



THE INDIGENOUS WORLD 2026

40TH EDITION

The Indigenous World 2026

40th Edition

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Editorial

Celebrating 40 years of documentation

The *Indigenous World* has been one of the most consistent and comprehensive sources of documentation on the situation and rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. Produced annually by IWGIA, the publication provides authoritative analysis on developments affecting Indigenous Peoples in more than 60 countries across all seven socio-cultural regions and more than 20 international processes and mechanisms.

This 2026 edition marks the 40th anniversary of this unique publication — a milestone that highlights both the enduring value of long-term documentation and the importance of centring Indigenous perspectives in global discussions.

The documentation of Indigenous Peoples' rights is at the very core of IWGIA's work. It is through solid and rigorous documentation that we, together with our partners, document and build knowledge about Indigenous Peoples' rights and use that as a foundation to advocate for a world where Indigenous Peoples can fully exercise and enjoy their inherent and internationally recognized rights.

The idea for this unique book arose out of the Workshop on Indigenous Rights held in Geneva in September 1986, where IWGIA was requested to present a synopsis of the major events in the Indigenous world over the previous 12 months. The reaction of the participants was that a detailed version of the account would be of immense value.

The first edition covered 66 countries and territories, as well as five international processes and global issues relevant to Indigenous Peoples. Since the first edition, the publication has become directly linked to the Indigenous Peoples' struggle for the recognition and protection of their rights, emerging as a key advocacy tool advancing these rights at national, regional, and international levels.

In 1989, the book started being produced in both English and Spanish to reach even more audiences and, in 1993, we changed the name from *IWGIA Yearbook* to *The Indigenous World*, signifying a shift away

from including IWGIA's annual report and toward a greater focus on the situation of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

Over these last 40 years, *The Indigenous World* has, in total, covered 56 international mechanisms, processes, and issues concerning Indigenous Peoples, from global UN mechanisms to regional processes across all seven socio-cultural regions.

From 1988 to 2009, across 20 editions, we covered the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), from its drafting process through to its adoption in 2007 and its first year of implementation. Since 1994, across 28 editions, we have been covering the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, from the working group set up to establish the Forum to its formation in 2000, and through to its activities to date. From 2001, across 25 editions, we began covering the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, since the Human Rights Commission established the mandate, which celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026. In the same year, we also began covering the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACH-PR) since the establishment of its Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities (WGIPM), and every year since.

Over 40 years, 119 countries and territories have been covered in the book. In those 40 years, eight countries have been documented in all 40 editions, nine countries have been documented in 39 editions, and 24 other countries and territories have been covered in 30 or more editions.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible dedication of our network of volunteer authors who generously give their time and expertise to document the situation of Indigenous Peoples year after year.

Since 1986 until today, over 950 different individuals have contributed their analysis to *The Indigenous World*. These volunteer authors include Indigenous, as well as non-indigenous, activists, scholars, lawyers, leaders, civil society and NGO workers, community members, human rights defenders, UN Special Rapporteurs, and more.

We wish to thank them and celebrate the bonds and sense of community that result from the close cooperation needed to make this one-of-a-kind documentation tool available.

As we celebrate 40 years of *The Indigenous World*, the 2026 edition includes 87 national, regional, and international reports, and includes an editorial focus on peace and security and the rising threats Indigenous Peoples are facing. The trends identified in this editorial are a synthesis of the analysis the authors of the articles within this book have documented.

Peace and security under pressure

When the UN was created in the aftermath of the Second World War, its core purpose was to prevent new global conflicts through a system grounded in the peaceful resolution of disputes, the collective maintenance of international peace and security, and the promotion and protection of human rights and non-discrimination as fundamental principles. Today, however, this founding vision is under severe strain. The UN system is facing one of the deepest crises in its history as ongoing wars, escalating geopolitical tensions, and widespread violations of international law reveal the weakening of the very mechanisms designed to uphold peace, security, human rights, and equality worldwide.

Decades of multilateral progress is being questioned or abandoned. Democratic and civil society spaces are shrinking as conflict rhetoric is heightening, and budgets are shifting away from human rights protections and environmental stewardship towards militarization, weaponry, defence systems and the extraction of “strategic” resources.

As the UN system struggles to uphold its founding mandate and States double down on “security first” agendas, the resulting policies are having devastating effects. Nowhere is this contradiction more visible than in the lives of Indigenous Peoples, whose rights, territories, and security are being further undermined in the name of “peace and stability”.

Many Indigenous Peoples and their communities and territories are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts, militarization, the activities of and wars against illegal cartels, and territorial sovereignty disputes between States. In many cases, their steadfast defence of their lands, rights, and ways of life makes them targets of violence, dis-

placement, and persecution. These dynamics often unfold without acknowledging Indigenous Peoples in policy frameworks or peacebuilding strategies, despite their vast knowledge and experience in conflict resolution. Their exclusion perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines efforts toward sustainable peace in all societies.

In a statement at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr. Albert K. Barume “drew attention to cases in which States have ‘taken shortcuts’ by labelling Indigenous Peoples ‘terrorists’, ‘extremists’ or ‘radicalized communities’, which represents a missed opportunity, both for the international community working for peace, and for States on whose lands these issues are recurring.”¹

The Special Rapporteur further noted in his interim report on “Identification, demarcation, registration and titling of Indigenous Peoples’ lands: practices and lessons”, which he presented to the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly on 13 October 2025, that there is an “urgent need for stronger recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples’ rights, particularly regarding land demarcation, legal recognition and protection from criminalization and violence”.² These rights are not only legal obligations but also contribute strongly to the peace and security of Indigenous Peoples and others, as well as to a more sustainable relationship with nature, and ensure the survival of Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge.

Indigenous Peoples have deep, generational experience with conflict resolution, justice, mediation and peacebuilding, and yet their long history is either ignored in Security Council and UN resolutions or, while recognized, they are excluded from the international security discussion and decision-making processes. Even when Indigenous Peoples are included in conflict resolution or peacebuilding frameworks, in most cases their role in implementation is not recognized, which can lead to further marginalization, undermining the sustainability of peace efforts.

As conflicts intensify worldwide, Indigenous Peoples are also increasingly targeted — a direct violation of the principles enshrined in the UNDRIP and the Charter of the United Nations itself. No serious conversation on peace and security can ignore Indigenous Peoples’ reality. Ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ rights, protection, and participation is essential, not only for justice but for any meaningful prospect of lasting peace.

Shifting budgets away from rights and international protections

The targeting of Indigenous Peoples and their lands and territories in the name of “peace and security” is only one front of a broader assault. Another, less visible one is emerging as States redirect budgets away from human rights and international protection frameworks. While conflicts may capture global attention, these financial and political shifts are quietly undermining Indigenous Peoples’ peace, security, and rights.

When U.S. President Trump took office in January 2025, one of his first actions was to effectively and almost immediately shut down the operations of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This abrupt dismantling halted thousands of programmes worldwide and left millions of people without access to lifesaving care — mainly the poorest of the poor, among whom Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented. Although the specific impacts on Indigenous Peoples have not yet been comprehensively assessed, this sudden loss has inevitably negatively impacted the international support that many Indigenous communities accessed to help advance and safeguard their rights.

We are also witnessing major cuts to development cooperation budgets and programmes on the part of many Western states. The efficacy and legitimacy of the multilateral system has also been crippled and called into question by the US President’s decision to withdraw from 66 international bodies, including 31 UN-affiliated entities, in January 2026. The domino effect of this additional sweeping policy decision is as yet unknown.

However, what we do know, as evidenced throughout the reports in this book, is that this is leaving Indigenous Peoples vulnerable to land dispossession, eviction, human trafficking, sexual violence, criminalization for any human rights defence work, or worse.

The weakening of these international spaces represents the weakening of one of the few and strongest platforms where Indigenous Peoples have fought for their rights, have made significant progress in their recognition as distinct Peoples and which they have at their disposal to further their rights, as those spaces in their national context are often non-existent or tokenistic.

Rush for resources bypasses protections

Another area where we see an increasing risk of violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights is in the global rush for resources, namely critical minerals, which are now beginning to be considered through the lens of "peace and security" as strategic assets. The so-called green transition, while still framed as a response to climate change and the clean energy transition, is also being viewed as integral to national security.

In fact, the World Bank forecasts a 500% increase in demand for these minerals by 2050,³ and the International Energy Agency estimates increases of 40% for copper and Rare Earth Elements (REEs), 60-70% for nickel and cobalt and almost 90% for lithium by 2040.⁴

Indigenous Peoples are at the forefront of this demand as more than 54% of the global reserves of these energy transition minerals lie on or near their lands.⁵ Framing certain minerals as "critical" allows governments to classify mining as a matter of national security or economic emergency, granting companies the right to operate on Indigenous territories without respecting their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).⁶

In some cases, Indigenous Peoples are being seen as inconvenient obstacles and their rights as incompatible with national interests. Laws and protections are being sidestepped for the sake of urgency, and protocols, such as FPIC, if not already ignored or improperly implemented, are now being compromised with compressed timelines for consent or meaningful consultation.

Indigenous Peoples and defenders who live in these areas, speak up, peacefully protest, or participate in international spaces and institutions are now being seen and framed as anti-peace, anti-security, and anti-state. They are facing intensified surveillance, intimidation, criminalization and silencing, as are Indigenous Peoples' own organizations. While their actions remain legal on paper, they are increasingly forced to operate in politically and physically unsafe spaces.

The shift away from the green transition as an environmental concern to a prong of national security strategies has also impacted the energy sector. Budgets and priorities are focusing on the speed at which energy independence can be secured. As some countries have been making concerted progress in mitigating emissions, as one of

many climate actions, we are thus also seeing an increase in the use of fossil fuels: coal-fired energy power plants are being re-opened, oil and gas leases are expanding, and extraction and development projects are escalating.

Much of this is being done without consulting Indigenous Peoples or their vast knowledge of best practices. In fact, Indigenous Peoples have noted solutions and good practices, based on their own knowledge, sciences, technologies, lived experiences and time-tested practices for restoration of sustainable food production and soil, ecosystem protection, and true and equitable just transition, distinct from models based on imposition, extraction, and colonialism.⁷

Indigenous Peoples continue fighting with resolve

Despite this global shift at an unprecedented pace, and all the violations, attacks, evictions, land loss, and climate change effects that have multiplied with it, Indigenous Peoples around the world were also able to celebrate a number of victories in 2025.

By continuously standing up for their rights, using national and international law, gathering in solidarity for collective action, and never letting their spirit break, Indigenous Peoples in 2025 successfully stopped harmful infrastructure projects, protected their lands, secured rights in national and international laws and processes, took decision-making positions, negotiated the return of ancestral remains as well as compensation for historical harms, and developed their own strategies for security.

The reports in this year's edition show that the obstacles Indigenous Peoples face in the protection of their rights, lands, resources, territories and dignity are increasing. And yet Indigenous Peoples' collective strategies are also increasing, and the resourcefulness, adaptability, and energy they have always had to employ continues.

Indigenous Peoples know what is being taken from them, they are fighting against the injustices of past colonialism and extractivism simultaneously with a new economic force that continues to thirst for their lands and knowledge.

Today's colonialism is taking shape in "green" policies that sometimes ignore Indigenous Peoples and lay claim to their lands, which some are calling "green colonialism". Today's extraction continues to be that of resources but now, with the rise of artificial intelligence, that extraction is expanding into the realm of Indigenous knowledge and data being collected about them, their lands and their practices, often without consent.

Indigenous Peoples know this, and they keep on fighting for their rights and for an equal footing, to be a genuine and meaningful part of local to national to global participation, recognition, and decision-making. They are not standing in the way or impeding the speed of progress or security; they simply want that progress to be just and they want people and governments to be held to account when those processes are unfair.

Indigenous Peoples are not resisting the future; they are asserting their right to shape it, ensuring that ongoing and historical injustices are neither ignored nor repeated.

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Copenhagen, March 2026

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About The Indigenous World

The compilation you have in your hands is the unique result of a collaborative effort between Indigenous and non-indigenous activists and scholars who voluntarily document and report on the situation of Indigenous Peoples' rights. We thank them and celebrate the bonds and sense of community that result from the close cooperation needed to make this one-of-a kind documentation tool available.

For 40 consecutive years IWGIA has published *The Indigenous World* in collaboration with this community of authors. This yearly overview serves to document and report on the developments Indigenous Peoples have experienced throughout 2025. *The Indigenous World 2026* adds not only documentation, but also includes a special focus on peace and security.

IWGIA publishes this volume with the intent that it is used as a documentation tool and an inspiration to promote and defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their struggles, worldviews and resilience.

It is our hope that Indigenous Peoples themselves, along with their organisations, find it useful in their advocacy work and in improving the human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples. It is also our wish that *The Indigenous World* is used as a main reference by a wider audience interested in Indigenous issues who, through these pages, can dive into local realities and further familiarise themselves with the current situation of Indigenous Peoples' rights worldwide.

We would like to stress that any omission of a specific country report should not be interpreted as no news is good news. In fact, sometimes, it is precisely the precarious human rights situation that makes it difficult to obtain contributions from specific countries. In other cases, we have simply not been able to get an author to cover a particular country. If you would like to contribute to *The Indigenous World*, please contact us.

The articles in this book are the views and visions of the authors, and IWGIA cannot be held responsible for the opinions stated herein. The respective country maps are, however, compiled by IWGIA and the content therein is the responsibility of IWGIA and not the authors. We wish to stress that some of the articles presented take their point of departure in ethnographic regions rather than strict state boundaries. This is in accordance with Indigenous Peoples' worldview and cultural identification which, in many cases, cuts across state borders.



PART 1

Region and Country Reports



Africa

Algeria



The Amazighs are the Indigenous people of Algeria and other countries of North Africa. The Algerian government does not, however, recognize the Indigenous status of the Amazighs and refuses to publish statistics on their population. Because of this, there is no official data on the number of Amazighs in Algeria. On the basis of demographic data drawn from the territories in which Tamazight-speaking populations live, associations defending and promoting the rights of Amazigh people estimate the Tamazight-speaking population to be around 12 million people, a third of Algeria's total population. The Amazighs of Algeria are concentrated in five territories: Kabylia in the north-east (Kabyls represent around 50% of Algeria's Amazigh population), Aurès in the east, Chenoua, a mountainous region on the Mediterranean coast to the west of Algiers, M'zab in the south (Taghardayt), and Tuareg territory in the Sahara (Tamanrasset, Adrar, Djanet). Many small Amazigh communities also exist in the south-west (Tlemcen, Bechar, etc.) and in other places scattered throughout the country. It is also important to note that large cities such as Algiers, Oran, Constantine, etc., are home to several hundred thousand people who are historically and culturally Amazigh but who have been partly Arabized over the years, succumbing to a gradual process of acculturation and assimilation.

The Indigenous populations can primarily be distinguished from Arab inhabitants by their language (Tamazight) but also by their way of life and their culture (clothes, food, songs and dances, beliefs, etc.). After decades of demands and popular struggles, the Amazigh language was finally recognized as a "national and official language" in Algeria's Constitution in 2016. But, in reality, the Amazigh identity continues to be marginalized and folklorized by state institutions. Officially, Algeria is still presented as an "Arab country" and "land of Islam", and anti-Amazigh laws are still in force (such as the 1992 Law of Arabization).

Internationally, Algeria has ratified the main international standards, and it voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. These texts remain unknown to the vast majority of citizens, however, and thus not enforced, which has led to the UN treaty-monitoring bodies making numerous observations and recommendations to Algeria urging it to meet its international commitments.

Changes in the Algerian legislative framework

Human rights organizations and UN bodies deemed Law No. 12-06 of 12 January 2012 on associations¹ highly restrictive of the right to freedom of association, and a draft organic law was presented by the government to civil society organizations in January 2025, for debate and enrichment. The aim is to replace the 2012 law with a new one more in line with international standards. A number of human rights organizations have, however, strongly criticized the bill. Human Rights Watch and seven other NGOs stated that “The draft bill [...] does not address provisions in existing law that violate the right to freedom of association and instead introduces additional restrictions and strengthens government control over organizations in the country.”² This is contrary to international standards, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Added to this is the fact that the civil society organizations that took part in the consultations organized by the government were all organizations that are collaborating with government departments.

On 03 August 2025, the Algerian parliament adopted a new Code of Criminal Procedure³ to replace the old code dating from 1966. According to the Ministry of Justice, the new code aims to “reinforce the rights and freedoms of individuals and strengthen the right to defence”. Many human rights organizations have nonetheless denounced an excessive concentration of judicial power in the hands of the Public Prosecutor, who has the power to “investigate, charge, instruct and convict”. The *Union Nationale des Ordres des Avocats Algériens* (UNOA) [Algerian Lawyers' Association] has also deplored the fact that the Ministry of Justice has ignored its recommendations. For UNOA, the new Code

of Criminal Procedure contains provisions “contrary to the principles of fair justice and the constitutional rights of citizens”.⁴

Serious human rights violations continue

2025 saw the continuation of the same repressive policy against anyone who acts or expresses an opinion critical of the Algerian government.

On 14 January 2025, Massinissa Lakhal, a young activist for Kabyle rights, was arrested in Tizi-Wezzu, Kabylia. He was prosecuted for publications in favour of the Kabylia self-determination movement. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment on the basis of article 87 bis of the Penal Code and detained in Tizi-Wezzu prison.

On 30 January 2025, Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders declared: “More than a year after I visited Algeria – at the end of 2023 – I am deeply disappointed to see that human rights defenders in different fields of work, some of whom I met, are still being arbitrarily arrested, judicially harassed, intimidated and criminalised for their peaceful activities under vaguely worded provisions, such as ‘harming the security of the State’.”⁵ Mary Lawlor presented her report on her visit to Algeria to the 58th session of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/58/53/Add.1).

On 03 March 2025, Ms Wafia Tidjani, a tourism professional and campaigner for the protection of nature and solidarity-based tourism in Kabylia and other Amazigh territories of Algeria, was arrested and charged with “undermining national unity” and “publishing false news”. Pending trial, she has been remanded in custody at Koléa prison, near Algiers.

Once again this year, as in the last five years, the *Tafsut Imazighen* (Amazigh Spring) celebrations, traditionally held on 20 April, could not take place because of a ban by the Algerian authorities. This is a serious violation of the Amazigh people's right to keep their collective memory and traditions alive.

On 21 June 2025, the *Rectorat de Vgayet* in Kabylia (the administrative body that manages higher education at the local level) banned the defence of student Samir Larabi's doctoral thesis in sociology for “not conforming to the values of the Algerian Constitution”. The thesis

focused on “the Amazigh question and its evolution towards self-determination for Kabylia”. This subject had nonetheless been validated by the university's scientific authorities. For the author of the thesis, this is simply unacceptable administrative censorship.⁶

On 05 July 2025, Christophe Gleizes, a French journalist who had gone to Kabylia to report on the local soccer team, was arrested and prosecuted for “apology for terrorism and a relationship with a political leader of the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK)”. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment at the Court of First Instance, a sentence upheld on appeal on 03 December 2025. He is being held in Tizi-Wezzu prison.

On 25 December 2025, Kamira Nait Sid, former co-president of the Amazigh World Congress (CMA), was summoned to appear before the Algiers Criminal Court for a retrial following the decision of the Algerian Supreme Court on 28 March 2024, which overturned her three-year prison sentence handed down in 2022. During the trial, the prosecution dropped several charges, including “belonging to a terrorist organization” and “undermining national unity”. At the end of the hearing, the court sentenced Ms Nait Sid to two years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 Dinars (around 500 USD). Having already served a three-year prison sentence between 2021 and 2024, she walked out of court free.

