



## **The European International Model United Nations 2016**

### **General Assembly**



Image source: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

*Advocating the Role of Indigenous People  
in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals*

## **Welcome Letter**

Esteemed Delegates,

It is our distinct pleasure to welcome you to The European International Model United Nations (TEIMUN) General Assembly. We are delighted that you are joining us to debate the role of indigenous people in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We hope you that throughout this week, we can strike a balance between productivity, diplomacy, and fun.

It is our sincere hope that you will depart from TEIMUN 2016 with a better understanding of and excitement for international affairs, as well as memories of engaging and informative debates. It is our promise to you, the delegates, that we will work tirelessly to meet your expectations of substantive excellence. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions, concerns, or suggestions regarding any committee of the General Assembly, and we will make sure to assist you to the best of our ability.

We look forward to meeting you all!

Your chairs,

Nariswari K. Nurjaman  
Joost Kielstra

## Introduction

The following study guide will be concerned with the complex issues surrounding the role of indigenous people in initiatives of sustainable development. Although the United Nations has yet to adopt a formal definition of “indigenous peoples”, the widespread opinion of the international community is that no universal definition of the term would adequately encompass all indigenous or aboriginal populations, and would inevitably be either over- or under-inclusive.<sup>1</sup> According to United Nations (UN) statistics, there are approximately 370 million indigenous people in the world, belonging to over 5,000 different communities in 90 countries.<sup>2</sup> For many of these people, the land and the natural resources on which they rely are the foundation of society, intrinsically associated with their history, culture, religious beliefs, and economic livelihood. Because land and natural resources are so greatly valued within these communities, indigenous people employ many environmentally conscious practices, using a quarter of the world’s surface area, yet safeguarding 80% of the world’s remaining biodiversity.<sup>3</sup>

However, the expansion of many industries has had a negative impact on aboriginal groups. Rising demands for natural resources, fossil fuels, and a growing market of commodities have attracted the attention of commercial industries to indigenous occupied areas<sup>4</sup>. During times of industrialization, plans for roads, mining contracts and drilling operations are developed, while indigenous people are often deprived of prior and informed consent of land seizure<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, the traditions and livelihoods of many indigenous populations face threats from outdated environmental policies, which fail to protect aboriginal populations from such loopholes exploited by developers<sup>6</sup>.

International forums on the topic of indigenous rights over the last decade have demonstrated concern from the international community regarding the protection and empowerment of indigenous peoples. However the creation of international treaties and agreements has proven ineffective, as many States are hesitant to apply operative provisions to their domestic policies<sup>7</sup>. Because many of the biologically preserved lands and waters are intact due to the stewardship of indigenous communities, indigenous communities are essential partners in employing sustainable practices, reducing risks from climate change, and mitigating

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<sup>1</sup> “Definition of Indigenous People”, accessed on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, <http://indigenouspeoples.nl/indigenous-peoples/definition-indigenous>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/who-are-indigenous-peoples>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples/overview>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/indigenous.htm>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.tni.org/files/download/reclaiming\\_fpic\\_0.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/download/reclaiming_fpic_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/SRIPeoplesIndex.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.isrn.qut.edu.au/pdf/ijcis/v2n1\\_2009/Final\\_Aitken.pdf](http://www.isrn.qut.edu.au/pdf/ijcis/v2n1_2009/Final_Aitken.pdf)

the damages of natural disasters<sup>8</sup>. However due to private interests and remaining divisions of colonisation, the international community faces many challenges in repairing its relationship with indigenous people and incorporating indigenous communities into the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Historical Background

Disputes regarding development practices and dignity of indigenous people date back to the Industrial Revolution, which led to explosions in both population and consumerism, predominantly in Europe and North America<sup>9</sup>. In order to satisfy the needs of a growing population, the necessity to meet consumption demands and mitigate a growing resource shortage became increasingly evident. For many States, managing the rate of consumption and production meant finding, controlling, and exploiting natural resources beyond national borders.

