcing the contemporary lifestyles that do not align with the traditional ones.

Such organizations as UNESCO and Expert Mechanism of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within the UN are striving to preserve languages and advance Indigenous knowledge (United

Nations Human Rights). This report explores the quality of preservation of the Indigenous cultures today and what is being done by the international and local authorities to help them.

Definition of Key Terms

Indigenous People

The new generations of those who inhabited this country or region prior to the arrival of people of other cultures or ethnicities. (United Nations, Who Are Indigenous Peoples?).

Cultural Erosion

The gradual decline or disappearance of a culture's traditions, beliefs, and identity due to influences such as globalization, trade, and migration (Bahr).

Displacement

When individuals are forced to leave the place where they normally live (Cambridge.org).

Decolonization

The process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country (Britannica).

General Overview

The issue of protecting Indigenous cultures and rights remains significant throughout the whole world. Although Indigenous people compose 5 percent of the global population, they contribute to almost 80 percent of the world's biodiversity (Biosafety Unit). That is a huge deal as it demonstrates their daily routine of 24 hours taking care of nature.

Although they are so significant, Indigenous communities have grave issues. They address discrimination, deprivation of their land, coercion to embrace other cultures and also neglect of their rights (U.N., Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development). In the majority of cases, these concerns arise when governments intend to do projects on Indigenous land such as roads, mines or dams. Those projects may bring economic benefits or development, but they often disregard the potential harm to the people living there.

When the rights of Indigenous people are overlooked, the impact is enormous: linguistics and knowledge become extinct, sustainable agricultural practices disappear, and the populations slip even further into poverty. That can give rise to additional problems, such as social tension or strife. This is why the UN and Indigenous leaders are campaigning on how to develop more effective methodologies of preserving cultures and at the same time develop them without destroying their way of life. This does not simply mean that respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples is only a matter of decency, but it is also important in combating climate change and safeguarding the planet (U.N., DISD).

Major Parties Involved

Canada

Canada is starting to get back on track with its Indigenous peoples—including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. In 2021, they adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, which translates to the fact that the law of Canada can now be aligned to UNDRIP. Then in 2023 they released a national Action Plan that displays their intentions to achieve those targets, so it seems Canada is, literally, seeking to provide legal backing to Indigenous sovereignty and rights.

Brazil

There are more than 300 ethnic groups in Brazil, the majority of whom live in the Amazon. Illegal logging and mining of such communities are a big menace. An August 2023-March 2024 initiative by a Brazilian government was successful in reducing deforestation on Indigenous lands by 42% (US Rainforest Foundation), however, by May 2025 the issue had once again escalated, with deforestation increasing 92 percent annually (AP News). In this way, the situation remains precarious though there was some progress. The Amazon is such a critical part of the planet that whatever happens there is a concern to everybody.

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

In 2000, the UNPFII was established which is the primary advisory UN system body on the Indigenous issues. It examines culture to education, health and sustainability of the environment. The forum has 16 experts, with half chosen by governments and half by Indigenous organizations. In 2025, its 24th session brought in over 1,000 people to talk about how to protect Indigenous rights and respond to issues like climate change (IWGIA).

International Labor Organization – Convention No. 169

This 1989 treaty is the only legally binding international agreement focused only on Indigenous and tribal peoples' rights. It covers stuff like land rights and consultation requirements. But only 24 countries had signed on by 2024, which limits its effectiveness (Swartz). Still, it sets an important legal example for other treaties.

UNESCO – International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032)

Languages are a big part of culture, and UNESCO is leading the charge to save endangered Indigenous languages. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages, running from 2022 to 2032, aims to help protect and revive these languages. UNESCO's Global Action Plan, launched in 2022, outlines how to get governments, NGOs, and Indigenous communities involved (UNESCO; Linguapax).

Timeline of Key Events

Year	Event
1957	ILO Convention No. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations adopted – The first international treaty recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples, focused on integration rather than self determination.
1989	ILO Convention No. 169 adopted – Replaced Convention 107, affirming indigenous peoples’ rights to land, culture, and consultation (C169).
1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit), Rio de Janeiro – Indigenous issues highlighted as central to sustainable development.
2000	Establishment of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) – A major step in institutionalizing indigenous rights within the UN system.
2007	Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – Recognized the rights of indigenous peoples globally, including land, language, and self determination.
2014	World Conference on Indigenous Peoples – Reaffirmed support for UNDRIP and encouraged stronger state commitments.
2021	Canada enacts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act – Incorporates UNDRIP into domestic law.
2022	Launch of UNESCO’s International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) – Aims to protect and revitalize endangered indigenous languages.
2023	Brazil reports a 42% drop in deforestation in indigenous territories – Marked a temporary success in environmental and indigenous rights protection.
2025	UNPFII 24th Session convenes – Focuses on implementation of Indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and the impacts of climate change.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13 Sept. 2007 (A/RES/61/295)
- International Year of Indigenous Languages, 2019 (A/RES/71/178)
- United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2000 (ECOSOC Resolution 2000/22)
- Convention on Biological Diversity, 5 June 1992 (Treaty No. 30619)
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, June 1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 (Human Rights Council Resolution 6/36)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 18 Dec. 1992 (A/RES/47/135)
- International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, 1995–2004 (A/RES/48/16)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