Thousands of Amazighs are banned from leaving Algeria. Those who live abroad avoid returning home for fear of not being able to leave. The NGO MENA Rights Group considers that Algeria uses travel bans as a ‘tool of mass repression’.⁷

Hate speech and discrimination against Amazighs

On 01 May 2025, Mohamed Lamine Belghit, a history teacher in Algeria, declared on the Sky News Arabia television channel that “Amazigh culture does not exist” and that it was a “Franco-Zionist creation”. On 03 May 2025, the Dar-El-Beida court near Algiers ordered his arrest and provisional detention for “undermining national unity and disseminating hate speech and discrimination”. On 03 July 2025, the court sentenced him to five years in prison. On 07 October, the Algiers Court of Appeal reduced his sentence to three years' imprisonment and a 2-year sus-

pending sentence. On 11 December 2025, the Supreme Court rejected his appeal, making his conviction final. Four days later, on 15 December, to everyone's surprise, the Algerian Head of State, Mr. Tebboune, granted him a pardon and Mr. Belghit regained his freedom. In fact, Mr. Belghit benefited from an exceptionally rapid judicial process, as he spent only two months in pre-trial detention, whereas the average length of remand for Amazigh prisoners is around 16 months. Moreover, according to several Amazigh organizations, including the Amazigh World Congress, "by granting his 'presidential pardon' to Mr. Belghit, who has offended the Amazigh people, the Algerian Head of State is demonstrating his lack of loyalty to and solidarity with the Amazighs, and at the same time showing his support for the Islamo-Pan-Arabist movement, which constitutes discrimination against the Amazighs of Algeria".⁸

During his preaching on 22 December 2025, the imam of the Er-rahma Mosque in Cherarba, Eucalyptus Commune, near Algiers, called for the "necessary erasure" of everything Amazigh in Algeria, justifying this by the fact that "it was colonial France that invented the Amazigh culture to weaken Arabness". The imam who made these racist and stigmatizing remarks about Amazighs has not been prosecuted, nor has he suffered any judicial or administrative sanction.

Peace and security threatened

The Amazighs' refusal to give up their collective rights has led to the reinforcement of Algerian security forces. In the absence of statistics on the subject, observations made by civil society organizations show a disproportionate presence of Algerian security forces (military, gendarmes, police). In protest areas such as Kabylia, there are an excessive number of permanent and temporary barracks, fixed and mobile road-blocks, day and night patrols in towns and villages, in cultivated fields and forests. Villagers are confronted with untimely, heavy-handed interventions by the gendarmes or the *Brigades de Recherche et d'Intervention* (BRI), a special unit of the Algerian police. The war weaponry used by these Algerian security forces, their combat uniforms, including the use of balaclavas, and their brutal methods of action, are creating a climate of terror among a peaceful and shocked population.

The fact that Algerian justice sentences innocent people to long years in prison, and sometimes even to death, is also a decisive factor, prompting Amazighs to be cautious, silent and inward-looking.

These stressful and oppressive living conditions have a negative impact on the economic, social and cultural life of the Amazigh people.

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Botswana



Botswana is a country of 2,763,338 inhabitants, having celebrated its 59th year of independence in 2025. Its government does not recognize any specific ethnic groups as Indigenous, maintaining instead that all citizens of the country are Indigenous. However, 3.41% of the population identifies as belonging to an Indigenous group. These include: the San (known in Botswana as the Basarwa) who number around 76,231; the Balala (2,842); and the Nama (3,571), a Khoekhoe-speaking people. The San were traditionally hunter-gatherers but today the vast majority are small-scale agro-pastoralists, cattle post workers, or people with mixed economies. Only an estimated 300 San people are full-time hunter-gatherers, although many others hunt or gather as a supplement to other food sources. The San consist of a large number of sub-groups, most with their own languages, including the Ju/'hoansi, Bugakhwe, Khwe-IlAni, Ts'ixa, ǀX'ao-ǁ'ae, ǀXóǀ, ǀHoan, ǀKhomani, Naro, G//ui, G//ana, Tsasi, Deti, Bakhwe, Shua, Tshwa, Cuaa, Kua, Danisi and /Xaise. The San, Balala, and Nama are among the most underprivileged people in Botswana, with a high percentage living below the poverty line.

Botswana is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and it voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, it has not signed the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 (ILO 169). There are no specific laws on Indigenous Peoples' rights in the country, and the concept of Indigenous people is not included in the Botswana Constitution. Botswana's census does not include information on ethnicity. Botswana took part in the 24th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), held in New York from 21 April to 2 May 2025.

Introduction

The year 2025 was a significant one in Botswana's history with regard to Indigenous Peoples' rights. It was the first year that an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was established, aimed at considering San (Basarwa, Bushmen) issues. The government also launched radio programs in several Indigenous languages, including Naro. It furthermore had a visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr. Albert Kwokwo Barume, who reported on the status of San in over a dozen communities and made recommendations for Botswana government consideration. For a number of reasons, as detailed below, Botswana faced a serious economic and health crisis in 2025. Moreover, fears of displacement due to the expansion of oil drilling and other resource extractive activities were expressed at the community level in several parts of the country.

Effects of the US suspension of foreign aid

On 30 January 2025, the US suspended foreign development assistance to all countries, including the aid given through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This termination was devastating for Botswana, which had been receiving USD 50-60 million (approx. EUR 42-50 million) annually, much of which had been distributed to the country's NGOs and CSOs (Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations). The US funds covered around two-thirds of the budgets for these organizations, which provide services in the areas of health, poverty alleviation, education and more from branches located throughout the country. By mid-February, 85 organizations serving over 66,000 people had closed, and 680 of their employees had been let go.¹ One of the largest was the Tebelopele Voluntary Testing and Counseling Services, which provided HIV-related services through dozens of centers throughout the country, many of which provided essential services to Indigenous people such as the San.²

On 28 January, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a "blanket waiver for lifesaving humanitarian assistance" but only for services

that do not relate to “gender or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) ideology programs”.³ Within a month, Tebelopele had applied for and been approved for this waiver, and announced it was reopening almost all of its centers.⁴

Even after the waivers and other adjustments had taken effect, the US contribution to Botswana during the 2025 fiscal year was USD 13.3 million (approx. EUR 11.2 million) – around a quarter of the previous year, which was USD 50 million (approx. EUR 42.3 million). In March, USAID itself was dissolved by the US government, with its remaining functions transferred to the US State Department.⁵

Inter-Ministerial Committee established to listen to the Basarwa

In February, President Duma Boko and the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Nelson Ramaotwana, discussed the establishment of a new Inter-Ministerial Committee, which would be mandated to “look comprehensively at the situation of the Basarwa in Botswana, including the communities found in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), and to come up with sustainable solutions that respect the rights, culture and dignity of Basarwa.”

On 14 March, Mr. Ramaotwana described the plan to Botswana’s parliament, saying that: “the heart of the mandate is a review of the 1986 National Settlement Policy”, which had been controversial because it involved moving some Remote Area Development (RAD) settlements to new areas in order to “enable better service provision”.⁶

The committee, chaired by Ms Naledi Moroka, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services, comprised the permanent secretaries of the ministries of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, Justice and Correctional Services, Environment and Tourism, Lands and Agriculture, among others.⁷

A meeting was held on 7 April, during a *Kgotla* (public) meeting in the town of Bere in the Ghanzi district. It was conducted by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, Mr. Kabelo Ebineng, who outlined the reasons for the meeting and encouraged the Basarwa present to speak their minds.

Kgosi David Resetswana, a community leader, said that more should be done to include Basarwa in discussions of national development because they “...felt they had been forgotten and felt left out”. He noted that the Basarwa in Bere did not live close to the town center and needed road infrastructure, electricity and an improved telecommunications network. He added that Bere had developed a craft center funded by the UN Development Programme.⁸

A second meeting of the committee was held the following day in New Xade, where San who used to live in the CKGR had been relocated in 1997. Kgosi Lobatse Beslag, a San, said the relocation to New Xade was difficult because their rights had not been considered. The community expressed their longing for the way of life they had enjoyed while living in the game reserve and pleaded with the government to let them return. They said that if they were allowed to return, they would remain in any area the government designated, suggesting that their new settlement could receive water from Gope. They said they would use their knowledge of the natural resources that were abundant in the park, and would help to preserve them.

Mr. Jumanda Gakelebone, a San member of the Ghanzi District Council, expressed his gratitude to the ministerial team, and said the meeting had given the community hope. He urged the committee to work toward a constitutional amendment to help align policies with human rights. He also strongly suggested that the committee work closely with civil organizations that are promoting the rights of the Basarwa (which has not been done as of the time of writing).

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Mr. Boatametse Modukanele, who organized the meeting, encouraged the community to put their views in writing to the committee.⁹

In June, members of the Inter-Ministerial Committee heard a report on the San communities of the North West district, presented by Ms Oritjiua Setekia, the Principal Development Officer in the region. Some of her detailed findings on the communities, which included Mababe, Khwai, Solemo, and Phuduhudu, were as follows: The population of San in these areas had grown significantly between the 2011 and 2022 population censuses. The spiritual aspects of this minority group must be considered by government; most of the San in these areas had been displaced from their original areas such as Savuti, Moremi Game

Reserve and the Khoemacau region, and they wanted to be able to visit their birthplaces “to revive connections with their ancestors” and to connect with “the spirit of their forefathers”. They also objected to the government’s local development planning, which is centered only around urban areas, excluding their small rural communities.¹⁰

President declares health emergency

By August, Botswana was running out of medical supplies, and President Duma Boko declared a “health emergency” due to a dwindling economy spurred by a diminished diamond market and the USAID cuts mentioned previously.

On 4 August, the Ministry of Health suspended non-urgent surgery and stated that the country had run out of medicines to treat hypertension, diabetes, cancer and most other diseases, including those necessary for HIV prevention and care.¹¹

The health crisis affected the entire country; however, the San, who are often marginalized and live in remote areas, experienced disproportionate suffering due to pre-existing challenges in accessing health-care and government services.

In D’Kar in the Ghanzi District, the San comprise most of the population of 2,500, 450 of whom are children under five. Over 80% of these small children are malnourished. Pregnant women are also malnourished, and this is passed on to their babies. Malnourished people are also more susceptible to other diseases such as tuberculosis, which has been increasing in D’Kar.¹²

Visit by the UN Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples

After persistent complaints from advocacy groups about violations of the human rights of the San (Basarwa), the UN Human Rights Council announced it would send Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples,¹³ Dr. Albert K. Barume, to Botswana. Dr. Barume spent the first 12 days of September in the country, first meeting with President

Boko, whom he congratulated for initiating a “profound policy shift in [the] approach to Indigenous Peoples” and for instituting the Inter-Ministerial Committee. He then visited several communities – Gaborone, Lokgwae Nama Ward, Zutshwa, Ghanzi, Grootlagte, D’Kar, Shaikarwe, Tsodilo, Molapo, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), Maun and Nata – to meet with Indigenous Peoples and their representatives.

In his “End of Mission Statement”¹⁴ Dr. Barume made the following recommendations and observations. [Quotations from participants are in italics.]

Legal recognition: There is currently a complete absence of “legal and constitutional recognition of communities self-identifying as Indigenous Peoples” because the section of the constitution that offered protection for them was removed in 2005. Those he visited said their top priority was a reinstatement of constitutional recognition and related reforms. *“It is as if we don’t belong to this country, yet we were the first inhabitants.”*

Land rights: Changes should be made in laws and procedures to permit San to exercise authority over their lands and resources. In particular, the government should reverse the settlement plan that has required people to leave their customary territory. They should be permitted to return to their homelands. *“Relocation destroys us, kills our sense of community, undermines our sense of culture...we feel disconnected, hopeless and lost.”*

Representation: San communities continually expressed frustration at their lack of representation at all levels of government. The Tswana tribal leaders administer customary law in many of their communities, and San are not represented in the House of Chiefs, where their languages are usually misunderstood.

Culture and language: Most communities worry about the future of their languages, where fluent speakers are generally aging. San have a strong culture, including hunting and tracking skills, dance and art, which could provide economic benefits for them.

Right to education: Many if not most Indigenous communities are too small to be supplied with on-site schools, either primary or secondary. Communities are told that they “do not have the numbers” to qualify for schools or, in fact, for other government services. This is due to a “population-based development system” in Botswana. Fortunately, the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education is aware that a different education model is needed for Indigenous children, which might include establishing satellite or mobile schools and translating teaching materials into Indigenous languages. Although the government language policy provides for the use of “mother tongue” instruction, there are few Indigenous teachers. Government should consider hiring residents who know the languages and could be employed as teacher aides.

When children reach the age for secondary school, the situation is truly dire. The San students are moved to hostels that are near the schools but usually far from their homes. Hostels are known for bullying, theft, and inadequate food, and children often run away from them. Children, especially girls, are subject to abuse by men around the hostels. One San girl said, “Young girls are therefore attended by men who give them money and drugs. Therefore, the girls become pregnant.” The girls drop out of school, and many become infected with HIV. Government must review the hostel system to make sure that San children can receive quality education while retaining their dignity, health, and security.

Equal access to public services: *“It seems like all government development policies and programs were designed while we were sleeping. When we woke up everything was designed to exclude us. If we ask for help, they give us papers but that is most difficult because we do not know how to read and write. We have lost hope completely.”*

The Remote Area Development Programme (RADP), introduced in 1978, was intended to reduce the inequality between those living in remote communities and those in more urban areas. The problem was that it failed to take account of communities’ specific characteristics, such as population size, ethnicity and culture. Some communities do not have any recognized rights to lands and resources, which makes planning for development impossible. There is hope that the forthcoming National Development Plan 12 (NDP 12) will reflect a more realistic picture of the variety of communities in the country.

Most San communities reported that they were experiencing chronic poverty. Because their opportunities for employment are almost non-existent, they depend on government services for food, water, health care, electricity, transport, and all other necessities of life. The elderly are particularly vulnerable – they may have to travel for hours in trucks to receive health care or their pensions.

Dr. Barume recommended the provision of mobile health clinics and training of health care workers proficient in Indigenous languages. However, he does not mention the likely impact of the termination of USAID, which would have funded these types of services.

The need for disaggregated data: In order to understand populations, identify their needs, and monitor the results of the programs and changes that the government is considering, the collection of demographic data should be revised to include tribal and ethnic identity. At present, it is difficult to estimate the extent of problems in the education or health systems as they apply to the San and to other groups as well.

Regional and international cooperation: Redressing historical injustices against Indigenous people will require considerable effort and resources. Dr. Barume calls upon “like-minded governments, donors, and civil society organizations in the region and at a global scale to assist the Government and the Indigenous People of Botswana in their journey, including by providing the technical assistance, lessons learned and good practices, capacity-building efforts and other resources that may be needed.”

Natural resource-related issues

In 2025, a new Community-Based Natural Resources Management Act was enacted.¹⁵ There were calls to revamp the country’s hunting quota system in the face of what could be described as a “poaching crisis” involving elephants.¹⁶ Numerous Indigenous and other communities in Botswana depend on the income and benefits received from joint venture partnerships with safari companies. Several communities, including the Tsodilo Hills, expressed fears that they were being told to relocate due to oil prospecting activities being conducted by ReconAfrica.

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Burkina Faso



Burkina Faso comprises 66 different ethnic groups. The M'bororo Fulani and the Tuareg are two of the peoples considered Indigenous. They live spread throughout the country but are particularly concentrated in the north, Seno, Soum, Yagha and Oudalan regions; they are mainly pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Most of these people live in the Sahel region. However, due to the impact of climate change, Fulani communities can be found all over the country. These groups have historically depended on natural resources and pastoral mobility. They are often geographically isolated, living in dry areas, economically marginalized and the victims of human rights violations, confronted by violent conflict and insecurity. There is no disaggregated data available on ethnic groups in the Sahel.

Socio-economically, the ongoing security and humanitarian crisis in the region has led to forced displacement, a loss of livelihoods, accumulated pressures on the land and natural resources, food insecurity, land marginalization and limited access to basic social services. These scourges make Indigenous Peoples one of the groups most affected by multidimensional poverty.

There are a number of organizations involved in the activities of the Indigenous Movement in Burkina Faso. One of them is Tin Hinan, an organization of pastoral women from the Sahel in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. There are also Indigenous media outlets, although they do not identify themselves as such (Anmidhal, Walde Ejef).

Burkina Faso's Constitution does not recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples but does recognize freedoms of association and expression. Across the Sahelian countries, the concept of Indigenous Peoples is difficult to incorporate into the various rights mechanisms and development policies. The political situation, accentuated by insecurity, makes it difficult to include the concept of Indigenous Peoples in national and regional legal frameworks.

Burkina Faso voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, it is not fully transposed into the national legal framework. ILO Convention No. 169 has not been ratified by the country.

Indigenous Peoples, insecurity and territories in 2025

Recurring insecurity in Burkina Faso began around 2015. Since then, terrorist actions have become increasingly frequent. This insecurity has only worsened, and 2025 was one of the worst years, marked by persistent insecurity, particularly in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso but also in other parts of the country.

Armed violence, the militarization of territories and restrictions on movement have profoundly disrupted pastoral lifestyles based on transhumance and seasonal access to pastures and watering holes. Many Indigenous communities have been forced to move internally, sometimes several times, losing their herds, their customary lands and their cultural landmarks. These displacements have increased inter-community tensions and competition for access to resources in the host areas.

Entire villages and communities have been forced to abandon their traditional homelands and move to host sites. This has affected several aspects of these communities' rights, with women and children being the hardest hit.

For example, in May 2025, deadly attacks perpetrated by armed groups around Djibo killed dozens of civilians and were accompanied by the burning of stores and medical centres. In several provinces (Sahel, North, East), jihadist groups have imposed blockades on towns (notably Djibo, Sebba, Titao), erected systematic roadblocks and made threats against humanitarian and commercial convoys. These restrictions were already being documented in 2024, and have persisted and even worsened in 2025, according to testimonies gathered by NGOs.¹

The Burkinabè authorities have also increased the number of military operation zones, making civilian access difficult. They have stepped up controls, screening and checkpoints, particularly in areas that have been recaptured, and have slowed down.²

In terms of conflict resolution, social cohesion and peacebuilding, it is important to encourage the participation of Indigenous communities and women so that they can contribute their expertise and commitment to peace. They are one of the population groups most in need of peace as their very survival depends on it. Although the role of Indigenous women is recognized as essential in combating the effects of

climate change and in conserving biodiversity, and thus in natural resource management, it remains weak due to their lack of access to resources. The security and humanitarian crisis is yet another challenge.

Faced with unemployment, a loss of identity and stigmatization, Indigenous youth are both vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and the bearers of innovative solutions for peace. In 2025, several youth initiatives focused on culture, community dialogue and resilience but they lack funding and institutional recognition.

Legal framework and public policies affecting Indigenous Peoples

There was no real national agenda in 2025 as regards the concept of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Although legal frameworks for land management exist, they are inadequate in relation to the exercise of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), particularly in areas affected by mining projects and protected areas.

In 2025, Burkina Faso had 22 industrial mining permits, which produced 53,375 tonnes of gold in 2024, plus 800 informal artisanal mining sites.³ Mining activities result, among other things, in a loss of access to water, land degradation, land ownership tensions, inter-community conflicts and violation of the rights of environmental defenders.⁴

The failure to take the land rights of Indigenous communities into account affects the economy and the sustainability of pastoral communities' traditional and environmental knowledge, cultures and moral values, including those relating to conflict resolution and peace. This can have an impact on the socio and political development of the country.