In order to satisfy foreign commodities, imperialist powers began to divide and lay claims to non-western lands, largely in Africa, Asia, and South America. Formal negotiations were made among western powers, dividing up unconquered lands in a way that has been historically depicted as “civilized” by colonial powers<sup>10</sup>. However, the rights of indigenous populations were not protected, nor were they considered in these negotiations. In many cases, land occupied by indigenous populations was unwillfully seized and appropriated for the use of the present colonial powers, with little or no compensation to the aboriginal inhabitants<sup>11</sup>.

Along with forced relocation and displacement, aboriginal populations experienced innumerable accounts of human rights violations. Displaced populations were often forced to work as laborers, earning arbitrary and insignificant wages<sup>12</sup>. Aboriginal families were often split up and dispersed to different, commonly unknown locations<sup>13</sup>. Any resistance from indigenous populations was often met with force and violence, many cases resulting in imprisonment, abuse, and death. Some figures estimate the 15th century population of North America at approximately 10 to 12 million, however due to death by murder, disease and famine, this number was reduced to approximately 300,000 by the 1890s<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/gfdrr/files/publication/Sendai\\_Report\\_051012\\_0.pdf](https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/gfdrr/files/publication/Sendai_Report_051012_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Page, Melvin E, and Penny M. Sonnenburg. *Colonialism: An International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003. Print.

<sup>10</sup> <https://people.smu.edu/knw2399/2015/04/30/the-exploitation-of-colonialism/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/hr5088.doc.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/indigenous.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/timeline-history-separation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-their-families-text>

<sup>14</sup> <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/native-americans/>

## Current Situation

The negative effects of colonial occupation were not remedied with the end of colonisation. Indigenous people have been modernly disenfranchised by means of structural marginalization in which laws were created to accommodate State interests and dominant corporations with financial stake<sup>15</sup>. These racially charged policies have resulted in discrimination, economic exploitation, and further human rights violations towards indigenous people. Through these policies, indigenous populations are often silenced, systemically marginalized, and kept at the lowest echelons of society.

**Figure 1:** *The Ground Truth Project.*

Many aboriginal populations continued to experience resettlement, seizure and destruction of land and property well into the twentieth century. For most indigenous groups, the concept of private ownership is unnecessary since these communities practice the collective right to use the land<sup>16</sup>. With this being said, these communities have no legally recognized titles of



land ownership, and often lose territorial disputes overseen by judicial bodies<sup>17</sup>. Seized property by government and private organizations is inclusive of, but not limited to, hunting and fishing grounds, farm land, houses, churches, burial sites and community buildings<sup>18</sup>. Although the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) both recognize the collective right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, very few countries have adopted the aforementioned framework<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/international-law-and-indigenous-peoples-historical-lands-and-contempor>

<sup>16</sup> [http://preylang.net/download/reports/2016\\_02\\_11\\_CCHR\\_Report\\_Access\\_to\\_Collective\\_Land\\_Titles\\_ENG.pdf](http://preylang.net/download/reports/2016_02_11_CCHR_Report_Access_to_Collective_Land_Titles_ENG.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/wcip/IASG%20Paper%20\\_%20Lands%20territories%20and%20resources%20-%20rev1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/wcip/IASG%20Paper%20_%20Lands%20territories%20and%20resources%20-%20rev1.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/existing-federal-law-and-protection-sacred-sites-possibilities-and-limit>

<sup>19</sup> C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)

By employing sustainable living practices, indigenous people have contributed a minimal ecological footprint. However, because their livelihoods so heavily depend on natural resources, these populations are disproportionately confronted with the negative consequences of climate change<sup>20</sup>. From melting ice in the Arctic region to changing flora and fauna in the Andes, the effects of climate change are affecting the ecosystems of indigenous populations<sup>21</sup>. For indigenous communities in humid areas, pastoral farming is becoming increasingly difficult due to droughts. Aboriginal populations in tropical environments are threatened by forest fires, deforestation, and the reduction of rainfall<sup>22</sup>. In addition, those in coast areas are experiencing the rising sea levels and unpredictable ecosystem changes. In some instances, although indigenous occupied lands were not seized, nearby developments are contaminate streams and fishing grounds, destroying water supplies and water dependant economies<sup>23</sup>. Despite being on the forefront of ecological conservation, indigenous populations are rarely included in climate change policies.

