

IWGIA 40 YEARS ON

At the 38th International Congress of Americanists, held in Stuttgart, Germany in 1968, a number of anthropologists presented alarming reports of atrocities being carried out against indigenous peoples in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Brazil. In a post-conference meeting just outside Copenhagen, in the home of Helge Kleivan, a Danish anthropologist, fellow anthropologists Milton R. Freeman, Lars Persson and Georg Henriksen met to discuss the obligation anthropologists were under to respond to such human rights abuses. On August 22, 1968 they decided to set up the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs with the explicit purpose of informing the international community on the plight of indigenous peoples.

Soon, the newly-formed Work Group began what is still a core element of IWGIA's activity today: documenting cases and situations relating to indigenous peoples and disseminating information to the wider world as to what is going on. Years of hard work, frustrations and limited funding and human resources were to follow, while a few dedicated volunteers, students and others joined this important effort. Looking back, it is impressive to note how a small group of people not only demonstrated extreme dedication to an ongoing struggle but also managed to develop and professionalize IWGIA's documentation and communication work. From day one, IWGIA was - and made great efforts



Some of IWGIA's founding members - Photo: IWGIA archive

to be - a network organisation. During the organisation's early years, we were also encouraged by the fact that we were increasingly able to establish cooperation with a number of other NGOs working on the same issues and, gradually, we were able to attract the attention of the media, governments and international agencies.

In the first few years, IWGIA concentrated on documenting and disseminating information about atrocities, outright discrimination and injustice, and the lack of respect for indigenous peoples and their rights. IWGIA was, in the beginning, largely working *on behalf of* the many victims, and mainly focussing on a number of countries in South America.

As indigenous communities slowly started to organize themselves, from the local and regional right up to the international level, IWGIA was able to begin *to work together with* indigenous representatives and to build relationships that were to grow into long-term partnerships. Even in the modern world, the fate of indigenous peoples has been shockingly grim and depressing. It was thus a true inspiration and encouragement to see indigenous organisations blossoming worldwide while recognition of the seriousness of the issue began to emerge

within international human rights processes. From the 1980s on, a number of instruments and mechanisms were introduced specifically targeting indigenous peoples, such as the creation of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (1982), the

adoption of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organisation (1989) and, later, the process of drafting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1995 – 2007), the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2000) and the mechanism of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples (2001).

For many years, the basic tools of IWGIA's secretariat were little more than a few desks, telephones, a stencil machine and heaps of paper and documents. From the very start, and for several decades, the University of Copenhagen generously provided a small office and logistical support, although the whole set-up remained very basic. Communication was, to a large extent, carried out by post, reports from IWGIA's network and an occasional field trip or small meeting. Volunteers came and went, a few people remained long-term and, little by little, IWGIA was able to hire staff to work for the organisation on a full-time basis. Helge Kleivan and others were finally able to persuade influential individuals in governments, the foreign service and donor agencies about the urgency of funding both IWGIA and many of its indigenous partner organisations. We

have received substantial funding from Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and the European Union for some decades now. This has given us the possibility of steadily increasing the number of professional staff in the secretariat, and fourteen people are now employed in Copenhagen, supporting a range of activities all over the indigenous world. In 2000, IWGIA became a membership organisation with an elected International Board which today is made up of members from Venezuela, Denmark, Norway, the USA and Canada, plus a staff representative. Stencilling is long gone, although printing and copying have stayed with us and we have also expanded into new media. Today you can find IWGIA-related materials on Facebook, Flickr and YouTube; we have our own dynamic website and we work with indigenous communicators to include video, podcasts and radio as a means of communication.

As the years passed, IWGIA decided to expand its activities from the original documentation and dissemination work to also include concerted efforts and engagement with international human rights work and advocacy. We also developed new methods and approaches by which to support our project

IWGIA's board in 2008 - Photo: IWGIA archive



work with and through indigenous organisations and communities. While other NGOs and development agencies may have concentrated on projects within education, health or agriculture, IWGIA and its partner organisations developed projects aimed at a rights-based approach, projects bringing indigenous leaders and communities together over borders and across continents, plus activities that have enabled indigenous representation in the international human rights arena.

Looking back over these past 40 years, we feel we have many reasons to be proud of what we, as an organisation and as individuals, have contributed to advancing the rights of indigenous peoples and improving their situation. Yet we are constantly reminded that IWGIA can only do so much and that, together with other NGOs, agencies, governments and indigenous organisations, we still face a massive uphill struggle. An impressive number of positive developments have occurred over the last 40 years but, regrettably, we have had to continue our reporting and documentation of mass killings, atrocities and gross abuses of human rights across the world, and we are still witnessing indigenous representatives and advocates of indigenous rights being murdered, intimidated, threatened, or disappearing without a trace.

In our own small world, tragedy struck when we lost IWGIA members on mission. Director Andrew Gray died in a plane crash off Vanuatu while networking and expanding our contacts in the Pacific, and Alexander (Sasja) Pika from IWGIA Moscow drowned off Kamchatka while conducting a research project with US colleagues into the health situation of Inuit communities on both sides of the Bering Strait. Two of IWGIA's founders and dedicated Board members for decades, Helge Kleivan and Georg Henriksen, departed this world all too early. We overcame the grief of such losses by focusing on the legacy these individuals left behind them, both within IWGIA and amongst the indigenous peoples.