In response to these challenges, community initiatives emerged and gained strength in 2025. For example, projects such as *“Femmes Pastorales du Sahel en Mouvement”*, supported by the Foundation for a Just Society (FJS), which has enabled the creation of a network and the strengthening of the Tin Hinan platform. Another project, the **“As-sdou N'Assehat d'Assoraten Ibnane Fal Tamoussnawen”**, in partnership with the Aramât project, brings together health and biodiversity through Indigenous knowledge. Its goal is to respond to the health and

well being needs of Indigenous communities —particularly women and girls— while preserving forest biodiversity.

Both projects have also made it possible to carry out field activities in the area of environmental conservation —capacity building in land management, protection of biodiversity species, participation in climate, desertification, advocacy and international engagement, such as in the Convention on Biological Diversity, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and UN sessions dedicated to the promotion and protection of Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

International commitments and the participation of Indigenous Peoples

The Tin Hinan Association participated in the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 2024, and the 24th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in April 2025. The association used these occasions to carry out advocacy actions and activities to promote the role of Indigenous women in conservation and combating desertification. It strengthened its networking across the pastoral and Indigenous movements, as well as within global civil society. Participation in the UNCCD COP 16 also provided an opportunity to engage with national institutions in Burkina Faso, in particular the Ministry of the Environment, Water and Sanitation. On the fringes of UNPFII, Tin Hinan took part in several events, including the “Global Strategy Meeting for the International Decade of Indigenous Humanitarian Peacebuilding 2025-2035”, which resulted in landmark decisions and declarations that will guide Indigenous peace.

In 2025, international human rights mechanisms, notably the UN, continued to emphasize the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in conflict situations. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples reiterated the urgency of securing Indigenous land rights as a foundation for peace and security.

However, the effective participation of Indigenous representatives in these international processes remains limited due to current global

issues, increasingly stringent visa requirements, access to travel resources, language barriers, and the fact that English-speaking regions continue to be favoured in terms of resources.

Looking ahead to 2026-2027, we remain positive but everything depends on an open dialogue and an understanding of the importance of involving everyone in protecting the environment, combating the effects of climate change and contributing to local and national development. Consolidation of a lasting peace is essential to achieving this.

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Cameroon



Among Cameroon's more than 20 million inhabitants, some communities self-identify as Indigenous. These include the hunter/gatherers (Pygmies), the Mbororo pastoralists and the Kirdi.

The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon uses the terms Indigenous and minorities in its preamble; however, it is not clear to whom this refers. Nevertheless, with developments in international law, civil society, Indigenous Peoples and the government are increasingly using the term Indigenous to refer to the above-mentioned groups.

Together, the Pygmies represent around 0.4% of the total population of Cameroon. They can be further divided into three sub-groups, namely the Bagyéli or Bakola, who are estimated to number around 4,000 people, the Baka – estimated at around 40,000 – and the Bedzang, estimated at around 300 people. The Baka live above all in the eastern and southern regions of Cameroon. The Bakola and Bagyéli live in an area of around 12,000 km² in the south of Cameroon, particularly in the districts of Akom II, Bipindi, Kribi and Lolodorf. Finally, the Bedzang live in the central region, to the north-west of Mbam in the Ngambè Tikar region.

The Mbororo people living in Cameroon are estimated to number over one million and they make up approx. 12% of the population. They live primarily along the borders with Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic. Three major groups of Mbororo are found in Cameroon: the Wodaabe in the Northern Region; the Jafun, who live primarily in the North-West, West, Adamawa and Eastern Regions; and the Galegi, popularly known as the Aku, who live in the East, Adamawa, West and North-West and North Regions.

Cameroon voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 but has not ratified ILO Convention 169.

Policy and program

The 13th session of the Inter-ministerial Committee on Oversight of Indigenous Peoples' projects (CISPAV)

In 2025, the Inter-ministerial Committee on the Oversight of Indigenous Peoples' Projects (CISPAV)¹ continued its coordination role in harmonizing actions aimed at protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon. The 13th session of CISPAV was held on 29 July 2025 in Yaoundé, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Social Affairs, Pauline Irène Nguene, who reaffirmed the Committee's central role in monitoring government and partner initiatives dedicated to the inclusion of vulnerable Indigenous populations.

The 2025 session included discussions on the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool to strengthen social protection, access to services, and the civic inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. Participants highlighted the opportunities offered by digital technologies to improve access to information, support the preservation of traditional knowledge, and strengthen community capacities, while stressing the importance of an ethical and inclusive approach to technological development.²

Key recommendations emerging from the session included strengthening inter-sectorial coordination to improve the implementation of programs affecting Indigenous Peoples; leveraging AI to enhance access to education, identity documentation, and essential services, particularly in the context of the electoral year; and accelerating efforts to provide official identity documents, which remains a significant barrier to full citizenship and the exercise of civil rights for Indigenous populations.

The 2025 session of CISPAV therefore set important directions for future action, integrating innovative approaches aimed at addressing the contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

In Cameroon, International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was celebrated in August 2025 in several localities as part of the global commemoration of 9 August, under the international theme "Indigenous Peoples and artificial intelligence: defending rights, shaping the future".

In Yaoundé, the celebrations included a week-long training course on AI for Indigenous participants. Minister of Social Affairs Nguene em-

phasized the importance of ensuring that Indigenous Peoples benefit from the opportunities offered by AI, particularly in combating social exclusion and improving access to essential services. At the end of the training, certificates were awarded to participants, reflecting the State's commitment to promoting the technological inclusion of Indigenous communities.³

In parallel, civil society organizations, including Greenpeace Africa, organized cultural and public events in Yaoundé, notably at Bois Sainte Anastasie, bringing together Indigenous communities, traditional authorities, NGO representatives, government officials and youth around the theme of AI. These activities combined conferences, cultural performances and advocacy for the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' territorial and cultural rights, highlighting their identity, their deep connection to their lands, and the urgency of concrete protective measures.⁴

The celebrations provided a platform to raise awareness among the public and decision-makers of the importance of including Indigenous Peoples in technological and social development processes, while also drawing attention to the persistent challenges related to the recognition of their land, cultural and economic rights.

Peace and security

The security situation in the North-West and South-West (NOSO) regions remained concerning throughout 2025, an electoral year marked by heightened tensions. Since the outbreak of the crisis in 2016, confrontations between State security forces and non-State armed groups have continued to have serious repercussions for civilian populations. Attacks targeting schools, health facilities and other public infrastructure, as well as recurring "ghost town" operations, persisted, severely disrupting social and economic life. Indigenous Mbororo communities remain particularly exposed due to their geographic location, pastoral way of life and structural vulnerability.

An incident in November 2025 in Sabga illustrates the continuing insecurity faced by Indigenous communities. On 14 November 2025, armed assailants stormed a mosque during Friday prayers in Sabga, Tubah Subdivision, opening fire on worshippers. The attack resulted in

the death of three people and left nine others injured. Several individuals were reportedly abducted but later rescued following the intervention of defence and security forces. The injured were evacuated to a regional hospital, with treatment costs reportedly covered by the State. In response, the authorities reinforced the security presence in the area, including establishing a gendarmerie post. While these measures were welcomed locally, the attack furthered fear among Mbororo populations already living under persistent insecurity.⁵

More broadly, insecurity in the NOSO regions continues to restrict movement, limit access to education and healthcare, and weaken traditional livelihoods, particularly pastoralism. Mbororo communities report ongoing intimidation, cattle theft and forced displacement, further increasing their socio-economic vulnerability. Ensuring peace and protection for Indigenous populations remains a major challenge in 2025, and civil society organizations continue to call for inclusive security approaches that address the specific risks faced by these communities.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to disproportionately affect Indigenous women and girls, particularly in isolated rural areas of the East Region of Cameroon. Baka communities report an increase in cases of sexual violence involving minors, revealing structural vulnerabilities linked to poverty, geographic isolation, limited access to justice, and unequal power relations between communities.

In 2025, multiple cases of rape involving Baka girls were documented in Makalaya and nearby villages in Mindourou subdivision. Reported cases include the rape of Abouchili from Nombakele, allegedly committed by Bidja Paul, who remains on the run; the assault of Ekossona Sandrine from Makalaya, with the alleged perpetrator, Ebongue Jean, held at the Atok brigade; the rape of Ekoussou Marie-Jeanne, whose alleged attacker is also reportedly on the run while her family has sought legal support through community organizations; and the assault of Mboans Nguélé Babeth, in which the accused are currently detained in New Bell prison in Douala. One of the child victims later died at home following the violence suffered. Despite attempts in some cases to negotiate informal settlements, families and community actors have pursued legal action,

underscoring both the severity of the crimes and the communities' demands for justice.⁶

These events highlight the urgent need to strengthen the protection of Indigenous children and ensure effective access to justice for victims, including through adapted prevention and response mechanisms.

Civil society initiatives

In 2025, several civil society organizations continued their advocacy efforts to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples through local workshops held in Bertoua and Batouri in Eastern Cameroon. In Bertoua, a meeting organized by REPALEAC (Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Cameroon) and OKANI strengthened awareness among Indigenous communities about their human rights while taking into account their socio-cultural realities. Participants highlighted persistent land insecurity, crop destruction, and natural resource exploitation as major drivers of rights violations. The principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was reaffirmed as a fundamental requirement for any initiative affecting Indigenous territories and livelihoods. Discussions also emphasized the State's responsibility in preventing violations, combating discrimination, and implementing international commitments, alongside the need to build community capacity in documenting violations and conducting advocacy, particularly for women and vulnerable groups.

The joint Association Sanguia Baka Buma'a Kpode (ASBABUK)/Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) workshop held in Batouri focused on the full recognition of Baka Indigenous Peoples as legitimate stakeholders in forest resource management. Exchanges stressed the importance of equitable and sustainable access to natural resources, including non-timber forest products, to secure community livelihoods. Participants called for the translation of existing institutional commitments into concrete and accessible action plans. The active involvement of Indigenous communities in forest monitoring and governance was identified as a key tool for environmental protection and combating illegal activities. The promotion of traditional knowledge and the establishment of accessible grievance mechanisms were also presented as essential to preventing conflict and strengthening social justice.⁷

Notes and references

1. The concerns of Indigenous Peoples are examined within the framework of the Inter-ministerial Committee on the Oversight of Indigenous Peoples' Projects (CISPAV). This was created through a Ministerial Act in 2013 to coordinate and harmonize all the actions of various stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2. Cameroun-l'IA au service des peuples autochtones : la 13ème session du Cispav pose les jalons d'un avenir inclusif <https://237infos.net/cameroun-lia-au-service-des-peuples-autochtones-la-13eme-session-du-cispav-pose-les-jalons-dun-avenir-inclusif/>
3. Excerpt from the Minister's speech on 9 August 2025 during the commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.
4. Journée internationale des peuples autochtones: Greenpeace Afrique célèbre l'identité et la résilience à Yaoundé, Luchelle Feukeng, 11 August 2025, <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/fr/communique-de-presse/58558/journee-internationale-des-peuples-autochtones-greenpeace-afrique-celebre-lidentite-et-la-resilience-a-yaounde/>
5. Interview with M. Ousman Haman.
6. Hélène Ayé Mondo, Executive President of the Centre for support for sustainable development of the Baka Peoples (CADDAP), Jean Marie Boleka Facilitator at the Centre for support for sustainable development of the Baka Peoples (CADDAP)
7. Jean Marie Boleka Facilitator at the Centre for support for sustainable development of the Baka Peoples (CADDAP)

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Eritrea



Eritrea borders the southern Red Sea in the Horn of Africa. It emerged as an Italian colonial construct in the late 19th century, superimposed over Indigenous populations. Eritrea's current population is between 3.7 and 5.9 million inhabitants.¹ There are at least four Indigenous Peoples: the Afar (between 4 and 12% of total population), Kunama (2%), Saho (4%) and Nara (>1%).² These groups have inhabited their traditional territories for some 2,000 years. They are distinct from the two dominant ethnic groups by language (four different languages), religion (Islam), economy (agro and nomadic pastoral), law (customary), culture and way of life. All four Indigenous groups are marginalized and persecuted.³

Following a UN Resolution in 1950 calling for the federation of Ethiopia with the Eritrean colony that Britain had captured from the Italians, a federation was established in 1952. Tensions arose immediately when Ethiopia interfered with the Eritrean courts and executive branch. An armed national liberation struggle broke out in 1961 when Ethiopia abolished Eritrea's official languages, imposed Ethiopia's national language, Amharic, dissolved the federation and annexed Eritrea. The ensuing 30-year struggle succeeded in 1991 when the current regime marched into the capital and took power. Following a referendum in 1993, Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia to form a new state.

Eritrean nationalism emanates from the two large ethnic groups (80% of total population combined) that control power and resources. This nationalism is based on suppressing sub-state identities, which the elites see as threatening to the nation-building process. In particular, the Indigenous Peoples have been under pressure from the government's policy of eradicating identification along regional and religious lines. The regime expropriates Indigenous lands without compensation and has partially cleansed Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories by violence.

The existence of Indigenous Peoples as intact communities is under threat from government policies aimed at de-

stroying Indigenous cultures, economies, landholdings and, for some, their nomadic and pastoral lifestyles.

Eritrea is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (but not its optional protocols), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (but not its optional protocol), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (but not its optional protocol), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (but not its optional protocol), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (but not its optional protocol), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (but not its optional protocol), and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (but not its optional protocol). Eritrea has not ratified ILO Convention 169, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), or International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMWR). Eritrea's failure to ratify the optional protocols means that its citizens do not have access to the international human rights machinery to vindicate violations of their human rights.

Eritrea is the subject of complaints to the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea (all of which sustained the allegations) and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. A new complaint was accepted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in 2025. The Commission granted the Government of Eritrea 60 days to respond to the accusations. Taken together, the complaints allege crimes against humanity including persecution, mass murder, ethnic cleansing, displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories, and intentional destruction of the Indigenous economy.

A country over the brink

On 8 June 2016, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE) reported that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials had committed crimes against humanity in a widespread and systematic manner since 1991. The COIE provided detailed evidence relating to specific crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, reprisals and other inhumane acts, persecution, rape and murder.⁴

Notably, the COIE found that these crimes had been perpetrated against two of Eritrea's four Indigenous Peoples, the Afar and the Kunama. Eritrea had persecuted these groups, the COIE concluded.⁵ Accordingly, the COIE recommended that the UN and other entities initiate protective actions to safeguard these two Indigenous groups.⁶ The recommended measures included bringing Eritrea's crimes and human rights violations to the attention of the relevant special procedures,⁷ the UN Security Council determining that the Eritrean situation poses a threat to international peace and security⁸ and, accordingly, the Security Council referring the situation in Eritrea to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.⁹

The situation continues

In February 2025, the Assistant Secretary-General of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights advised the UN Human Rights Council of continuing concerns about Eritrea's "grave human rights violations ... including torture, sexual and gender-based violence and abusive labour practices."¹⁰ In June 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, reported to the UN Human Rights Council concerning Eritrea's human rights violations that "no meaningful progress has been made". He expressed deep concern over the situation on the ground:

freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion and the right to participate in public affairs are effectively non-existent ... The Government of Eritrea continues to subject the popula-

tion to a system of indefinite military or civilian service that ... is a system of social control and indoctrination, where coercion and grave human rights violations are widespread ... gross human rights violations including the widespread use of arbitrary and incommunicado detention and enforced disappearance persist unabated and constitute a government policy.¹¹

The fact that the human rights situation in Eritrea in 2025 has not changed from that consistently reported over the 2013-2025 period illuminates the cataclysmic situation of Eritrea's Indigenous Peoples in 2025. The COIE, as well as Dr. Babiker and his predecessors as Special Rapporteurs, consistently reported on the "widespread persecution"¹² to which Eritrea's Kunama and Afar people were subjected over the 2016-2025 period. Dr. Babiker detailed how

they [the Afar Indigenous people] have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, arbitrary arrests, disappearance, violence [which] 'interfered with their traditional means of livelihood, eroded their culture, caused displacement and threatened their way of life.'¹³

Persecution on a widespread basis is a crime against humanity,¹⁴ which makes the responsible Eritrean officials liable to arrest and prosecution under international criminal law. All the UN mandate holders have called for the authorities to pursue this course of action before national and international criminal tribunals.

Peace and security

Escalating tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia caused the security situation for Eritrea's Indigenous Peoples to deteriorate markedly in the period under review. A chief source of the conflict involves the Red Sea port of Assab, located in the traditional territory of the Afar Indigenous people who reside in both countries.

Ethiopia lost possession of Assab when Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993. On 1 September 2025, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy

Ahmed claimed that losing Assab was a “mistake”. That “mistake”, Abiy threatened, would be “corrected tomorrow”. Abiy’s high officials, including army chief Field Marshal Birhanu Jula, suggested that Ethiopia would take Assab “by force”. Ownership of Assab, said Ethiopia’s Major General Teshome Gemechu, “has become our survival interest worth paying any price for”.¹⁵

In February 2025, Eritrea began a nationwide mobilization of its armed forces and deployed increased military strength along the border with Ethiopia to confront a similar buildup on the Ethiopian side. Eritrean forces also occupied border areas awarded to Ethiopia under the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission,¹⁶ against the will of Ethiopia. In those areas Eritrean troops “are committing atrocities, including abductions, rape, property looting, and arbitrary arrests”.¹⁷ In addition to journalistic reports of flareups and border clashes between the two sides, in July 2025, while inside Ethiopia, I personally heard eye-witness testimony of clashes at the border from both Ethiopian soldiers and Eritrean deserters who had fled to Ethiopia.

All this is taking place in what is otherwise a highly securitized situation. Despite the Pretoria Agreement of 2022, which declared a Cessation of Hostilities in the Tigray War to end fighting between Ethiopia’s federal government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), instability, ongoing disputes, and violence continue. In November 2025, the Government of Afar State in Ethiopia (one of 12 regional states in Ethiopia’s ethnically organized federation) accused TPLF fighters of crossing into Afar Indigenous territory and seizing six villages in the Megale district.¹⁸

Afar Indigenous people suffered horrible mass atrocities, with huge loss of life and enormous destruction of property during the Tigray war (2020-2022), which was fought in part on Afar territory in Ethiopia. Given renewed threats to resume fighting on their territory, the Afar traditional and customary leadership mobilized, gathering together twice, in July and December 2025, to consider a response to the gathering war clouds and the ongoing persecution of Afar people inside Eritrea. The Conferences issued a “Declaration of the Afar Nation” on 30 December 2025 in which “the Indigenous Afar People ...Declared to the World” their intention to establish “Autonomy and Self-Government within our historical territories in Dankalia” and also condemned “in the strongest

terms, the persecution and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Government of Eritrea and its officials against the Afar people”.¹⁹

The current military buildup both between Eritrea and Ethiopia and also between Ethiopia’s central government and Tigray regional state in Ethiopia is extremely worrisome. Afar Indigenous people and their territories are once again under threat.

Outlook

There is no panacea for this grim situation. It remains especially important to document what is happening inside Eritrea’s repressive regime as much as possible. The civilized nations of the world will one day demand accountability from Eritrea and its officials for the longstanding and ongoing atrocities they have committed. Hopefully, that day will come soon and provide relief for the persecuted Indigenous Peoples of Eritrea.