Modern human rights violations against indigenous populations assume many forms including but not limited to rape, disappearances, murders, and other violent crimes<sup>24</sup>. These acts of violence are carried out as force against civilians by State military and police personnel, or as hate crimes conducted by individual, non-state actors. Oftentimes, non-state offenses go unsolved as these cases are accredited as the result of isolated crimes instead of structural violence<sup>25</sup>. However, figures from the Unites States Bureau of Justice Statistics express clear trends of disproportional violence, gesturing that American Indians experience crime at a rate of twice the general population<sup>26</sup>; while in Canada, indigenous people are three times more likely to fall victim of a violent crime than non-aboriginal Canadians<sup>27</sup>. Despite experiencing increasing account of victimization, indigenous people are often failed by the criminal justice systems, encountering arbitrary detention, surveillance, profiling and intimidation at a higher rate than the general public<sup>28</sup>. Indigenous populations also experience inflated rates of conviction, whereas Australia's Aborigines comprise only two percent of the overall population, yet yield 26% of convictions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social\\_justice/nt\\_report/ntreport08/pdf/Climate\\_Change\\_Community\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social_justice/nt_report/ntreport08/pdf/Climate_Change_Community_Guide.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder\\_ClimateChange\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder_ClimateChange_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder\\_ClimateChange\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder_ClimateChange_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/none/indigenous-peoples-and-water-rights>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/02/13/those-who-take-us-away/abusive-policing-and-failures-protection-indigenous-women>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.irenees.net/bdf\\_fiche-analyse-990\\_en.html](http://www.irenees.net/bdf_fiche-analyse-990_en.html)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/aic.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd3-rr3/p3.html>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.aic.gov.au/media\\_library/conferences/outlook99/davis.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/outlook99/davis.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> 'Prisoners in Australia', ABS 2007; 'Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians', ABS 2006

Due to encroaching foreign markets, the destruction of local economies, and holes in labor protection laws, aboriginal populations have faced economic inequality for centuries. Despite indigenous people comprising only 5% of the world's population, figures suggest they make up anything from 10% to 30% of the world's poorest people.<sup>30</sup> Although past reports have analyzed nominal percentages of indigenous poor among the general population, more recently studies have used quality of life indicators to determine wealth (under-five mortality, water deprivation, malnutrition, literacy, and net primary school enrollment)<sup>31</sup>. These studies have verified that quality of life indicators for indigenous peoples are worse than population averages. For example, while nominal estimates appear to be positive for indigenous populations in India, the under-five mortality and male literacy among India's Scheduled Tribes are consistently worse than the national average.<sup>32</sup> In connection with this, indigenous people also experience high accounts employment discrimination in the industrialized world, because of racial stereotypes, lack of education, cultural barriers and lack of formal documentation.

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**Figure 2:** *International Monetary Fund, December 2005.*



The deprivation of cultural identity is also an impending threat towards indigenous populations, and is often expressed

through discriminatory youth development policies<sup>34</sup>. In Australia, Canada and the United States, mixed-race Aboriginal children were commonly removed from their homes and given up for adoption by white families during the twentieth century<sup>35</sup>. These children, who are academically referred to as the "Stolen Generation", were rarely informed of their Aboriginal ancestry or heritage. Additionally in the United

<sup>30</sup><http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTINDPEOPLE/0,,contentMDK:22551137~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:407802,00.html>

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP\\_Press\\_package.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP_Press_package.pdf)

<sup>31</sup>[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTINDPEOPLE/Resources/407801-1271860301656/HDNEN\\_indigenous\\_clean\\_0421.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTINDPEOPLE/Resources/407801-1271860301656/HDNEN_indigenous_clean_0421.pdf)