United Nations Initiatives

The UN has done a number of things in order to secure native cultures and provide them with a voice. One of the major advancements was the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 which established an international rulebook in order to acknowledge and safeguard the identity, land, and culture of native people (United Nations, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)”). In 2000 the UN also began the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which provided the indigenous peoples a direct voice and a place at the table to discuss issues with the rest of the world (United Nations, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues -UNPFII Permanent Forest (UNPFII) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)). Later, in 2007, the UN introduced the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that assists the Human Rights Council with expert assistance to enhance action to impose the rights of indigenous people. All these measures have increased the profile and existence of the indigenous people in the world.

International Conferences and Agreements

The major international conferences and agreements have also given importance to the voices of indigenous people. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, most often referred to as the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, highlighted the importance of the indigenous knowledge in terms of sustainable development and planetary care (United Nations, “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992”). In the same manner, the Convention on Biodiversity officially recognized the importance of native people in protecting biodiversity (Biosafety Unit, “Indigenous & Local Communities). It is these world events which led to the greater cooperation of governments and indigenous populations to strengthen both development and cultural retention in a manner that honors the native values and expertise.

Bilateral and Regional Cooperation

Apart from UN-led efforts, individual countries have also taken steps to protect indigenous rights through direct partnerships and regional projects. As an instance, in Canada and Norway, the countries have collaborated to offer aid to the Sami people by targeting issues such as safeguarding their language and managing their land in a manner that decencies their culture (Samediggy). Other Latin American nations like Bolivia and Ecuador went further by enshrining indigenous rights in their

national constitutions -which was traditionally facilitated by negotiations with regional organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS) (OAS). These practices demonstrate the fact that although international regulations are not minor, local and regional actions turn out to be equally vital in achieving practical change.

Challenges and Continuing Efforts

Despite all this development, some of the indigenous people continue to experience major challenges, such as being displaced, loss of cultural practices and social alienation. Such initiatives as the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages and the current International Decade of the World Indigenous Peoples attempt to make society more aware of indigenous language revival and think over supporting community-based work (UN.org; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). One of the most recent developments has been the increasing presence of indigenous people in the international dialogues on climate change and sustainability, which has presented a variety of new opportunities, not only to conserve the environment, but also to strengthen their rights and maintain their cultures.

Possible Solutions

Proposed Multilateral Frameworks

In order to effectively safeguard the native cultures and rights of native population, I believe it is extremely vital to strengthen the multilateral systems in existence. An idea is to allocate more resources and authority to UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in order to support and monitor indigenous peoples around the globe (United Nations, “United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)”). We could also establish tighter accountability of governments and corporations particularly those that seize land or seek after native resources without prior consultations.

Enhancing Indigenous Participation

Actual change will not occur unless indigenous communities are recognized as real stakeholders in decisions that affect them. That is why I would insist on making it compulsory to include native representatives to any international agreement concerning environment and development such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and climate agreements. Native people have the right to take an active part in the actions with their land and culture (Biosafety Unit, “Indigenous & Local Communities). On top of that, we should be funding more indigenous-led projects and building up their capacity to lead on issues that matter to them. It’s not just about listening—it’s about supporting real leadership within those communities.

Bilateral and Regional Cooperation Initiatives

As the indigenous population is so varied and embedded in localities, we require accords that can capture such diversity. Indigenous populations of countries (such as the Sámi in Northern Europe or indigenous people in countries of Latin America) should collaborate (on such issues as safeguarding indigenous language, deforestation conservation and ensuring land tenure). Such regional alliances may prove to be very successful and flexible. Creating shared knowledge platforms and systems to track progress collectively could also help improve protection strategies (Samediggy) (OAS).

Addressing Socioeconomic Challenges

It is also necessary to note that when the preservation of indigenous cultures is provided, the overall difficulties that these communities encounter are also to be addressed. The programs of education, healthcare and development need to be crafted on the basis of native values and

lifestyles. That implies the respect of traditional knowledge and the relevance and inclusiveness of programs. Internationalism should do more than just symbolically support the indigenous people, but actually work on decreasing inequality and enhancing the living standards of the people in a manner that will resonate with them (Rojas).

Balancing Conservation and Development

It is a great concern to find a means of safeguarding the environment and at the same time honor indigenous rights. The indigenous people have generations-long experience as the guardians of biodiversity and their presence should be reflected in environmental policy. Concurrently, free prior and informed consent of people living in the land should also be a mandatory requirement before any development projects can proceed on the indigenous land. Displacement and exploitation can be diminished by strengthening land rights through legal protection. Such practice would align with the ideals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (United Nations, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)).

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Appendix

- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) • [UNPFII – United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#) • [ILO Convention No. 169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989](#) • [Convention on Biological Diversity – Indigenous & Local Communities](#) • [World Conference on Indigenous Peoples \(2014\)](#)
- [IWGIA – International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs](#)
- [UN Division for Inclusive Social](#)