Notes and references

1. 3.7 million is stated by the SR-Eritrea in his 2024 Report, citing the UN Population Fund, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, UN Doc. A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, para. 71. Online: [https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/073/00/pdf/g240730; 4.39 million is an estimate by the World Bank, see *World Bank Country Profile: Eritrea*. \[http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=ERI\]\(http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=ERI\); 5.9 million is an estimate by the CIA, see CIA, *World Factbook*. Accessed on 26 January 2026. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>](https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/073/00/pdf/g240730;4.39%20million%20is%20an%20estimate%20by%20the%20World%20Bank%20see%20World%20Bank%20Country%20Profile%20Eritrea%20http%3A%2F%2Fdatabank.worldbank.org%2Fdata%2FViews%2FReports%2FReportWidgetCustom.aspx%3FReport_Name%3DCountryProfile%26Id%3Db450fd57%26tbar%3Dy%26dd%3Dy%26inf%3Dn%26zm%3Dn%26country%3DERI;5.9%20million%20is%20an%20estimate%20by%20the%20CIA%20see%20CIA%20World%20Factbook%20Accessed%20on%2026%20January%202026.%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cia.gov%2Flibrary%2Fpublications%2Fthe-world-factbook%2Fgeos%2Fer.html)
2. The numbers are disputed. There are no reliable figures to resolve the dispute as there is no count and no census that has been conducted by Eritrea or others. The CIA *World Factbook* reports the Afar at 2% but this is very unlikely given that there are 20,000 UN-documented Afar refugees in two refugee camps in neighbouring Ethiopia and many more undocumented asylum seekers inside Ethiopia – this alone would likely account for 2% of the Eritrean population. The figure for the Saho is reported by Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, *The Saho of Eritrea: Ethnic Identity and National Consciousness* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013).
3. *Eritrea: Constitutional, Legislative and Administrative Provisions Concerning Indigenous Peoples* (a joint publication of the International Labour Organization, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, 2009, pp. 5-7. <http://www.chr.up.ac.za/>

- chr_old/indigenous/country_reports/Country_reports_Eritrea.pdf
4. *Second Report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea*, A/HRC/32/47, 8 June 2016, para. 60. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColEritrea/A_HRC_32_CRP.I_read-only.pdf
 5. *Ibid*, para. 87-88, 124, 129(b).
 6. *Ibid*, para.124 (the COI referred to the Afar and Kunama as “ethnic groups”).
 7. *Ibid*, para. 129(b).
 8. *Ibid*, para. 132(a).
 9. *Ibid*.
 10. Ilze Brands-Kehris, Statement at the 58th session of the Human Rights Council, 27 February 2025. Online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/02/enhanced-interactive-dialogue-human-rights-eritrea#:~:text=Our%20Office%20also%20calls%20on,Thank%20you>
 11. UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Dr. Mohamed Babiker, Statement. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovzc3YtqDZM>
 12. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker*, A/HRC/53/20, 9 May 2023, para 58 and 78. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5320-situation-human-rights-eritrea-report-special-rapporteur>
 13. *Ibid*, para 58.
 14. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, art. 7(1)(h) and 7(2)(g). See generally, F. Pocar, *Persecution as a Crime Under International Criminal Law*, [2008] 2 *Journal of National Security Law and Policy* 355
 15. BBC, *Escalating war of words between Ethiopia and Eritrea triggers fears of conflict*, 25 November 2025. Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgwg042vr4o>
 16. Permanent Court of Arbitration, *Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission*. Online: <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/99/>
 17. Ilze Brands-Kehris, note 10, *supra*.
 18. *Tensions in Ethiopia: Afar Accuses TPLF of Attacks Despite Peace Deal*. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maEvasYlbew>
 19. *Declaration of the Afar Nation Conference*, 30 December 2025. Online: <https://dankalia.org/2026/01/declaration-of-the-afar-nation-conference-dec-29-30-2025/>

Gabon



Gabon's total population is estimated at 2,621,850. The percentage of Indigenous Peoples in Gabon is thought to be less than 1% of the national population, or between 18,000 and 20,000 people.¹ This estimate will become clearer with the final report of the general population census that is currently ongoing.

Indigenous Peoples are mainly hunter-gatherer communities comprising nine ethnic groups (Baka, Babongo, Bakoya, Baghame, Barimba, Akowa, Bakouyi) with different languages, cultures and geographical locations. They live both in the towns and in the forest. Their livelihoods and their cultures are inextricably linked to the forest, however, which covers 85% of Gabon. Gabon's Indigenous Peoples continue to live in precarious poverty. There is no recent specific data on this population, and it would be good to see Gabon make greater efforts to obtain reliable statistics on its Indigenous Peoples.

Gabonese legislation does not recognize the concept of "Indigenous Peoples" but certain texts do provide for the concept of "Indigenous and village communities". These benefit from customary rights, particularly in land and forestry matters.

Articles 1 and 35 of the Constitution² of the Gabonese Republic, adopted by referendum on 16 November 2024, specify that: "The Gabonese Republic upholds the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, ethnic group, sex, opinion, religion, beliefs or rites." "Protecting young people from exploitation and from moral, intellectual and physical abandonment is an obligation of the State and other public authorities." It explicitly recognizes and protects³ social groups, notably children, the elderly and people with disabilities but it makes no mention of Gabon's Indigenous Pygmy peoples. Article 152 specifies that representatives of the peoples, appointed by their peers, may sit on the Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural Council.

The Gabonese Republic has ratified several international treaties and conventions protecting various aspects of In-

digenous Peoples' rights, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The country has still not adopted ILO Convention 169, however.

The 2018-2025 Strategy for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (PACL) of Central Africa, which is coordinated by the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) via the Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC), aims to incorporate the traditional knowledge and needs of Indigenous Peoples into sustainable forest management. The four themes are: land, natural resources, economic development and living conditions, plus a cross-cutting theme on representation aimed at harmonizing national and regional policies that address climate change and biodiversity by strengthening their effective participation.

Good policies, programmes and practices

The substantive and procedural rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are increasingly being recognized in international legal instruments relating to the environment and trade. In the context of the Congo Basin,⁴ however, there is a significant lag in their practical implementation. Despite the existence of numerous international commitments enshrining these rights, their transposition into national and local practices remains incomplete. Significant progress has been made in terms of participation and consultation, thanks to the impetus provided by civil society organizations, which keep a strategic watch on the forestry sector.

This progress also depends on formal forest management systems, which affect the day-to-day exercise of customary access and use rights. However, results remain mixed when it comes to securing land rights and the effective transfer of collective ownership. These shortcomings are largely due to poor application of existing legal frameworks. Moreover, the recognition of differentiated rights for Indig-

enous groups raises questions as to their legitimacy, in a context where the notion of “indigeneity” remains subject to legal and societal controversy. Improving the way forest peoples' rights are taken into account requires complementarity between national legal standards and transnational initiatives, in a context marked by a weak rule of law.

Generally speaking, Gabon applies the World Bank's guidelines on Indigenous Peoples (OP 4.10, the framework for social and environmental management) but there is no specific legal text on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

On 09 August every year, the world celebrates International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This is an opportunity to recall their fundamental role in preserving the world's biodiversity, particularly in rich and strategic regions such as the Congo Basin. On this occasion, the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in line with the priorities of the Franco-Gabonese Co-Facilitation roadmap. In its 2023-2025 roadmap, the Franco-Gabonese Co-Facilitation of the CBFP places Indigenous Peoples at the heart of its priorities, namely:

- Dialogue and scientific cooperation: promoting participatory research that incorporates the knowledge of Indigenous communities for sustainable forest management.
- Regional planning and sustainable value chains: supporting inclusive management of forest areas that respects the customary rights and economic needs of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- Innovative financing: developing financial mechanisms that directly benefit local communities and strengthen their capacities.
- Visibility and international advocacy: enhancing the voice of Indigenous Peoples and local communities on the international stage to ensure better recognition of their rights.
- Synergies and partnerships: strengthening dialogue with Indigenous networks and building lasting alliances with other partners committed to protecting forests and the people who live in them.

Forest, biodiversity, conservation, and Indigenous Peoples

From 10-15 March 2025, a planning workshop was held in Douala, Republic of Cameroon, for the Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC). The general objective of the workshop was to carry out the annual planning of REPALEAC's activities. The aim was to report on the achievements of REPALEAC's delegates to the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties (COP 29) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the 2024 UN Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The aim was to draw up REPALEAC's action plan for 2025, submit and validate REPALEAC's strategic framework evaluation reports, and analyse projects focusing on land tenure for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. During the meeting, the operational plan⁵ for REPALEAC 2025 was validated by the participants, bearing in mind the priorities of the national networks from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, Gabon, Chad, Rwanda, Central African Republic (CAR) and Burundi for that year.

In June 2025, the Three Forest Basins Congress in Brazzaville resulted in an alliance of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Indigenous Peoples and local communities from the world's tropical forest basins,⁶ including the Amazon, Congo, Borneo-Mekong-Papua and Mesoamerica, concluded their first ever World Congress with a concrete and urgent call for protection, recognition and respect, as well as direct and ambitious financial commitments. These regions are described as the lungs of the planet, home to more than two-thirds of the world's remaining tropical forests, and they are essential carbon sinks in the fight against climate change. They are also home to immense biodiversity and provide vital ecosystems for hundreds of millions of people. The Congress resulted in a joint declaration calling for urgent global action to protect the land rights and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, to safeguard their free, prior and informed consent, and to guarantee direct access to funding.

The Congress resulted in a collective document outlining the priorities, demands and commitments of these communities in response to the escalating climate and biodiversity crises. This declaration urgently calls for legal recognition and protection of Indigenous territories, direct funding for Indigenous communities and full participation in environmental and climate governance. The main outcomes of the final declaration were: recognition and protection of territories; an end to criminalization and violence; full and effective participation; direct and transparent funding; a moratorium on destructive activities; and a call for global action for the 2025 UNFCCC COP 30.

On 11 and 21 November 2025, in Libreville, in partnership with the Gabonese Ministry of Water and Forests (responsible for human/wildlife conflicts), the NGO Space for Giants and other local NGOs, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) organized a workshop⁷ on human-elephant conflict to strengthen national community awareness, taking into account the concerns of local communities and Indigenous Peoples. The workshop was part of the preparations for the national campaign to raise awareness of human-elephant coexistence in Gabon. The workshop forms part of a project funded by the Central African Forest Initiative (Cafi) aimed at supporting peaceful and sustainable cohabitation between human populations and forest elephants.

The Africa 2025 Regional Assembly on Areas and Heritage Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (APAC)⁸ brought together member organizations, coordinators, advisors, country focal points and honorary members from the following five regions: North Africa, West Africa, Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands, East and Horn of Africa, and Central Africa. Some 60 participants took part in the event, which marked a major turning point in the strengthening of the APAC-Living Territories movement in Africa. Pursuing the objective of a strong and sustained commitment to Indigenous communities as guardians of biodiversity, this meeting focused on four key themes: building a common understanding of the Consortium, its values and its mission; reflecting on the key perspectives for the region with regard to the process of organizational change; formulating a strategy for greater cohesion within the mega-region; and developing a concerted regional action plan.

Gabon's review by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

CERD examined Gabon's report under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). During the dialogue between the Committee's expert members and the Gabonese delegation that had come to support the report, one expert congratulated Gabon on the significant development of a relevant legal and institutional framework since the previous review in 1998. The expert noted, however, that the Gabonese Constitution of 2024 did not contain all the grounds for discrimination provided for in the Convention, such as skin colour, national origin and descent. The expert also reported that the country's human rights and environmental defenders, including women, farmers and Indigenous Peoples fighting deforestation, were highly vulnerable to abuse and reprisals. According to available information, entire villages populated by Indigenous communities have been displaced, without prior consent, for mining projects in Bakoumba, and relocated to undesirable and polluted areas. The same expert stressed that State sovereignty must be exercised for the benefit of the entire population, including Indigenous Peoples. She asked what special or affirmative action was envisaged to combat inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination against ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples, and to ensure that these groups can effectively enjoy their rights throughout Gabon. Another expert expressed the Committee's concern at the general lack of disaggregated data, including on ethnicity or origin, which is necessary for monitoring human rights progress in Gabon and informing policy-making.

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Kenya



The peoples who identify with the Indigenous movement in Kenya are mainly pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, as well as some fisher peoples and small farming communities. Pastoralists are estimated to comprise 25% of the national population, while the largest individual community of hunter-gatherers numbers approximately 79,000. Pastoralists mostly occupy the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of Northern Kenya and towards the border between Kenya and Tanzania in the south. Hunter-gatherers include the Ogiek, Sengwer, Yiaku, Waata and Awer (Boni) while pastoralists include the Turkana, Rendille, Borana, Maasai, Samburu, Ilchamus, Somali, Gabra, Pokot, Endorois and others. They all face land and resource tenure insecurity, poor service delivery, poor political representation, discrimination and exclusion. Their situation seems to get worse each year, with increasing competition for resources in their areas.

Kenya's Indigenous women are confronted by multifaceted social, cultural, economic and political constraints and challenges. Firstly, by belonging to minority and marginalized peoples nationally and, secondly, through internal social and cultural prejudices. These prejudices have continued to deny Indigenous women equal opportunities to overcome high illiteracy and poverty levels. It has also prevented them from having a voice to inform and influence cultural and political governance and development policies and processes due to unequal power relations at both local and national levels.

Kenya has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but not the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) or ILO Convention 169.

Chapter Four of the Kenyan Constitution contains a progressive Bill of Rights that makes international law a key component of the laws of Kenya and guarantees protection of minorities and marginalized groups. Under Articles 33, 34, 35 and

36, freedom of expression, the media, and access to information and association are guaranteed. However, the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) remains a challenge for Indigenous Peoples in Kenya although the Constitution does guarantee the participation of the people.¹

Kenya's prevailing economic situation is in an intractable crisis. It is a profound indictment of the status quo that a disproportionate number of Indigenous communities continue to bear the burden of crisis after crisis evidenced through impacts of climate change, insecurity and apparent food insecurity.

Despite some shifts in rhetoric, however, climate financing projects targeted at most Indigenous Peoples' landscapes are seemingly failing to bridge the inequality gap and are, in most cases, coordinated by elites.

On the other hand, despite concerted efforts to secure the collective land rights of communities, disruptive actions such as the Ogiek community eviction are a glaring reminder that we are far from securing human rights and, particularly, tenure rights for most Indigenous communities in Kenya.

Land

Indigenous communities in Kenya remained at the centre of major land disputes that reveal tensions between conservation, tourism development, and historical rights. These cases raise fundamental questions about governance, oversight, and the proper compensation for ancestral lands.

1. The Ritz Carlton Maasai Mara: The lawsuit by an activist against the Ritz Carlton that drew the attention of international media alleges that the Ritz Carlton lodge was built without a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and in violation of the Maasai Mara National Reserve Management Plan (2023-2032), which bans new tourist accommodation. Despite the developer, Lazizi Mara, and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

stating that all approvals were granted and the site was not on a migration corridor, the court deemed the matter of sufficient significant public interest to proceed in December 2025. This conflict highlights potential weaknesses in agencies such as the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the balance between tourism and ecological integrity.²

2. The Olderkesi community presented its case to the Senate's Committee on Lands, Environment and Natural Resources in 2025. They claim that approximately 7,818 acres of their communal land has been leased to an investor since the 1920s with no compensation reaching them.³ Furthermore, the subsequent subdivision and allocation of the group ranch was marred by a lack of transparency, with committee members allocating large parcels to themselves and other family members. Their appeal to the Senate seeks an investigation into historical ownership and equitable redistribution.
3. In Kajiado County, the youth and residents of Oldonyonyokie group ranch mounted determined resistance against a proposed carbon project. They challenged the initiative as a form of "green colonialism", arguing it was using the guise of climate action as a ploy to dispossess them of their ancestral land. This conflict has brought long-standing concerns about the rapid expansion of such projects on pastoralist lands to a critical point. The community argues that these schemes threaten to undermine Indigenous land rights and could lead to displacement, echoing similar land conflicts facing Maa-sai communities in Tanzania. Local protestors describe the expanding carbon market projects as a form of climate colonialism where corporations from the Global North effectively outsource their emission responsibilities by buying carbon credits tied to African lands, without delivering real climate benefits and at the expense of local people.⁴ These projects price nature and shift the climate crisis burden onto communities that did not cause it, while enriching intermediaries and bypassing community consultation.
4. The National Land Commission has published its decisions following investigative hearings on historical land injustices

targeting Isiolo County. Specifically, the Commission recommended that a portion of land held by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) be adjusted such that while KDF would retain its titled land, specific areas occupied by verified residents would be surrendered for community settlement. The Livestock Marketing Division was directed to surrender 60% of its land for verified residents, with the remaining 40% to be retained under a land-use plan developed in consultation with the authorities. Community members occupying these lands were to be regularized and verified, with a multi-agency technical committee tasked with surveying boundaries, verifying beneficiaries, and overseeing subdivision and titling.⁵ While the Commission's findings are welcome, particularly as they recognize the long-standing residency of affected communities, it falls short of delivering substantive justice and the intent of Article 67(2)(e) of the Constitution. Recognition of presence without acknowledgement of dispossession reduces historical injustice to an administrative issue rather than a constitutional wrong. The decision is further undermined by the absence of compensation or other reparative measures.

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: compliance decision in the Ogiek Case

On 4 December 2025, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights delivered its compliance decision **finding that the Kenyan government had failed to duly comply with its previous judgements**. This ruling marks the Court's first compliance decision and is a crucial test for the enforcement of Indigenous land rights in Africa.

The legal journey that began with a 2017 merits judgement whereby the Court affirmed the Ogiek as an Indigenous people of the Mau Forest and found that the State had violated their rights to property, culture, and non-discrimination. Further, a 2022 reparations judgement ordered specific remedies, including the payment of compensation into a community fund and the restitution of ancestral lands through collective title within two years.

Despite these rulings, implementation stalled. The Ogiek informed the Court that the government's actions were not only insufficient but actively contrary to the judgements. They cited ongoing evictions, the allocation of their land to third parties, and a complete lack of meaningful consultation. In its decisive December 2025 decision, the Court systematically found Kenya in non-compliance. Key failures noted include not paying any of the ordered compensation, making no substantive progress on identifying and titling Ogiek lands, and failing to ensure the community's right to free, prior, and informed consent. The Court emphasized that domestic laws or internal processes cannot justify breaching international obligations.⁶

Policies and legislative framework

National Policy on Ethnic Minorities, Indigenous and Marginalized Communities (2025 - 2035)⁷

To give effect to Article 56 of the Constitution of Kenya, the Cabinet has developed and approved the National Policy on Ethnic Minorities, Indigenous and Marginalized Communities with the primary objective of enhancing full integration and representation of marginalized communities across government institutions, guaranteeing affirmative action to communities' access to credit and establishing nomadic schools to ensure access to education for nomadic pastoralists. The Policy was launched on 18 December 2025 by the President of Kenya alongside the celebrations of the UN International Minority Rights Day.

Developed in partnership with Indigenous Peoples' representatives, the Policy establishes a comprehensive roadmap and financial plan aimed at reducing disparities faced by marginalized and Indigenous communities, with a specific focus on improving outcomes in education, health, and infrastructure.

The Wildlife Management and Conservation Act, 2025⁸

The Wildlife Management and Conservation Bill, 2023 was passed into law in October 2025. While improving the position of Indigenous communities in wildlife governance, including the recognition of traditional knowledge, the implementation of the Act will indicate

whether communities who continue to lose their lands to wildlife conservation will fairly benefit and whether fair compensation arising from human-wildlife conflict will be realized.