<sup>32</sup><http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2011/Resources/7856131-1302708588094/GMR-Chapter4.pdf>

<sup>33</sup>[http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/discrimination\\_indigenous.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/discrimination_indigenous.aspx)

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/hr5300.doc.htm>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-20404764>

States and Canada, native children were frequently sent to residential schools, with the aim of cultural deprivation<sup>36</sup>. Expression of native language, religions and cultural beliefs were forbidden, and often warranted physical punishment. Contact with parents and family was often discouraged, and in many cases even disallowed. These actions were defended as being well-intended in the interests of the aboriginal children, with the ultimate goal of cultural assimilation.<sup>37</sup>

Indigenous people also experience systemic oppression through under-representation within State politics. The institution of party-politics is a foreign concept to many indigenous populations, who typically adhere to their political systems of elder hierarchy. These political systems are traditionally community oriented, and depend on the wisdom of elder leaders and consensus in decision making to maintain social order<sup>38</sup>. Despite these structural differences, some aboriginal groups have managed to integrate into the nation-state oriented political system. For example, in 2010 the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples was established as a representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people<sup>39</sup>. This body was created in light of political under-representation in both the Australian House of Representatives and Senate. However, in the few areas where indigenous people have entered mainstream politics, their parties are often unable to compete with the dominant parties. This is due to minimal resources, inadequate media influence, and the polling restrictions<sup>40</sup>. Of Mexico's five-hundred lower house representatives, only fourteen are claim aboriginal ancestry; while in Guatemala, only 12% of the parliament are considered indigenous<sup>41</sup>.

## Recent Developments

In 2002, at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the UN outlined the role of indigenous people in achieving sustainable development, referencing indigenous groups fifty-seven times in the document.<sup>42</sup> This framework aimed to improve indigenous people's access to economic enrichment programs and rural community development initiatives, and called for the preservation of indigenous ecosystems and farm lands. However, the UN did not stop here, four years later adopting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/03/world/americas/canadas-forced-schooling-of-aboriginal-children-was-cultural-genocide-report-finds.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/03/world/americas/canadas-forced-schooling-of-aboriginal-children-was-cultural-genocide-report-finds.html?_r=0)

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/indigenous.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples' Experiences with Political Parties and Elections. ed. by Kathrin Wessendorf, IWGIA 2001

<sup>39</sup> <http://nationalcongress.com.au/>

<sup>40</sup> Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples' Experiences with Political Parties and Elections. ed. by Kathrin Wessendorf, IWGIA 2001

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44974#.V2CTIpMrIoc>

<sup>42</sup> Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, United Nations, New York, 2002.



covered an array of indigenous issues including self-determination, political participation, citizenship, cultural preservation, and anti-discrimination<sup>43</sup>.

Despite these efforts, the current ethnocentric theories and intervention methods, arising from western ideologies on the development of indigenous communities are not necessarily accepted by Indigenous people.<sup>44</sup> In June 2014, the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group (IPMG) delivered a written statement to the SDG open working committee in New York, saying, "that if we are not explicitly and meaningfully referred to in the operative text of the SDGs, we will encounter immense constraint and exclusion from the implementation and monitoring processes." They group noted that indigenous people were excluded from policy discussions during the MDG<sup>45</sup> era, which preceded the SDGs prior to 2015. Their statement concluded by expressing a willingness to collaborate with the UN, stating, "You don't have to turn your back on us. You can still take our hand and include us in the journey of the next 15 years. We can make valuable contributions. Don't leave us behind." Ironically, the statement was not delivered in the plenary session due to time constraints.<sup>46</sup>