IWGIA has been blessed with an incredibly professional and dedicated staff, both today and over the years. The organisation has also managed to remain a network organisation. Many people have given their time and effort to local groups in Denmark, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and France, while others have either contributed as writers or as members of our Advisory Board. Although funding has provided crucial means and opportunities, IWGIA's work would not have been possible without the commitment of many individu-

als – and their families – both within academia, among activists and in the indigenous world. As we turn 40, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who have supported the decisive work we have been, are, and will continue to be, engaged in.

This is why, as IWGIA's 40th anniversary approaches, we decided not to focus solely on our organisation's past or our own achievements but to look also at the interesting, fascinating and important developments that have taken place in the indigenous world in general, and IWGIA in particular, since 1968. A book on the history of IWGIA and its work for and with indigenous peoples is therefore in the process of being written by former IWGIA director, Jens Dahl and will be published shortly by IWGIA. But we also thought it fitting to highlight a number of current and future issues and challenges facing the indigenous world. One first initiative connected with our anniversary came about in early 2008 when we organised a successful international conference on indigenous peoples and climate change (see <http://www.iwgia.org/sw29085.asp>) as a starting point for incorporating indigenous concerns and demands into the process leading up to the World Conference on Climate change (COP 15), due to take place in Copenhagen in December 2009. In October, coinciding with the celebrations for our 40th anniversary, IWGIA convened a seminar entitled "Being Indigenous in Today's World". We invited a number of our indigenous partners to present their views and tell us about different aspects of the indigenous political movement, as well as their experiences of indigenous politics in both the national and international fields.

This 40th anniversary issue of *Indigenous Affairs* also focuses on some selected developments and issues that IWGIA and its partners are working on in different parts of the world.

We start with the keynote speech given by Johnson Malih Ole Kaunga from Kenya at our 40th anniversary celebrations in Copenhagen. His speech reflects on what it implies for him to be indigenous in today's world. Even though his perspective is African, we believe that his reflections represent a reality for indigenous peoples around the globe and point to the essence of their struggles for self-determination.

The following article is also from Kenya and gives an overview of the indigenous pastoralist movement by one of its prominent leaders, Joseph Ole Simel. Being a rather young movement, spanning no more than 20 years, these organisations are struggling to deal with a range of challenges including, on the one hand, the government's efforts to keep them in check

and, on the other, weak and inexperienced organisations that have sometimes raised suspicion and criticism on the part of their own constituency. Indigenous organisations in Kenya have, nevertheless, grown stronger and can report on important milestones achieved. Many challenges lie ahead for the indigenous peoples of Kenya but there are reasons to hope and believe that their organisations and their movement are now strong enough to face those challenges.

In Asia, we focus on discussing the concept of indigenous peoples. In March 2006, together with its partners in Asia, IWGIA organised a conference on this theme, which concluded with a declaration of experiences and issues common to indigenous peoples in Asia. This declaration is meant to provide guidelines for identifying indigenous peoples in the region. While the article by Bengt Karlson looks at the situation in India, we have also included the said declaration. Interested readers can, furthermore, refer to a book on "The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia", published by IWGIA in 2008.

Indigenous peoples in Latin America have a long history of organising and of political involvement. The article by Alberto Chirif and Pedro Garcia takes a close look at the history of the indigenous movement in Peru, including its challenges, its achievements and its future.

The issue of natural resource development is common to all indigenous peoples in the world, as it

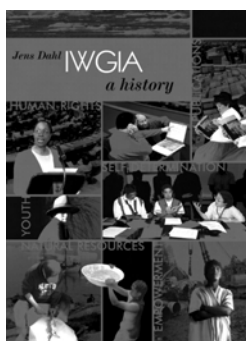
relates to the very essence of indigenous life, to their relationship with their land and territories and to their vulnerability in relation to multinational and national companies and state interests. Olga Murchko's article on Russia looks at the general and legal situation of the indigenous peoples in that country and uses specific case studies to describe their relationship to industrial development.

The issue concludes with an article dealing with a very recent development in Greenland. On November 25, 2008, 75.5% of the electorate of the world's largest island voted in favour of greater autonomy. In his article, Mark Nuttall looks at the consequences of this vote, including the economic and environmental challenges and the solutions sought by Greenland. He concludes that taking into consideration the challenges and clear decisions Greenlanders are taking to deal with them reminds us that self-determination is also about the right to development and, based on the rights of people to govern themselves, it is about the right to make decisions and choices that determine the path development should take.

Finally, and in order to give the reader a better impression of our work in the past and, particularly, the present, we have also included short sections on IWGIA's work in the regions, and the references to recently published and forthcoming books will guide the way to more information on the issues discussed in this issue of *Indigenous Affairs*. □

IWGIA - A HISTORY

By Jens Dahl



IWGIA was one of the very first organisations to be established in support of indigenous peoples. It was founded in 1968 by anthropologists concerned at the atrocities being committed against Indians in South America.

This book is written by Jens Dahl, a Danish anthropologist and former director and Board member of IWGIA. Jens has been closely connected with the organisation for the last 40 years and this book thus offers an insider's view of its development.

(Forthcoming book)

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