Conferences

Carbon Markets Conference: Unlocking Kenya's Carbon Market Potential

19 - 20 May 2025, Nairobi

As Kenya continues to position itself as a hub for carbon market projects, a law having been created to enhance this,⁹ the conference co-organized by the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative (VCMI) and the Government of Kenya provided a critical platform to reflect on how these ambitions can be realized responsibly and equitably. This high-level conference¹⁰ brought together government, private sector actors, carbon market intermediaries, civil society, and community representatives to interrogate both the opportunities and risks presented by the rapid expansion of carbon markets in the country. Thematic discussions centred on the need to build **high-integrity carbon markets** with a strong emphasis on transparency, credible measurement, reporting and verification systems, and alignment with international frameworks such as Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

Looking forward, the conference concluded with a shared commitment to advancing a carbon market that is environmentally credible, socially just, and economically viable. Key forward actions include strengthening safeguards for communities, operationalizing transparent benefit-sharing frameworks and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships. However, this must be matched by heightened vigilance at the community level. As national carbon markets expand, it is imperative that Indigenous Peoples exercise their right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), empowering them to determine their own path. This means respecting their decision not to participate in carbon projects and, where agreements are pursued, ensuring they are transparent, credible, and guarantee that benefits are shared equitably across the entire community.

Biennial Regional Policy Conference on Customary Tenure Rights in Eastern Africa¹¹

2 September – 1 October 2025, Nairobi

The conference focused on the role of policy, research and learning in securing pastoralism and rangelands in the region with an objective of creating a space for dialogue with policymakers, and launching and disseminating recently conducted research, studies and reports, outcomes and policy briefs with a bearing on customary tenure and pastoralist rights in the East and Horn of Africa.

The discussions emphasized the strategic use of data and technology for empowerment, recognizing the need to invest in community-led land mapping and to integrate data on customary holdings into official national systems.

The conference was designed to build momentum towards the global event: **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) in 2026**.

Community Land Summit, 2025

24 – 27 November, Nairobi

The 5th Annual Community Land Summit (CLS) served as a major regional platform for dialogue on community land rights, pastoralism, climate justice, and tenure security, deliberately held in the capital to amplify community voices directly with policymakers and national decision makers.¹² Indigenous cultural identity and traditional knowledge were celebrated and integrated throughout the event, reflecting that land is both a cultural and economic heritage for participating communities. One significant outcome of CLS 2025 was its role as a policy incubator and advocacy platform specifically marked by the launch of a Pastoralism Policy serving as a fundamental tool ahead of the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) in 2026**.

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Libya



The Amazighs form the Indigenous population of Libya. They are estimated to number some one million people, or more than 16% of the country's total population.

They live in various areas of Libya in the north, east and south of the country albeit without any geographical continuity. To the west of Tripoli, on the Mediterranean coast, they live in the town of At-Wilul (Zwara) and in the Adrar Infussen (Ne-foussa) mountains, on the border with Tunisia; in the south-east, on the border with Egypt, they live in the oases of Awjla, Jalu and Jakhra; in the south, the Fezzan region is traditionally Kel-Tamasheq (Tuareg) territory, including the areas of Murzuq, Sebha, Ubari, Ghat and Ghadamès. Libya's Kel-Tamasheq are naturally linked to other Kel-Tamasheq communities living across the borders with Niger and Algeria. Tripoli is also home to a significant Amazigh community.

In addition to Arab and Amazigh communities, there is an ethnic minority in Libya known as the "Toubou", comprising some 50,000 individuals. They are originally from the Tibesti plateau in Chad and they live along the Libya/Chad border. They live a nomadic way of life and practise pastoralism across an area that extends from northern Niger to the Sudan.

During the time of Gaddafi (1969-2011), Libya was declared an exclusively "Arab and Muslim" country. The 1969 Constitutional Proclamation states in its first article that "Libya is an Arab republic (...), the Libyan people are a part of the Arab nation and its aim is total Arab unity. The country's name is the Arab Republic of Libya." Article Two adds that "Islam is the state religion and Arabic its official language." Government policy since then has always relentlessly persecuted anyone who does not recognize Libya's "Arab-Islamic identity".

Following the 2011 "revolution", a "Provisional Constitutional Council" submitted a draft new Constitution in 2017¹ that in no way changed the country's identity foundations. Article Two still provides that "Libya forms part of the Arab nation" and that "Arabic is the state language". Article Six notes that "Islam is the state religion and Sharia the source of its law". Other dis-

criminary articles then follow prohibiting a non-Muslim Libyan from standing for election to the Chamber of Representatives (Article 69) or as President of the Republic (Article 101) and stating that justice shall be passed down “in the name of Allah” (Article 189). These articles are clearly aimed at imposing an Islamic republic, to the detriment of the diversity of cultures and beliefs in Libya. Due to Amazigh and Toubou opposition, however, and also because of the war, this draft constitution has not yet been adopted.

Libya voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Latent instability and insecurity persist

Libya is still divided and has two governments, one called the “national unity government”, headed by Prime Minister Abdel-Hamid Dbeiba and based in Tripoli, controlling the Tripolitania region, and another called the “national stability government” headed by Osama Hammad, based in Benghazi and controlling the eastern and southern regions of the country. The struggle between the two rival factions is not just about political power but is also about control of Libya's oil and gas resources.

Insecurity is further fuelled by the fact that Libya is also ruled by numerous armed militia who control many territories as well as some smuggled oil exports. These militia often engage in bloody battles with each other, such as the one that took place in Tripoli in May 2025, involving the SSA militia and Brigade 44.²

The UN is continuing its efforts to reunify the country and restore stability. Following Abdoulaye Bathily's resignation in April 2024 as head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the UN Secretary-General appointed Hannah Tetteh as his Special Representative for Libya on 24 January 2025. She was quick to point out that “at the heart of the political deadlock lies a power struggle fuelled by fragmented institutions and competition for economic resources”.³ On 21 August 2025, she presented a new roadmap to the UN Security Council, calling for general

elections, the unification of national institutions, the establishment of a unified government, a new electoral framework and a broad dialogue involving all Libyan stakeholders. But this new plan was met with reservations and even rejection by the Benghazi government, whose Prime Minister, Osama Hamad, sent a formal complaint to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and members of the Security Council, accusing her and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) more generally of “serious violations of national sovereignty” and “interference in the internal affairs of the country”.⁴

In other words, the peace plan proposed by Hannah Tetteh has no chance of success. The UN believes that “deep-rooted divisions, economic mismanagement, persistent human rights violations and competing internal and external interests continue to erode the country's unity and stability, and put it increasingly at risk of renewed conflict”.

The daily challenges facing Amazighs

In a context marked by instability and insecurity, the Amazigh of Libya are trying to preserve their territories, particularly in the Adrar Infussen and At-Wilul (Zwara) regions. Although not part of the conflict between the two governments, Libya's Amazighs are nevertheless under the influence of the Tripoli government, especially as Tripoli has long been home to a strong Amazigh community.

Structured around their municipalities and their High Council of Amazighs of Libya (HCAL), they are trying to influence decisions on matters that concern them, despite insecurity and poor governance. As a result, they are attempting to negotiate with the government in Tripoli to obtain more resources, recognition and participation in the decision-making and political life of their country.

On 14 March 2025, a delegation of Amazigh mayors, elders and community leaders thus met Mohamed El-Menfi, President of the Libyan Presidential Council, in Tripoli. The aim of the meeting was to discuss “constitutional recognition of Libya's Amazigh community, recognition and protection of its socio-cultural, linguistic and religious identity, and an end to discriminatory administrative practices against Amazighs”.⁵

On 12 June 2025, representatives of Amazigh municipalities and Amazigh communities met with Hannah Tetteh, Head of UNSMIL⁶ in Na-lut, in the Amazigh territory of Adrar Infussen. During the meeting, the Amazigh representatives presented their recommendations concerning, in particular, the draft political roadmap of the UN representative in Libya, recalling the constitutional guarantees necessary for Amazigh rights and the equitable participation of Amazighs in the national dialogue. This meeting was important for the Amazighs of Libya because it demonstrated an international commitment to the Amazigh communities and recognition of their role as key players in the country's political future.

Continuing their consultations with government authorities, representatives of the Amazighs of Libya, including the High Council of Amazighs of Libya, were received by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeiba on 17 December 2025, at the seat of government in Tripoli, in the presence of other members of the government. They had already met in May 2025. The meeting focused on collaboration between the two parties, security issues and the needs of the Amazigh territories if they were to ensure their development in all areas.⁷

Despite ongoing dialogue with the government authorities in Tripoli, Amazighs are still discriminated against and often subjected to acts of racial hatred. Such was the case on 17 February 2025, in the Hay Al-Andalus district of Tripoli, when a vehicle belonging to the Libyan police was filmed deliberately driving over the Amazigh flag. Amazigh communities perceived this act as a serious provocation and immediately reacted by organizing mass street demonstrations. The High Council of Amazighs of Libya, the Municipal Councils of Amazigh territories and Amazigh civil society organizations also reacted strongly, issuing press releases condemning the racist act and calling for the resignation of the Minister of the Interior, Imad Trabelsi.⁸

The Amazigh therefore continue to face various forms of racism, discrimination, intimidation and violations of their rights. In the south of the country, the Kel-Tamasheq (Touareg) community faces several major challenges: poverty, despite the presence of oil deposits on its territory, and the fact that 15 to 20,000 families, i.e. some 80 to 100,000 Kel-Tamasheq people, remain deprived of Libyan nationality and identity documents. As a result, they are barred from taking part in elections, and from accessing public services such as education and training, health care and legal employment.

Insecurity and its impact on Amazigh life

The various oil and gas fields that provide Libya with almost all its financial resources are all under the control of armed groups affiliated to one or other of the two Libyan governments. Amazigh communities do not benefit from the exploitation of these mineral resources, even when they are located on their traditional territories. On the contrary, the presence of natural resources attracts all kinds of competing predatory groups, fostering conflict and violence. Poverty is compounded by insecurity and danger, which complicates the daily lives of local people.⁹

The Kel-Tamasheq community, whose territory in south-west Libya (Fezzan) straddles the Algerian-Libyan border, is faced with the challenge of Algeria's closure of this border on security grounds. The closure of this border has put an end to the traditional trade between the towns of Ghat and Djanet, seriously disrupting the lives of the local population.

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Morocco



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The Amazigh (Berber) peoples are the Indigenous Peoples of North Africa. The last census in Morocco (2024) estimated the number of Tamazight speakers at 24.8% of the population. However, Amazigh associations strongly contest this and instead claim a rate of 85%. This means that the Amazigh-speaking population could well number around 29.6 million out of a total population of 37 million in Morocco in 2023.¹

The administrative and legal system of Morocco has been strongly Arabized, and the Amazigh culture and way of life are under constant pressure to assimilate. Morocco has, for many years, been a unitary state with a centralized authority, single religion, single language and systematic marginalization of all aspects of the Amazigh identity. This has had a negative effect, including the falsification of Amazigh history and the people's total Arabization, especially in the cities. This cultural genocide has prompted the Amazigh elite to organize themselves into new structures such as associations and confederations. All these entities, working to protect and promote the rights of the Amazigh people in Morocco, form part of an Indigenous movement referred to as the "Amazigh Movement" (MA) or "Amazigh Cultural Movement" (MCA). In the 1980s, this movement began criticizing the State's assimilationist policies through a cultural charter published in 1981² by the Association Nouvelle pour la Culture et les Arts Populaires (ANCAP), later known as the Organization Tamaynut. Then, in 1991, it began to make the demands set out in the Agadir Charter,³ which became a common platform for the different players in this movement. This historic reference document was aimed at getting the Royal Cabinet and political forces in Morocco to react favourably to Amazigh rights. Decision-makers have nonetheless ignored the voices of Indigenous Peoples, leading the MA to address the UN and to participate in the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. This participation helped them to discover the similarities and connections between the Amazigh and the world's other Indigenous Peoples. The MA's accession to the international Indigenous movement was an historic turn-

ing point, leading to the creation of the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM) in 2001. Today there are more than 900 Amazigh associations established throughout Morocco.

The 2011 Constitution officially recognizes the Amazigh identity and language. This could be a very positive and encouraging step for the Amazigh people of Morocco. Parliament finally adopted an organic law for the implementation of Article 5 of the Constitution in 2019, after several years of waiting. Twelve years on from the Constitution and four years after the organic law was passed in Parliament, however, nothing has really changed: Tamazight language teaching is still at the same stage and will have to wait until 2030 to be extended to all primary schools; and linguistic discrimination is still the order of the day, since the Tifinagh script is absent from national identity cards, passports and the new Moroccan banknotes that went into circulation on 24 November 2023.⁴

Morocco has not ratified ILO Convention 169 and has not adopted UNDRIP.

Peace and security

The issue of peace and security for Morocco's Indigenous Amazigh people raises complex challenges at the intersection of human rights, social justice, territorial security, cultural recognition and political freedom. Despite constitutional recognition and some institutional advances, the Amazigh people continue to face major structural barriers affecting their human security, social cohesion, territorial sovereignty and political participation.

This article analyses four key dimensions:

- The marginalization of the Amazigh dimension of the Moroccan Sahara, despite its fundamental role in national identity.
- The plundering of land and natural resources, without respect for the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Structural barriers to the formation of Indigenous political

parties, notably the case of the Amazigh Democratic Party (PDAM).

- The delays in implementing Organic Law 26-16 on officially institutionalizing the Amazigh language.

Marginalization and neglect of the Amazigh dimension of the Sahara in southern Morocco

The question of the Western Sahara to the south of Morocco is often discussed, at a diplomatic and geopolitical level, in terms of the issue of territorial sovereignty. Morocco has taken a very important step towards a final resolution of this dispute, reflected in Resolution 2797 of the UN Security Council.⁵ This resolution sets out a regulatory framework for the process of implementing a plan for the area's autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.⁶ Nevertheless, the socio-cultural level of the issue, particularly the Indigenous aspect, is poorly known and sometimes misunderstood. This region is inhabited by the Amazigh, the Indigenous people and oldest known inhabitants,⁷ and an Amazigh identity has always been present in its toponymy, language and different forms of culture, even among tribes that have undergone a process of Arabization.⁸ This identity remains marginalized, however, and this dimension is often absent from concrete State policies, including peace and security strategies and negotiations on the region's future.⁹

The lack of programmes and strategies to promote the Amazigh identity, particularly in Morocco's Sahara region, has several consequences:

- The creation of a formalized identity vacuum whereby peace-building is based on unilateral national narratives rather than inclusive recognition of the Amazigh identity within a framework of plurality.
- The perception of national security as cultural homogenization rather than the protection of diverse heritages and collective rights.
- The lack of a peace agreement that fully recognizes Amazigh rights to language, culture, land and local governance.

The plundering of Amazigh lands and resources

Territorial security is an essential condition for lasting peace. The Amazigh people's deep attachment to their land, not only as an economic resource but also as a founding element of their cultural identity, is well documented, as are the persistent challenges arising from this.

The history of land law in Morocco reveals a radical transformation of traditional Amazigh systems following the French protectorate: a series of colonial laws gradually abolished collective ownership of land, substituting foreign legal regimes for Amazigh customary law¹⁰ (Azerf).¹¹

Even after independence, land tenure systems inherited from the colonial period persisted, contributing to the marginalization of Amazigh communities in their own territories, notably through:

- The cancellation of customary rights,
- The placing of collective lands under public (Ministry of the Interior) or private control (cession to large investors),
- The exploitation of natural resources without Indigenous consent.¹²

Laws passed in 2019 removed the inalienability of collective lands traditionally held by Amazigh communities, opening the door to their privatization or “*Mélikisation*”.¹³ This poses a serious risk to land security in the sense that collective lands represent a significant proportion of Amazigh territories, and their conversion to private ownership will fragment community structures; this will lead to a loss of control over natural resources (water, forests, minerals etc.) that are essential to economic and cultural survival.¹⁴

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a pillar of international law for Indigenous Peoples: it requires that, before any decision is taken affecting their lands –whether for resource exploitation or development projects– Indigenous communities are fully consulted and give their consent without coercion.

And yet several State interventions, in particular demarcations and projects to exploit Amazigh lands, have been initiated without explicit respect for this principle,¹⁵ (such as natural park projects in Morocco, for example Resolution 3267.23 published in the Official Gazette

of 14 March 2024, aimed at demarcating more than 111,000 hectares of collective lands to create a natural park in the Anti-Atlas of the Souss-Massa region).¹⁶

The plundering and non-consensual exploitation of land has direct consequences for human security:

- Impoverishment of rural populations;
- Exodus to cities or abroad;
- Local conflicts over access to water and grazing land;
- Gradual destruction of traditional production systems, which were historically factors of community resilience.¹⁷

Ban on organizing Indigenous political parties

Political freedom, including the right to form a political party, is a fundamental element of democratic participation and conflict prevention. The experience of the Amazigh Democratic Party (PDAM) and other recent projects illustrates the legal and institutional limits imposed on Indigenous political aspirations in Morocco.

The *Parti Démocratique Amazigh Marocain* (PDAM) was founded in 2005 to defend Amazigh identity, culture and political recognition. However, the Ministry of the Interior declared the party illegal in November 2007 for “non-compliance with the laws governing political parties, which prohibit formations based on ethnic, linguistic or regional criteria”. The Administrative Court ordered its dissolution in April 2008, confirming the implicit ban on political parties explicitly based on an Indigenous or ethno-cultural identity.¹⁸

This institutional ban has important implications. Firstly, it limits political pluralism by preventing the organizational emergence of movements directly linked to Amazigh identity. In contrast, it reinforces a political framework that tends to homogenize demands in parties with general platforms, or others known for their negative track record towards Amazigh and pluralism in general, rather than allowing for political representation specific to the needs of Indigenous communities. The absence of legal political spaces for the expression of Indigenous demands then triggers significant security issues that can exacerbate social tensions, as voices turn to non-institutional or protest channels.

Outside the framework of political parties, restrictions have been reported on freedom of expression, association and peaceful demonstration for Amazigh activists. Excessive restrictions on certain organizations or bans on demonstrations may be interpreted as restrictions on civil and political rights¹⁹ (e.g. the case of sections of Amazigh organizations such as “Tamaynut” that have not yet received their receipts/registration documents as of 2025).

Delays in implementing the provisions of Organic Law 26-16

Organic Law No. 26-16²⁰ aims to officially institutionalize the Amazigh language, following its constitutional recognition in 2011.²¹

This law was intended to lay the legislative foundations for the institutionalization of the Amazigh language, which is the majority language despite the disputed figures from the latest 2024 census,²² so that it is used in teaching, appears in public services, and is incorporated into administrative documents and the institutional apparatus.

The legislative assembly did set deadlines for the gradual application of these measures but it is important to stress that implementation has been very slow, often missing the deadlines set; key sectors such as schools, public media and administration have not significantly integrated the Amazigh language; and certain provisions concerning compulsory bilingual signage or the use of Tamazight in the justice system have not yet been applied consistently, sometimes in contrast to the provisions of the Constitution and Organic Law 26.16, such as article 14 of law 38.15 on judicial organization.²³

The delays in implementing this law contribute to a continued lack of visibility of the Amazigh language in the public sphere, reducing citizens' effective access to their cultural rights, and increasing the Arabization of the population. It also creates a feeling of institutional inequality that is likely to produce social frustration among the Amazigh. All this has an impact on national cohesion, as the failure to effectively implement an organic law symbolizing cultural recognition could be perceived as a lack of political will.

Conclusion: challenges for peace and security

Analysis of the four dimensions shows that, despite constitutional recognition of the Amazigh people's historic role and symbolic legislative advances, several structural barriers continue to affect their human, cultural, territorial and political security.