Later that year, in September 2014, the United Nations held the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, allowing indigenous representatives to voice their concerns during interactive sessions<sup>47</sup>. During this process, all representatives were permitted to comment and make recommendations on the policies being proposed in the Alta Outcome Document, a document drafted by UN representatives in 2013<sup>48</sup>. This document categorized indigenous issues into themes, including: protection of lands, territories, resources, oceans and waters; how the U.N. system can ensure the protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples through UNDRIP; and Indigenous Peoples' priorities for development with free, prior and informed consent<sup>49</sup>. Despite the goals of the conference, many believe that no tangible progress was made

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<sup>43</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Linda Clarkson, Vern Morrisette and Gabriel Régallet, "Our Responsibility to The Seventh Generation: Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development," *International Institute for Sustainable Development, Winnipeg* (1992): 12, [https://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh\\_gen.pdf](https://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh_gen.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight goals with measurable targets and clear deadlines for improving the lives of the world's poorest people. These goals comprised a 15 year agenda, which began with the signing of the historic millennium declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, and were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (UN).

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Glennie, "Why are Indigenous People Left Out of the Sustainable Development Goals?," *The Guardian*, accessed on January 9, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/aug/14/indigenous-people-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/indigenous/#&panel1-1>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/letters/9152014WCIP%20-%20CFs%20on%20Draft%20Outcome%20Document.pdf>  
<http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/letters/9152014WCIP%20-%20CFs%20on%20Draft%20Outcome%20Document.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/letters/9152014WCIP%20-%20CFs%20on%20Draft%20Outcome%20Document.pdf>

through the outcome document, which uses non-binding language through recommendations<sup>50</sup>.

Despite the inefficiency of international treaties, some State governments have made strides in domestic policy. Newly elected Prime-Minister Justin Trudeau presented his plan to reconcile Canada's relationship with its indigenous people during his address to a group of First Nations leaders in Gatineau, Quebec<sup>51</sup>. During this address, he promised to launch nation-wide investigations into missing and murdered indigenous women, reinvest in indigenous education programs, lift funding caps for First Nation programs, and repeal all discriminatory legislation enacted by previous governments. The Central and South America, an initiative entitled the Integrated Ecosystem Management in Indigenous Communities Regional Program (IEM) has been created to repair damaged ecosystems and alleviate extreme poverty<sup>52</sup>. The IEM will help communities manage local resources and will finance sustainable tourism initiatives. In Norway, the Sami people have established their own parliament. As a political organ, they are able to work with political issues sensitive to the Sami people, managing missions and laws delegates to them by the Norwegian authorities<sup>53</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges faced by indigenous people are deeply ingrained in systemic and historical oppression. Moving forward with the Sustainable Development Agenda, indigenous and aboriginal people must be included in policy developments, territorial settlements, and environmental negotiations. As delegates begin independently researching the indigenous populations of their respective country, it is encouraged that delegates refer to the frameworks established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the recent Paris Agreement on climate change, and prior conventions relating to the status of indigenous peoples.

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<sup>50</sup><http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/09/25/what-did-indigenous-peoples-get-out-world-conference-157042>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/justin-trudeau-afn-indigenous-aboriginal-people-1.3354747>

<sup>52</sup><http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P075219/integrated-ecosystem-management-indigenous-communities?lang=en>

<sup>53</sup> <http://nationalcongress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/1.0.1-Sami-Parliament-Info.pdf>

## **Questions a Resolution Must Answer (QARMAs)**

1. Should the United Nations establish a formal, universal definition of indigenous people? If so, under what terms and conditions should indigenous populations be defined? Should Member States be permitted to have their own definition of indigenous populations?
2. What steps should be taken to integrate indigenous people into the SDGs?
3. What measures could be taken to mend the relationship between aboriginal/indigenous communities and the international community?
4. How can the international community work cohesively with indigenous people in regards to resource management?
5. What obligations do states have in supporting indigenous populations? What services should be provided to support indigenous people?
6. What programs administered by the UN and its subsidiary bodies could be improved upon to consider the interests/rights of indigenous peoples?
7. What measures should be taken to ensure that indigenous interests are being represented within State governments and intergovernmental organizations?

*Author: Samantha Shimer, Secretary-General.*