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Namibia



The Republic of Namibia celebrated its 35th year of independence in March 2025. The Indigenous Peoples of Namibia include the various San groups, the Ovahimba, Ovahimba, Ovahimba and, potentially, a number of other peoples including the Ovazemba, Damara, Nama, and the distinct Nama group of the Topnaars (!Aonin). Taken together, the Indigenous Peoples of Namibia represent less than 3% of the total population of the country, which was over 2.8 million as of the 2025 census. The San (Bushmen) population has commonly been estimated to be between 28,000 and 35,000 and account for between 1.05% and 1.35% of the national population, although the 2023 Census was broken down by language and gave a San population of 71,201 or 2.4% of the population. They include the Khwe, the Hai||om, the Ju|'hoansi and ǀKao ||Aesi (southern Ju|'hoansi), the !Xun, the Naro, and the !Xóǃ. Each of the San groups speaks its own language and has distinct customs, traditions, and histories. The San were mainly hunter-gatherers in the past but, today, many have diversified livelihoods. Over 80% of the San have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands and resources, and they are now some of the poorest and most marginalized peoples in the country. The Ovahimba, Ovahimba (Ovatwa), and Ovazemba are largely pastoral people, formerly also relying on hunting and gathering, and residing in the semi-arid mountains and steppes of north-west Namibia (Kunene Region). Together, the pastoralists number some 30,895, or 1.08% of the total Namibian population.

The Namibian government prefers to use the term “Marginalized Communities” when referring to the San, Ovahimba, support for whom falls under the Division of Marginalized Communities (DMC). The Constitution of Namibia prohibits discrimination on the grounds of ethnic or tribal affiliation but does not specifically recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Namibia voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) when it was adopted in 2007 but has not ratified ILO Convention No. 169. Namibia is a signatory to several other binding international agreements that affirm the norms represented in the UNDRIP, such as the

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Namibia representatives attended the 24th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York from 21 April-2 May 2025. A draft White Paper on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Namibia, first drafted a decade ago, remains awaiting approval by Cabinet.

Introduction

There were a number of important events affecting Indigenous and marginalized peoples in Namibia in 2025. The most important of these was the cutting off of development assistance by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This led to the cutting of over USD 70 million (approx. EUR 59 million) in aid and the termination of 420 medical and technical staff.¹ The Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services had to scramble to ensure that health programmes and clinics were able to survive.² The annual state of the nation report by H.E. President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah underscored the government's concern at the financial cutbacks that had occurred.³ The financial cutbacks had significant impacts on marginalized communities, especially the poor.

The development assistance cutbacks also had impacts on conservation activities in Namibia in 2025. Biodiversity protection programmes had to be reduced, as did efforts involving anti-poaching and forestry protection.⁴ According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Land Reform, there were challenges in the availability of water in dryland areas of the country. The drought that had affected Namibia up until early 2025 was largely remedied by heavy rains in early 2025. Nevertheless, there were losses of wildlife and domestic stock in some parts of the country due to thirst and disease.⁵ In late September 2025, a huge wildfire affected as much as two-fifths of Etosha National Park,

the country's premier national park (22,269 km²), killing some of its megafauna, including rhinos and elephants.

The Division of Disability Affairs and Marginalized Communities continued to highlight issues facing Indigenous and Marginalized Communities. The election of Namibia's first female President, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, in late 2024 led to increased female representation across government ministries, and the transfer of the Division of Marginalized Communities from the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare to the Office of the Vice-President, under Lucia Witbooi. Women's organizations in Namibia, including the Namibian Women's Association (NAWA), pressed for greater recognition of women's rights, including the rights of women to land and to protection from exploitation and domestic abuse. Significant attention was paid in Namibia in 2025 to gender mainstreaming in government policies and programmes, including those related to refugees and immigrants; these were especially important given the high percentages of women making up refugee populations, as seen, for example, in the Osire Refugee Camp south of Otjiwarongo.⁶

The Government of Namibia has yet to recognize the Khwe Traditional Authority, something that the Khwe people felt undermined their ability to resolve key land tenure and development issues. In the case of the !Kung Traditional Authority (TA) in the N/a Jaqna Conservancy, there were reactions in the conservancy to the perceived support given by the !Kung TA to outsiders who had entered the conservancy illegally, bringing with them cattle and small stock and setting up fences.

In October 2025, the Namibian Defence Force took a significant step by reserving 60 positions (4% of its 1,500-strong 2025/26 intake) specifically for San, Ovaherero, and Ovambo youth. Political analyst Ndumba Kamwanyah called it "the government's effort to correct historical imbalances". Regional governors across all 11 regions were tasked with verifying applications through traditional authorities.⁷ As the national unemployment rate of the country is significantly high and Indigenous Peoples have even fewer employment opportunities than the non-indigenous population, the military provides not only financial security for those Indigenous people selected but also gives them medical help and other support they would not receive elsewhere.

Genocide remembrance issues

In April 2025, Namibia's Vice-President Lucia Witbooi started consultations with traditional leaders across regions where communities including the Nama and San live, in preparation for Genocide Remembrance Day. Leaders and representatives attended meetings in Keetmanshoop, Opuwo, Omaruru, and other centres.⁸

Namibia held its first official Genocide Remembrance Day on 28 May, marking the atrocities committed during German colonial rule against the Herero and Nama peoples. This was a historic state-level commemoration meant as a step toward reconciliation.⁹

However, some communities, including activists from the San (Bushmen), criticized this remembrance for not adequately recognizing their historical suffering. They said that the legacy of colonial cruelty toward Bushmen had often been overlooked or minimized in national commemoration narratives.¹⁰

The Nama Traditional Leaders Association (NTLA) and various international partners (e.g., the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), and Minority Rights Group International) continued to call on the Namibian government to uphold Indigenous rights throughout 2025, especially regarding land rights and Free, Prior and Informed Consent on development projects affecting ancestral territories.¹¹

Workshops on Indigenous knowledge

From 3-4 September 2025, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Namibia Nature Foundation, and Namibian government convened a national workshop aimed at emphasizing Indigenous and local knowledge (including from San and other communities) in national biodiversity planning. This was a notable effort to integrate Indigenous perspectives into policy. A number of notable recommendations came out of this meeting, including the importance of protecting cultural and natural heritage.

Later that same month, from 5-18 September 2025, Namibia hosted the Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge Fair at N/a'an ku sê Lodge, bringing together over 50 knowledge holders from multiple continents.¹² Vice-President Witbooi delivered the opening address, emphasizing:

“We must move from exploitation to custodianship, from exclusion to inclusion.” Participants presented a manifesto rooted in ancestral wisdom and ecological stewardship. However, the October 2025 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Shadow Report flagged a problem that, in translated Indigenous knowledge materials “key information was sometimes missed or translated into the wrong San language” because consultation was inadequate.¹³

Human rights and advocacy reports

The 2025 UPR Shadow Report highlights continued human rights challenges for the San and other Indigenous communities, noting that systemic marginalization persists and international recommendations for better legal recognition have not been fully implemented.¹⁴

The October 2025 UPR Shadow Report documented discrimination in healthcare, including verbal abuse, treatment denial, and absence of San-speaking medical staff. Tuberculosis, HIV, and malaria rates remain high in Indigenous communities, worsened by poverty and isolation.

The report also documented the arrest, in May 2025, of a British tourist at Grashoek Living Museum in Tsumkwe for sexual exploitation of San children; the authorities found over 1,500 illicit photographs. No domestic legal protections exist against this exploitation and although the authorities were quick to act in this case, it is not isolated and similar issues have been raised in Ovahimba communities in Kunene.

The report also documented widespread domestic and sexual violence, compounded by lack of access to protection orders on the part of rural women because magistrate courts are only in towns and there is a lack of San-speaking police officers, causing Tsumkwe’s San community to hold a protest in July 2025 over the lack of San police officers.¹⁵ Harmful stereotypes portraying San girls as “good sex providers” are driving high adolescent pregnancy and HIV transmission rates.

Mother-tongue education failures

A May 2025 review by Palms for Life Namibia exposed serious gaps in San language education. After assessing 14 schools in Tsumkwe and

Otjinene, researchers found that Ju/'hoansi, the only San language officially approved for instruction, is barely used in classrooms despite a 2011 curriculum mandate. Observer24 reported on 29 July that only a handful of schools in Nyae Nyae actually teach in Ju/'hoansi. Teacher shortages and lack of materials continue to undermine implementation.¹⁶

The October 2025 UPR Shadow Report alleged additional barriers: some schools ban San children from speaking their mother tongue on school grounds, textbooks ignore San history, and pregnant San girls are blocked from returning to school despite a 2001 ministry policy guaranteeing their right to education.

Oil exploration and its implications in Namibia

In 2025, concerns were expressed about the activities of a Canadian oil company, Reconnaissance Energy Africa (ReconAfrica). The oil company was employing fracking (hydraulic fracturing) techniques in the region north of Khaudum National Park in the Kavango West Region. Local communities as far away as the south of Khaudum National Park had been told that they would have to move as a result of the company's activities.¹⁷ However, no movements had occurred as of the end of 2025.

On 29 September 2025, ReconAfrica announced it had reached 4,200 metres depth at its Kavango West 1X well and hit hydrocarbon pay, with production testing planned for early 2026.¹⁸ The October 2025 UPR Shadow Report documented San communities' complaints about lack of proper consultation, with specific concerns about noise driving away wildlife, potential water contamination threatening the Okavango basin's one million users, and threats to local farming.

Land rights and hydropower disputes

In Kunene Region, the Baynes Hydropower Project pushed forward despite Ovahimba opposition.¹⁹ The Namibian reported in October that the project between Namibia and Angola was progressing even as residents warned it would destroy ancestral lands. NamPower and Gov-

ernor Vipukuje Muharukua said no formal petition had been received, although resistance remained strong.

The October 2025 UPR Shadow Report detailed how San people are routinely blocked from gathering traditional foods on land now enclosed by private conservancies, and several legal cases prior to 2024 remained in court regarding San land rights.

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Rwanda



The Batwa of Rwanda, just like their counterparts in the Great Lakes Region, remain an extremely marginalised group in Rwanda, socially, economically, and politically.¹ They remain a minority at 1% of the population of approximately 12.4 million people, according to National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda in 2019. These hunters and gatherers have remained intrinsically intertwined with the forest ecosystem, deeply knowledgeable on the forests and their resources, with pottery being their major socioeconomic activity.²

After the genocide in 1994, in an effort to promote unity, the Rwandan government banned references to ethnicity and preferred to refer to the Batwa, due to their historically known injustices, as part of the Historically Marginalised Peoples (HMPs), a term used to refer to groups marginalised by history. Whereas the justification may sound genuine given the circumstances, unfortunately for the Batwa it has served to overshadow the factors that sustain their discrimination and marginalisation.³

The Batwa are therefore not officially recognised as an Indigenous group nor given rights and protections as such. Rwanda is a State Party to the following charters: African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and others; however, the country has not ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) or ILO Convention 169.⁴

Political representation

According to the African Initiative for Mankind Progress Organisation (AIMPO), a non-governmental organisation, the political representation of Batwa interests is reflected in the Rwanda government's consideration of Historically Marginalised Peoples (HMPs), a collective name under which the Batwa are categorised. President Paul Kagame has frequently nominated Batwa into the Senate.

However, no Batwa were not nominated in 2025, which runs counter to the constitutional provision for representation and has been the only hope for political representation of the most excluded group in Rwanda. According to Article 80, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, which guarantees equality, freedom of expression, and inclusive governance, the president must appoint eight members of the Senate that ensure the representation of HMPs.⁵ The decision not to appoint any Batwa to the current Senate has erased any hope of meaningful representation and thus minimised opportunities within the Rwandan legislature to advocate for concerns specific to the Batwa's state of well-being. Importantly, it ran counter to a constitutional requirement founded on consensual and pluralistic democracy, power sharing, national unity and reconciliation, good governance, social justice, tolerance, and the resolution of problems through dialogue.

Batwa living with disabilities

Families with disabilities experience higher levels of vulnerability in many ways. For instance, interactions with communities from Nyaruguru, Kamonyi, Burera Gasabo and Gatsibo in July 2025 indicated that Batwa children with disabilities lack support to facilitate their education; they are thus kept at home and do not attend school. Those who manage to access schools are faced with the reality that no teachers have the capacity to assist them, and that there are inadequate facilities in schools to cater for different disabilities, such as access ramps for buildings built before 2020, customised toilets or accessible facilities for rehabilitation. Although these problems are faced by all children with disabilities, the Batwa are doubly marginalised due to the

discrimination they already face as a minority. Progressive government programmes such as “Uburezi budaheza” or “non-exclusionary education” are yet to fully guarantee the inclusion of Batwa children with disabilities.⁶

Although Batwa with disabilities can access the basic healthcare services that are available at health centres and district hospitals, it remains difficult to reach specialised or higher-level hospitals because the health insurance they have does not cover such costs. There is also limited awareness among Batwa with disabilities even as regards accessing services that exist within the districts. Batwa with disabilities live in extreme poverty, making it further difficult to pay for the health insurance that would give them access to appropriate medication and healthcare. Access to buildings and facilities for the visually and speech impaired is rarely available and assistive devices and replacement services that could help them request services in a way that is not burdensome are not prioritised in many hospitals.

Inclusive development

The Rwandan government, supported by the World Bank Project “Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate Smart Development (IFPA-CD)” in Nyungwe and Gishwati-Mukura national parks, aimed at improving livelihoods, supporting tourism-related initiatives, enhancing climate-resilient livelihoods, restoring landscapes, and improving the sustainable management of forests and protected areas through agroforestry and community-based, nature-based enterprises, has been criticised as contributing to the exclusion of the Batwa (referred to under the Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups Plan (VMGP)) from their ancestral forests.⁷

Poverty and discrimination

Rwanda has made significant progress in reducing poverty, lifting nearly 1.5 million people out of poverty between 2017 and 2024, according to Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, during his visit in May 2025. However, the Batwa contin-

ue to face severe challenges, with 98% living in extreme poverty.⁸ This is largely due to the lack of government recognition of the Batwa as a group requiring special attention. The Batwa population today stands at between 25,000-30,000.

Batwa poverty is exacerbated by discrimination, and a lack of access to education, land and government opportunities. The Batwa face calculated economic marginalisation through the destruction of their traditional pottery industry. The government's policies reveal a stark double standard: while Chinese ceramics freely enter the market, Batwa artisans are systematically denied access to sources of clay due to restrictive wetland policies. Other craft industries receive state support while our pottery tradition –a cornerstone of both our cultural identity and economic survival– is intentionally undermined.

Cultural preservation

The government emphasis on national unity has silently and deliberately suppressed Batwa Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions. State policies that criminalise ethnicity have eliminated the Batwa identity and cultural heritage.

Firstly, the Batwa's sacred *Intwatwa* music and dance tradition faces deliberate suppression. This is not mere neglect because while their community is prevented from practising these traditions, the government actively supports non-Batwa performers who have appropriated the same cultural expressions. This cultural theft occurs while the Batwa artists are silenced, representing a clear violation of their intellectual and cultural property rights.

Secondly, and most egregiously, Batwa ceremonial rituals and practices form the very fabric of their community's social and spiritual life, yet they continue to be criminalised. For instance, their end-of-year ceremonies, where chiefs gather their communities together for blessings and spiritual guidance, are now forbidden under forced assimilation policies. Examples of such policies include the government's "collective settlement" programme, which has effectively outlawed Batwa traditional gatherings, severing the crucial links between generations and disrupting the transmission of their ancient knowledge. This cultural genocide is executed through Rwanda's aggressive "de-ethnicisa-

tion” campaign, which has forced integration at the lowest societal level without resources or support, rendered the Batwa institutional systems invisible and criminalised organising around their cultural preservation, something that is crucial for strong identity. This has been exacerbated by a masking of their identity under the generic label of HMPs, coined by the government.⁹

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South Africa



The Khoikhoi and San peoples, or the Khoisan, self-identify as the Indigenous Peoples of South Africa. The Khoikhoi and San consist of six large groups, including various San, Nama, Griqua, Koranna and “revivalist Khoikhoi and San” communities.¹ Collectively, the Khoisan make up approximately 1% of South Africa’s population of nearly 60 million.²

Various Indigenous-led organisations and councils represent the Khoikhoi and San Indigenous communities at local and regional levels, the largest among them being the National Khoisan Council and the San Council of South Africa.

South Africa’s 1996 Constitution enshrines the rights to culture, language and heritage, which apply to the population of the republic generally. However, explicit legal recognition of the Indigenous Khoikhoi and San peoples remains incomplete. The 2019 Traditional and Khoikhoi and San Leadership Bill is a key piece of legislation that goes towards addressing this gap; however, the conclusion of this statute has been subjected to several delays – namely in 2023 and 2025 – due to insufficient public participation (for more see in *The Indigenous World 2024*, *The Indigenous World 2025*).

Despite constitutional commitments to civil and political rights, including freedom, equality, dignity, expression, and other rights protected by the Bill of Rights, the Indigenous Khoi and San continue to face systemic marginalisation and structural challenges to asserting their rights to their land and resources, including their biocultural rights.³ Moreover, the Khoikhoi and San people of South Africa experience pervasive socio-economic challenges, including abject poverty, disproportionately high levels of unemployment, and lack of access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and housing.

South Africa supports the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), having voted in favour of this international instrument in 2007. However, South Africa has not ratified ILO Convention 169.⁴

Introduction

Throughout 2025, the Indigenous Peoples of South Africa continued to navigate a complex legal, socio-economic and political landscape. The year saw several symbolic advances towards redressing some of the historical legacy still felt by the Khoikhoi and San peoples of South Africa. Nevertheless, the landscape for Indigenous Peoples in South Africa remains marred by ongoing challenges, including inadequate legal recognition, contested land and biocultural rights use, and persistent socio-economic marginalisation.

Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill

South Africa's legislative framework for the recognition of Khoikhoi and San communities and their leadership structures has long been marked by significant structural inadequacies. The first notable piece of legislation in this regard was the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act 41 of 2003 (TLGFA), which recognised traditional chiefs and councils under customary law but failed to include Khoi and San leadership structures in this formal recognition.⁵ In light of this, on the 28 November 2019, Parliament repealed the 2003 Act and passed the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act of 2019 into law. The objective of this Act was to replace the TLGFA and formally recognise Khoi and San leadership structures alongside other traditional communities and their leadership.⁶ However, in the matter of *Mogale and Others v the Speaker of the National Assembly and Others* (2023), the Constitutional Court declared that the 2019 Act was unconstitutional due to overwhelmingly inadequate public participation in its passing. Although this ruling rendered the 2019 Act invalid, the Court suspended the Act's invalidity for a period of 24 months with the intention that Parliament would use this time to address the shortfalls in the legislation and pass a new constitutional law into effect. The Court set a deadline of May 2025 for the government to amend and conclude the Bill.^{7, 8}

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) accordingly developed and published a new draft Bill – the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill (TKLB of 2024) and invited pub-

lic comments.⁹ The aim of the Bill is to formally recognise and regulate the leadership structures of the Khoikhoi and San people and provide a means for their access to justice, participation in the different spheres of government, cultural preservation and meaningful engagement with government institutions.¹⁰ This Bill will serve as a crucial step towards affirming the legitimacy and leadership of the Khoikhoi and San people in the wake of the previous legislations inadequacies – especially the lack of meaningful public participation. The draft Bill was published for comments with a deadline of 28 February 2025.¹¹

In May 2025, however, the Bill's passage was further delayed. According to the Constitutional Court, the government had failed to take the necessary steps to address the "constitutional deficiencies" of the Bill within the 24-month period provided, thus necessitating additional time for the Bill to be streamlined.¹² The Court held that, in light of this delay, the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act would have its declaration of invalidity suspended, thus continuing to remain in force until 29 May 2027 – providing CoGTA another 24-month period to allow for sufficient legislative reform, ensuring proper consultation.¹³

Rooibos Benefit-Sharing Agreement

The conclusion of the groundbreaking Rooibos Benefit-Sharing Agreement in 2019 ensured that the Khoikhoi and San peoples' traditional knowledge of the rooibos plant's uses and benefits was recognised, and that the traditional knowledge holders were economically compensated for their stewardship of the resource.¹⁴ Starting in 2024, the community began to receive the financial benefits as per the agreement.¹⁵

In 2025, various communities, such as those in Wupperthal, Nieuwoudtville and Suid-Bokkeveld in the Cederberg region, continued to receive monetary benefits. While the agreement's substantive benefits for the Khoikhoi and San people continues to be challenged by external actors – such as policy analysts and academics – the Indigenous leaders from these communities emphasised the importance of the Rooibos Benefit-Sharing Agreement and the economic benefits it brings.¹⁶ The levy has enabled the community to own and support many grassroots projects that are crucial to the wellbeing and development of

the communities. These projects include providing additional funding to local schools, installing water pumps, opening an organic Rooibos nursery, funding local students' higher education, setting up an internet café, and supplying farmers with diesel to till their lands, among other interventions.¹⁷ This highlights that the impact of the Rooibos Agreement was not merely symbolic but resulted in tangible, long-term benefits for the communities preserving the plant.

Land, negotiation & community security: Knoflokskraal

In 2020, a group of seven Indigenous Khoikhoi and San people returned to their ancestral territories, which today form a 1,800-hectare state forest area in Grabouw, in the Western Cape Province.¹⁸ This settlement, named Knoflokskraal, was envisioned as a Khoikhoi and San settlement that would allow members of the Indigenous community to return to their ancestral land, and reclaim and restore their culture as a self-sustaining community. Since its establishment in 2020, the population of the Indigenous settlement has grown to over 4,000 people.¹⁹

2025 marked a promising year for the formal recognition of the residents of Knoflokskraal. The community members, led by a mandated Cultural Task Team, developed a preliminary Biocultural Community Protocol (BCP) through which they articulated their rights as an Indigenous community reclaiming their ancestral land.²⁰ Representatives of the government – specifically, the Premier of the Western Cape, the Minister of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure and the Theewaterskloof Municipality – showed goodwill towards the Knoflokskraal community and the task team, convening a bilateral meeting in which significant steps were taken towards addressing the long-standing challenges, such as non-recognition as an Indigenous community and lack of access to justice, being faced by the community.²¹ A key outcome of this dialogue was the municipality's expressed commitment to incorporate the needs of Knoflokskraal into its formal budgetary planning, paving the way for the provision of essential services such as water and sanitation, which the community had been living without access to, and for more responsive local-level support.

The Knoflokskraal community was able to formally present its BCP, which was well-received by the state. The state representatives, in turn, indicated a willingness to remove the threat of eviction and work constructively with Knoflokskraal as partners. This included agreeing to enter a structured social facilitation process designed to support a mutually beneficial way forward. The process of bilateral engagement remains a priority for the community going into 2026.

Richtersveld Nama community

The Nama community of Richtersveld are the descendants of the Indigenous Nama People of South Africa.²² In the landmark case of *Alexkor Ltd v Richtersveld* (2003), the Constitutional Court of South Africa recognised this Nama community's communal Indigenous right to the land of Richtersveld and to the resources found therein.²³ The Court affirmed that the community was entitled to restitution of the right to ownership, including minerals and precious stones, and the exclusive beneficial use and occupation of the land. However, in spite of this judicial victory, a 2007 deed of settlement effectively undermined those rights, reducing the community to a 49% minority share in a joint company with the state-owned mining entity.²⁴

Eighteen years later, the community still has not seen the benefits of their constitutional win. They remain on land they legally own but with very little return.

As a result, the community have taken a proactive approach in order to re-assert their rights and determine how their mineral resources are mined and developed. In 2025, the community partnered with the African Community Resource Rights Alliance (ACRRA), an Indigenous-led non-profit organisation focussed on providing legal and technical support to Indigenous communities, to advance these efforts. The goal of this partnership is to advocate for the enforcement of the 2003 Constitutional Court victory, provide training in the development of a bi-cultural community protocol for the Richtersveld Nama peoples, support community-led cultural initiatives and consultations and promote recognition of the Richtersveld Nama Traditional leadership.

Return of Khoikhoi and San ancestral remains

A significant symbolic development in 2025 was the repatriation of the ancestral remains of six Khoikhoi and San individuals from the University of Glasgow, Scotland to South Africa.

On 17 October 2025, the Indigenous Peoples of South Africa gathered at the Iziko Museum in Cape Town to celebrate the return. The ceremony was attended by various community members and leaders of Indigenous Khoikhoi and San peoples, as well as delegates from the Northern Cape and the Minister of South Africa's Department of Sports, Arts and Culture.²⁵

In the 19th century, these Indigenous individuals had been unethically exhumed from their burial sites in South Africa in the name of science and colonial curiosity, and transported to Europe, eventually to be held at the University of Glasgow. Five of these individuals are believed to originate from the Northern Cape and the sixth from the Western Cape in South Africa.²⁶

Khoisan removed from state property

Beginning in 2018, in an act of protest, a group of Khoikhoi and San community members took up residence in the Union Building gardens, the government headquarters in Pretoria.²⁷ The aim of this protest was to secure recognition for the community as the Indigenous people of South Africa and to uphold their Indigenous rights. The community have been demanding an audience with President Cyril Ramaphosa to make their demands, which include demands for equal benefits under the country's affirmative action policies, formal recognition of their status as the country's Indigenous Peoples, inclusion of their languages on the state's list of official languages and abolition of the racial term "coloured",²⁸ which was imposed on the community under the Apartheid regime.²⁹

However, in February of 2025, following an eviction order granted to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in 2024, the Khoikhoi and San community was removed from the government premises by law enforcement officials.³⁰ The Department stated that, although

it was sympathetic to the grievances of the community, the space occupied by the Khoikhoi and San protestors was a public space to be enjoyed by the wider public.³¹ While, on the face of it, the seven-year-long protest seems not to have achieved its ultimate aims, it nevertheless did contribute to the broader struggle of the South African Indigenous Peoples' movement for their recognition and rights, making it more visible to the general public.

Outlook

Key risks facing the Indigenous population include land dispossession, lack of resource restitution and socio-economic marginalisation. There do, however, remain opportunities for the Indigenous Peoples of South Africa in the form of strategic litigation, robust and sustained advocacy efforts at regional and international levels and increased Indigenous network and alliance-building.

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Tanzania



Tanzania is estimated to have a total of 125 – 130 ethnic groups, falling mainly into the four categories of Bantu, Cushite, Nilo-Hamite and San. While there may be more ethnic groups that identify as Indigenous Peoples, four groups have been organizing themselves and their struggles around the concept and movement of Indigenous Peoples.

The four groups are the hunter-gatherer Akie and Hadzabe, and the pastoralist Barabaig and Maasai. Although accurate figures are hard to arrive at since ethnic groups are not included in the population census, population estimates¹ put the Maasai in Tanzania at 430,000, the Datoga group to which the Barabaig belongs at 87,978, the Hadzabe at 1,000² and the Akie at 5,268. While the livelihoods of these groups are diverse, they all share a strong attachment to the land, distinct identities, vulnerability and marginalization. They also experience similar problems in relation to land tenure insecurity, poverty and inadequate political representation.

Tanzania voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 but does not recognize the existence of any Indigenous Peoples in the country and there is no specific national policy or legislation on Indigenous Peoples per se. On the contrary, a number of policies, strategies and programmes that do not reflect the interests of the Indigenous Peoples in terms of access to land and natural resources, basic social services and justice are continuously being developed, resulting in a deteriorating and increasingly hostile political environment for both pastoralists and hunter-gatherers.

Land rights and displacements

Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA)

In response to peaceful demonstrations in Ngorongoro in 2024 over Maasai land rights and resident relocations, President Samia Suluhu Hassan met with Maasai traditional leaders on 1 December 2024,³ and

subsequently established two presidential commissions of inquiry. One commission was mandated to examine land-related grievances raised by residents, while the second was tasked with evaluating the voluntary relocation programme to Msomera in Handeni District. The commissions have continued their work throughout 2025; however, their findings have not been publicly released and there is limited information on whether their recommendations have been implemented. Meanwhile, community concerns persist, with reports of ongoing restrictions, live-stock forfeitures, and alleged human rights violations during 2025.

At the relocation site in Msomera, relocated families continue to raise concerns regarding insufficient grazing land, water scarcity, limited access to social services, and delays in housing and compensation commitments. Some families state that the relocation process did not fully reflect the expectations presented to them. These ongoing challenges highlight continued uncertainty about livelihoods and long-term stability for those who relocated from Ngorongoro. Further, the relocation programme has led to land disputes and rising tensions between Msomera residents and the newcomers. Several original residents have filed lawsuits challenging the claim that there is unused land available for relocation. Eight residents of Msomera filed cases in 2025 at the Tanga High Court against the government and some of the relocated individuals. They are contesting the government's decision to acquire their land and allocate it to others without compensation.

Continued violation of Indigenous Peoples' rights in Loliendo

The creation of the Pololeti Game Reserve in 2022 continues to directly impact Indigenous Peoples' rights and access to grazing land in 2025. The creation of this physical fortress design for conservation displaced the Maasai from their ancestral lands and transformed the 1,500 km² of legally recognized village land into a restricted reserve. The two most affected villages of Kirtalo and Ololosokwan particularly revealed a systematic strategy of "impoverishment by fines", where the state uses the boundaries of this new reserve to drain the community of its only capital: livestock.

In Kirtalo village, in 2025 alone, 35 livestock owners were forced to pay a combined total of TZS 456,900,000 (approx. EUR 148,000) in

finer. This is not a standard regulatory fee; it is an astronomical penalty that averages over TZS 13 million (approx. EUR 4,200) per household—a sum that no rural family can afford to lose and remain self-sufficient. The situation is equally dire in Ololosokwan village where, between November 2025 and January 2026, the authorities seized 1,423 heads of cattle and 879 sheep with a combined market value of TZS 150,000,000 (approx. EUR 48,700). Within this tiny two-month window, the total economic loss for these two villages exceeded TZS 614,000,000 (approx. EUR 200,000).⁴

Eviction from Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA)

The crisis at KIA, which has intensified since 2023,⁵ is no longer a threat—it is an active tragedy. Over 20,000 residents from eight villages, including Tindigani, Sanya Station, and Malula, have watched their land and legal rights vanish overnight. In May 2025, the government moved from dialogue to force, deploying the military to install boundary beacons and demolish homes. For the Maasai families there, this “expansion” meant the immediate destruction of seven decades of investment, including homes, rainwater collection tanks, and schools. Families were forced to open bank accounts and accept “compensation” as low as TZS 800,000 (approx. EUR 260), a sum that is not a payment but a final insult that leaves a family homeless in an economy where a single acre of land costs millions.

The human cost is measured in the silence that followed. Sacred sites such as Endonyo Olmorwak,⁶ critical for Maasai rites of passage, are now behind airport fences, and social services, such as health centres that the community built themselves, have been levelled to make way for a VIP terminal and luxury hotels. Parents have been separated from children, and livestock, the heartbeat of the community, have no place to graze, forcing elders who were once self-sufficient into a life of begging or working as low-wage security guards on the very land they used to own. The “KIA Man” is now a stranger in his own home, watching international tourists land on a runway built over his demolished boma (a traditional Maasai circular homestead), while the state continues to ignore the 2023 and 2024 calls for an independent inquiry into this massive, forced dispossession.

Losimingori Forest Reserve in Monduli District

Since 2021, when the then Losimingori Forest Reserve was upgraded by the government to a Nature Forest Reserve, without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Maasai, management of the area has lain with the Tanzania Forest Services (TFS) and strict restrictions on human activity have been put in place, spurring tensions. These tensions reportedly further increased in 2025 as pastoralist access to traditional grazing areas and forest resources has become even more restricted.

Climate change and carbon credit schemes

Climate change has severely affected pastoralists across Tanzania, with many livestock dying due to drought and lack of pasture. In areas where grazing zones have been annexed, for example in Loliondo, where 1,500 km² were forcibly taken by the government to form a Game Controlled Area, the impacts have been even more severe. Pastoralists have paid millions of shillings to recover their livestock from auctions after the animals were seized for grazing in areas that are now designated as protected land. As mentioned earlier, this situation has been described as “impoverishment by fines”. Many pastoralists who once lived in relative stability have lost their main sources of income, and the pressure has also contributed to serious mental health challenges.

Pastoralism depends on mobility as a key strategy for managing climate variability, drought, and maintaining ecosystem balance. Land annexation and restricted access to grazing areas have greatly limited this mobility, while repeated livestock detentions have significantly reduced herd sizes. Instead of strengthening conservation and climate resilience, current enforcement practices are only increasing vulnerability, dependency, and long-term insecurity.

Maasai villages in Longido, Monduli, and Simanjiro are being targeted for large soil carbon credit projects, which come with restrictions on land use for the duration of the project. The Longido and Monduli Rangelands Carbon Project (LMRCP), led by Soils for the Future Tanzania Ltd in partnership with international companies including Volkswagen Climate Partners, covers some 970,000 hectares for a 40-year period.⁷ The Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project (RTEP), led by The Nature Conservancy, covers around 830,000 hectares with a 20-year

crediting period, plus the possibility of extension.⁸ These projects focus on villages that already have communal land titles and land-use plans, especially mapped grazing areas. While carbon developers present this as an opportunity, many Maasai fear further loss of control over their land, restrictions on grazing, and long-term impacts on pastoralism, land rights, and mobility. Given the long history of land alienation in Maasai areas through conservation and protected areas, there is deep concern that carbon projects could bring new forms of land control and future biodiversity credit schemes with additional restrictions.

Currently, in 2025, Indigenous civil society organizations (CSOs) have called for a moratorium on all carbon credit projects in northern Tanzanian rangelands, following research conducted in January 2025 that examined the two major projects. Despite this, project proponents are continuing to push communities to sign agreements, with reports of pressure from district leaders. Some senior government officials have acknowledged that many communities do not clearly understand the carbon business and have stressed the need for proper information and consent. In Simanjiro, the district has temporarily paused the signing process for 30 days to allow responses to community concerns, showing that community voices are beginning to have an impact.

Creation of new hunting block allocations

In late 2024 and early 2025, the Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority (TAWA) conducted electronic auctions to allocate multiple hunting blocks. In addition, there is a proposed expansion involving the creation of 16 new hunting blocks covering approximately 15,856 km².¹⁰ This plan aims to convert nearly 70% of Maasai village land in districts such as Simanjiro into Game Reserves and Game Controlled Areas, affecting over 100,000 people.

New Game Reserves

An internal report from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, based on its 2021–2026 strategic plan, shows that 15 new areas, covering nearly 7,000 km², are proposed for conversion from Game Controlled Areas (GCAs) into fully designated Game Reserves. This

shift would significantly change the land status and its management, bringing stricter conservation regulations and limiting community access to grazing and settlement areas. The plan is expected to affect the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people who depend on these lands for pastoralism and other traditional activities. It also includes an additional 4,000 km² in the Lake Natron area, a region that is both ecologically sensitive and central to Maasai livelihoods.¹¹

East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP)

PINGO's Forum conducted a mixed-methods study¹² on the impacts of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) using key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and direct community engagement, with attention to women, youth, and marginalized groups. Responses were gathered from Manyara (35%), Dodoma (33%), and Tanga (31%).¹³ The findings show serious gaps in consultation and compensation. Only 23% of respondents said they were consulted during project planning or implementation, while 30% said they were excluded. Many described consultations as poorly inclusive, and just 4% believed their views had influenced decisions. Around 43% reported negative livelihood impacts, mainly loss of grazing land and displacement. Compensation has been inconsistent, with only 23% confirming they had received any payment, and very few considering it adequate. Communities also reported unfulfilled promises under the Social Investment Programme, limited local employment, poor working conditions, and cultural harm, including the exhumation of graves.

Despite these concerns, recent developments indicate that the project is moving forward. On 7 February 2026, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni visited Tanzania and met with President Samia Suluhu Hassan, announcing that oil exports through the pipeline are expected to begin in July 2026. During the same meeting, President Samia stated that, after completion of EACOP, there were plans to construct an additional pipeline along the same route to transport refined oil.¹⁴ These announcements suggest a continued expansion of the project, even as affected communities continue to raise concerns about rights, compensation, and long-term impacts.

Hadzabe hunter-gatherers: the impact of tourism and artificial intelligence

Tourism in Mang'ola has made the Hadzabe highly visible, as many visitors travelling to the Ngorongoro area seek to experience their culture. The system is, however, largely controlled by outsiders rather than the community itself. Decisions about visitor access, photography, payments, and performances are often made without proper consultation or FPIC. Financial benefits are uneven and limited, with most income managed by camp supervisors while performers receive very small payments. Women selling handmade crafts are especially vulnerable to underpayment and intimidation. Tourism has also contributed to dependency, food insecurity, alcohol abuse, and cultural harm, including misuse of images and staged or inappropriate content that misrepresents the Hadzabe identity. While the community does not reject tourism, there is a strong call for a community-led model that ensures transparency, dignity, and fair benefit-sharing.¹⁵

Artificial Intelligence and digital media have intensified these risks. Images and videos of Hadzabe individuals are edited, manipulated, or fabricated using digital tools and shared online without consent. Some content includes sexualized or false portrayals that are deeply offensive to cultural norms and cause emotional distress, reputational harm, and internal community conflict. Those featured often cannot trace the source of the material or request its removal. The gap between online visibility and real living conditions has created confusion and social tension within communities. These harms are already affecting cultural dignity and cohesion, highlighting the urgent need for safeguards, accountability, and strict respect for collective consent.¹⁶

General election in October 2025

Tanzania's General Election in October 2025 was followed by strong reactions from international and regional bodies expressing concern over reports of unrest, arrests, and restrictions on civic space. Civil society organizations documented allegations of intimidation, limitations on freedom of assembly, and pressure on human rights defenders. On 12

November 2025, staff from the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) one of the organizations that also works with Indigenous Peoples, were holding a meeting at the White Sands Hotel when security personnel reportedly surrounded the compound.¹⁷ According to LHRC, staff members were questioned, their laptops, mobile phones, and identification documents were confiscated, and they were instructed to report to the Zonal Crimes Office the following day. Although the devices were later returned, the incident raised concerns about data privacy, surveillance, and the operating environment for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the aftermath of the election, President Samia Suluhu Hassan publicly accused certain local and international NGOs of financing protesters and contributing to unrest during the electoral period.¹⁸ She stated that investigations would be conducted into organizations alleged to have supported demonstrations. These statements increased tensions between the government and sections of civil society, with rights groups calling for transparent investigations and protection of constitutional freedoms. The situation has continued to spark debate about political space, accountability, and the role of civil society in Tanzania's democratic process.

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Tunisia



As elsewhere in North Africa, the Indigenous population of Tunisia is formed of the Amazighs. There are no official statistics on their number in the country but Amazigh associations estimate there to be around 1 million Tamazight speakers, accounting for some 10% of the total population. Tunisia is the country in which the Amazighs have suffered the greatest forced Arabization. This explains the low proportion of Tamazight speakers in the country. There are, however, increasing numbers of Tunisians who, despite no longer being able to speak Tamazight, still consider themselves Amazighs rather than Arabs.

The Amazighs of Tunisia are spread throughout all of the country's regions, from Azemour and Sejnane in the north to Tittawin (Tataouine) in the south, passing through El-Kef, Thala, Siliana, Gafsa, Gabès, Matmata, Tozeur, Djerba. As elsewhere in North Africa, many of Tunisia's Amazigh have left their mountains and deserts to seek work in the cities and abroad. There are thus a large number of Amazigh in Tunis, where they live in the city's different neighbourhoods, particularly the old town (Medina), working primarily in skilled crafts and petty trade. The Indigenous Amazigh population can be distinguished not only by their language but also by their culture (traditional dress, music, cooking and Ibadite religion practised by the Amazigh of Djerba).

Since the 2011 "revolution", numerous Amazigh cultural associations have emerged with the aim of achieving recognition and use of the Amazigh language and culture. The Tunisian state does not, however, recognize the existence of the country's Amazigh population. Parliament adopted a new Constitution in 2014 that totally obscures the country's Amazigh (historical, cultural and linguistic) dimensions. The Constitution refers only to the Tunisians' sources of "Arab and Muslim identity" and expressly affirms Tunisia's membership of the "culture and civilization of the Arab and Muslim nation". It commits the state to working to strengthen "the Maghreb union as a stage towards achieving Arab unity [...]". Article 1 goes on to reaffirm that "Tunisia is a free state, [...], Islam is its religion, Arabic its

language” while Article 5 confirms that “the Tunisian Republic forms part of the Arab Maghreb”. The new Tunisian Constitution, adopted in July 2022, proclaims that “Tunisia forms a part of the Islamic nation” (article 5), that “Tunisia forms a part of the Arab nation and that the official language is Arabic” (article 6) and that “the Tunisian Republic forms a part of the Greater Arab Maghreb” (article 7). Article 44 stipulates that “the State shall ensure that the younger generations are rooted in their Arab and Islamic identity and their national belonging. It shall ensure the consolidation, promotion and generalization of the Arabic language”. Tunisia makes no reference to its Indigenous Amazigh history, nor does it recognize the country's human, linguistic and cultural diversity.

On an international level, Tunisia has ratified the main international standards and voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. These international texts remain unknown to the vast majority of citizens and legal professionals, and are not applied in domestic courts.

Tunisia remains lacking in stability

Following a terrorist attack targeting the Tunisian presidential guard in Tunis on 24 November 2015, a state of emergency was declared throughout the country. Since then, it has been extended year by year up to 31 December 2025. Tunisia has thus settled into a permanent state of exception, which has enabled the Tunisian authorities to curb individual and collective freedoms and resort to numerous arrests and sentences that are considered arbitrary.

Judges, lawyers, human rights defenders and members of civil society organizations have been arrested and imprisoned for exercising their professional rights or their right to freedom of opinion and expression.

UN experts¹ and NGOs such as Amnesty International have called on Tunisian authorities to release the detainees and respect international² human rights standards. According to the Euro-Med NGO Hu-

man Rights Monitor, “Tunisian authorities continue to use national legal frameworks in a manner that strips them of their human rights substance, employing them as instruments to restrict civic space and hinder freedom of the media and civil society work.”³

On 07 March 2025, Tunisia notified the African Union Commission of its decision to withdraw the declaration provided for in Article 34(6) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. Tunisia ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1983, and officially became a party to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2007. Tunisia's withdrawal from the African Court now prevents Tunisians and human rights NGOs from bringing cases directly before the African Court to allege violations of their fundamental rights. According to some Tunisian NGOs, Tunisia's withdrawal from the African Court “constitutes a severe blow and a serious setback for human rights in Tunisia” (Committee for Justice) and “a serious breach of the 2022 Constitution and a reneging on the commitments made by Tunisia in terms of justice and the protection of human rights, stemming from its ratification of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia).⁴

Observations and recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Tunisia

As part of its monitoring of the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) examined the periodic report of the Tunisian government at its 116th session, and held a hearing with the Tunisian delegation on 26 and 27 November 2025 at the headquarters of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, on the subject of racism and racial discrimination in Tunisia (CERD/C/TUN/CO/20622).

The CERD experts noted that there was “no official data on the ethnic composition of Tunisian society, on national or ethnic minori-

ties or on the Indigenous population”, and therefore asked the Tunisian delegation to provide information on the socio-economic situation of different groups, such as Amazighs and Tunisians of African descent. The experts also wanted to know “whether the State recognizes the Amazigh as an Indigenous people and protects their collective rights in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Tunisia approved in 2007”. The CERD experts were also concerned about the refusal to register Amazigh names in civil registers and the absence of Amazigh representatives in the Assembly of People's Representatives.

After hearing the Tunisian delegation's responses and explanations, the CERD experts published their concluding observations and recommendations, extracts from which are given below.

1. The Committee recommends that the State Party collect and provide to the Committee reliable, updated and comprehensive statistics on the demographic composition of the population, based on the principle of self-identification, including on the Amazigh ethnic minority group and Black Tunisians. It also recommends that the State party produce disaggregated statistics on the socioeconomic situation of ethnic minority groups and non-citizens and on their access to education, employment, health care and housing.
2. The Committee recommends that the State party (a) ensure the effective implementation of the circular by the Minister of Local Affairs of 15 July 2020 to allow the registration of Amazigh names for newborns; (b) take effective measures, including special measures, to address the marginalization and structural discrimination faced by the Amazigh ethnic minority and guarantee their access to education, employment, health care and housing; (c) adopt measures to ensure access to education in their mother-tongue for members of the ethnic Amazigh minority group in public schools and universities, and to allocate sufficient human, technical and financial resources to ensure high-quality instruction in the Tamazight language; and (d) collect and include, in its next periodic report, statistics about the ethnic Amazigh minority group, particularly concerning their economic, social and cultural situation.

3. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt measures to ensure fair and equitable representation of Black Tunisians and the Amazigh ethnic minority group in the public sector and in decision-making and high-level positions, including through special measures and by identifying and removing the barriers that members of Black Tunisians and the Amazigh ethnic minority group face in this respect.
4. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt measures to enhance the school curricula review process in order to integrate the concepts of ethnic and cultural diversity and the fight against racial hatred and discrimination at all levels of education and to ensure that history education is conducted in such a way as to prevent a dominant historical narrative and ethnic hierarchizing. It also recommends that the State party run awareness-raising campaigns for the general public, civil servants, law enforcement officials and judicial authorities on the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity, tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding.

Tunisia's Amazighs are entitled to peace and security but this comes at the price of denying their rights as the country's Indigenous people

Tunisia's Amazigh movement, comprising mainly associations for cultural promotion, heritage and environmental protection, has grown greatly since the “2011 revolution” but has dropped back sharply since 2019 in terms of the number of players, the number of activities organized and the content of these activities. Given the chaotic political context, restrictions on freedoms and repression, Amazigh movement leaders are playing it safe by practising a form of self-censorship that consists of limiting their organizations' activities to cultural aspects only. In 2025, for example, the associations organized celebrations of Yennayer, the Amazigh New Year, visits to Amazigh heritage sites and discovery workshops but no activities on the rights of the Amazigh as the country's Indigenous people.

Tunisian Amazigh organizations have also disappeared from the international scene, and have even broken off their traditional relations with Amazigh organizations in other North African countries. Similarly, while the UN gives them the opportunity to express themselves at international meetings and advocate for their rights, Tunisian Amazigh organizations are totally absent from these international bodies for fear of reprisals. No Tunisian Amazigh organizations have prepared any reports, for example, nor contributed to the NGO reports submitted to the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination, which examined the case of Tunisia in November 2025. H. Zemmour, an Amazigh activist from the Gabès region, tells us: “The Tunisian government does not recognize our existence as Amazighs, and even less so as natives of this country. So, officially, we don't exist. As a result, it's dangerous for us to raise our voices.” In the current context of criminalization of rights and freedoms, Tunisia's Amazighs, who form one of the most vulnerable sectors of society, have no choice but to show great discretion in order to avoid being subjected to repressive measures by the Tunisian government.

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Uganda



Indigenous Peoples in Uganda include former hunter-gatherer communities such as the Benet and the Batwa. They also include minority groups such as the Ik, and the Karamojong and Basongora pastoralists, who are not recognized specifically as Indigenous Peoples by the government.

The Benet, who number slightly over 8,500, live in the north-eastern part of Uganda. The 6,700 or so Batwa live primarily in the south-western region and were dispossessed of their ancestral land when Bwindi and Mgahinga forests were gazetted as national parks in 1991.¹ The Ik number some 13,939 and live on the edge of the Karamoja/Turkana region along the Uganda/Kenya border. The Karamojong people – whose economy is traditionally based on livestock – live in the north-east of the country (mainly drylands) and have an estimated population of 1,094,100,² according to a mid-2018 estimate by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. The Basongora number around 15,000 people and are a cattle-herding community living in the lowlands adjacent to Mt. Rwenzori in Western Uganda.

All these communities have a common experience of State-induced landlessness and historical injustices caused by the creation of conservation areas in Uganda, in addition to mining interests in the case of Karamoja. They have experienced various human rights violations, including continued forced evictions and/or exclusions from ancestral lands without community consultation, consent or adequate (if any) compensation. Other violations include violence and destruction of homes and property, including livestock and denial of their means of subsistence and of their cultural and religious life through their exclusion from ancestral lands and natural resources. All these violations have resulted in their continued impoverishment, social and political exploitation, and marginalization.

The 1995 Constitution offers no express protection for Indigenous Peoples but article 32 places a mandatory duty on the State to take affirmative action in favour of groups that have been historically disadvantaged and discriminated against. This provision, which was initially designed and en-

visaged to deal with the historical disadvantages of children, people with disabilities and women, is the basic legal source of affirmative action in favour of Indigenous Peoples in Uganda.³ The *Land Act* of 1998 and the *National Environment Statute* of 1995 protect customary interests in land and traditional uses of forests. However, these laws also authorize the government to exclude human activities in any forest area by declaring it a protected area, thus nullifying the customary land rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁴

Uganda has never ratified ILO Convention No. 169, which guarantees the rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in independent states, and it was absent from the voting on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.

The Ik people of Uganda: conflict, peace and security situation

The security in and around Ik territory in 2025 remained fragile, and was most violent in the areas of Kalapata, Lotim, Kathile, Morungole, Timu, and Kamion subcounties, especially the mining site of Mutunan in Timu bordering Turkana County to the east. There were robberies, murders, and killings targeting women, *boda boda* bike riders (motorcycle taxi riders), and small artisanal miners in Ik, and small-scale traders moving services between the subcounties of Ik County. Key security threats included armed violence between Turkana and Dodoth pastoralists and the Uganda Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF), land conflicts linked to protected conservation areas, especially the forest cover areas/reserves of Timu and Morungole, climate-induced food insecurity affecting the neighbouring households, and intermittent tensions with Dodoth and Turkana pastoralists over access to water, grazing land, and forests.

Small businesses owned by women and men, such as retail shops, artisanal gold mining and sales faced security hindrances in the form of laid ambushes, robberies targeting service suppliers

of goods, and the rape of women in the mines, creating tension and threatening the growth of these Ik businesses. A few such events experienced in 2025 were:

- In April 2025, at least two Ik were killed at the Mutunan gold mining site by unknown assailants, attacked on grounds of being Ik peace agents.
- In May 2025, one Turkana woman was killed by unknown gunmen in Kamion subcounty while she was travelling to Kamion trading centre.
- In August 2025, a violent eviction of Ik people from Pire, in the Morungole forest reserve by the National Forest Authority and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), resulted in the Ik losing their food reserves and the gold they had mined at Pire site.

Responses by the authorities and Ik community

Due to the heightened insecurity involving armed violence, the local authorities – including the UPDF – engaged in peace dialogues with local communities so that they could report those suspected of committing crimes to local security officers.

- In October 2025, a joint peace security dialogue community meeting was held in Kalapata subcounty where communities identified criminals and areas where they were hiding out. The meeting was supported by the Karamoja Peace and Development Agency (KAPDA).
- In November 2025, a cross-border road from Morungole, Uganda to Nikush and Kapoeta, South Sudan was opened through the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to facilitate the trade of livestock and agricultural products, thus promoting peace through cultural exchange, trade and knowledge sharing among people across the border.
- In December 2025, the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), in partnership with Warrior Squad Foundation, a local NGO working in Karamoja, opened a police station

in Timu subcounty to facilitate a quick response to conflicts and armed violence in the Timu and Kalapata areas of Kaabong District.

The situation of the Karamojong pastoralists

In 2025, a resurgence of armed and violent insecurity rocked most parts of Karamoja subregion. This was characterized by cattle rustling, road ambushes, robberies, and killings of traders by armed warriors. The violence was rife in parts of Kaabong, Abim, Kotido and Nabilatuk Districts. It affected teachers, travellers, *boda boda* bike riders and businesspeople. In Kotido District, cattle rustling has turned into a commercial practice, involving collaboration with other actors, and corrupt local security officials. The source of ammunitions, including military uniforms used by robbers at night, makes it difficult for local people to distinguish between them and security officers.⁵

And yet President Museveni has declared that cattle rustling in Karamoja is being “permanently defeated” and that the security situation has improved significantly for businesses to be able to operate in the region. The UPDF has sustained “Operation Usalama Kwa Wote”, a violent and ruthless security programme aimed at imprisoning and shooting to kill people in possession of illegal firearms, and burning the *confiscated firearms*. Its additional task was to recover raided cattle, if stolen.

Local leaders indicate that poverty, high unemployment, and the presence of small arms are continuing to fuel periodic conflicts in the region and state that they do not want to conclude that insecurity affecting pastoralists has been defeated because, due to porous borders, armed gangs are continuing to enter Uganda.⁶

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

The food insecurity projection of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) 2025 indicated that IPC phase 3 crisis was likely to persist due to imminent drought and that this was expected to potentially spark cattle rustling, land conflicts and violence among households and local communities over limited resources.⁷

Key insecurity events

- **Kamacharikol centre, Kathile south subcounty in Kaabong District:** In February 2025, armed thugs suspected of being local deserted soldiers attacked a trading centre, assaulting residents and looting shops. One victim, Lopeyok Simon, was beaten and robbed of 670,000 Uganda Shillings (USD 200).
- **Cattle raiding (Abim District):** In March 2025, UPDF troops engaged in gunfire with suspected Jie Karamojong rustlers in Abim District, recovering stolen livestock and resulting in the death of at least one suspected raider.
- **16 October 2025 in Kalapata, Kaabong District:** A surge in abductions for ransom was reported, with kidnappers demanding 500,000 Uganda Shillings (USD 185) for the release of victims. Armed warriors were noted to be operating in these areas, specifically targeting travellers and businesspeople.
- **November 2025 (Kotome-Lodiko Road):** A teacher, Grace Lakica Okello, was shot dead, and a *boda boda* rider was killed in a separate ambush along the same road. This was described as a “fresh wave” of gun violence. That same month, police launched a manhunt following an armed robbery targeting traders among the Turkana and Dodoth armed warriors and army deserters.⁸

Response mechanisms

Due to the loss of such vital property as livestock to cattle rustlers from Kenya, and the continued failure of the security forces to recover the livestock or the State to provide compensation for the livestock, the local youth/Karachuna have established schemes that are enabling them to access benefits from the government through microfinance schemes to support business. The peace incentives are bringing youth together to work towards a better future for their communities.

In March 2025, the government began supporting Karachuna with the Parish Development Model fund, as a means of empowering them and protecting them from violent cattle rustling and armed gangs.

In order to secure land for local communities, Kaabong District has started systematic land titling and urban planning, which has since provided an opportunity for 20,000 local women and men to secure their land.

The situation of the Basongora people

In 2025, the Basongora community continued to face peace and security threats rooted in historical land dispossession and unresolved evictions from protected areas. Persistent encroachment on Basongora communal and private lands, particularly in Busongora County, has restricted access to livelihoods and heightened social tensions.

Land conflicts and security

The land disputes between Basongora and Bakonzo over land ownership has left spirals of insecurity among pastoralists. In 2025, tensions remained high, with Basongora pastoralists marginalized and denied access to traditional grazing lands, while facing threats of eviction from both protected and private land reserves.⁹

In October 2025, Basongora pastoralists were violently attacked at Ibuga and Muhokya. During the same period, there were illegal occupations of Basongora lands at Magyengo, Buchumbamurro and Nyakakyindo, and wider regional unrest following the closure of an unlawful encampment at Kasese Municipal Headquarters.

The Basongora Community Land Trust (BCLT), a community-based organization, was working closely with the local authorities in 2025 to pursue land conflicts involving land evictions, and illegal land transactions and wildlife conflicts.

Key notable events

- **Massive Displacement and Protest (2025):** Throughout mid-2025, thousands of residents, including members of the Banyabindi, Bakonzo, and Basongora communities, camped at the Resident District Commissioner's (RDC) office in Kasese

demanding that the government fulfil its promises to resettle them on land, particularly in areas such as Ibuga I, Nkoko, and Kabukero. Following a four-month-long encampment, the Kasese District Security Committee ordered the residents to vacate the office of the Resident District Commissioner, who is responsible for district security affairs, by 20 August 2025, citing health hazards and security risks. By September 2025, the evicted group had shifted their camp to the Kasese District Headquarters in Rukoki. In response, the government security forces forced the residents out and detained their leaders.¹⁰

- **Failed Promises and Impasse:** In June 2025, State Minister for Lands, Dr. Sam Mayanja, visited and promised that the boundary between the community and Queen Elizabeth national park would be opened and land titles issued within three months. However, as the deadline approached in August 2025, no significant progress had been made, causing residents to accuse the government of inaction.¹¹
- **Violence and Humanitarian Crisis:** The land wrangles have resulted in violence, including the death of a community land defender, Mr. Stephen Mohindo Esenge, in a brutal attack in which he was beaten to death by security personnel. Many people have been unable to farm, resulting in severe food insecurity.

Response actions

On 03 September 2025, residents filed a formal complaint with the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) implicating the Kasese Resident District Commissioner and the Attorney-General's office in alleged human rights violations during their eviction.

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Zimbabwe



Zimbabwe celebrated its 45th year of independence on 18 April 2025. While the Government of Zimbabwe does not recognize any specific groups as Indigenous to the country, two peoples self-identify as such: the Tshwa (Tjwa, Cua) San found in western Zimbabwe, and the Doma (Vadema, Tembomvura) of Mbire District in north-central Zimbabwe. Population estimates indicate that there are 3,405 Tshwa and 1,675 Doma in Zimbabwe, representing approximately 0.031% of the country's population of 17,472,752 as of July 2025. The government uses the term "marginalized communities" when referring to such groups.

Many of the Tshwa and Doma live below the poverty line in Zimbabwe and, together, they comprise some of the poorest people in the country. Socioeconomic data is limited for both groups. Both the Tshwa and Doma have histories of hunting and gathering, and their households now have diversified economies, including local-level agriculture, informal agricultural work for other groups, pastoralism, mining, small-scale business enterprises, and working in the tourism industry. Remittances from relatives and friends both inside and outside the country make up a small proportion of the total incomes of Tshwa and Doma. As is the case with other Zimbabweans, some Tshwa and Doma have emigrated to other countries in search of income-generating opportunities, employment, and greater social security.

The realisation of core human rights in Zimbabwe continues to be challenging. Zimbabwe is party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Reporting on these conventions is largely overdue but there were efforts in 2025 to meet some of the conventions' requirements. Zimbabwe voted for the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. Zimbabwe

has not signed the only international human rights convention addressing Indigenous Peoples: ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of 1989. The government has indicated its wish to expand its programmes and service delivery to marginalized communities but there are no specific laws on Indigenous Peoples' rights in Zimbabwe. The "Koisan" language is, however, included in Zimbabwe's 2013 revised Constitution as one of the 16 languages recognized in the country, and there is some awareness within government of the need for more information and improved approaches to poverty alleviation and improvement of well-being among minorities and marginalized communities. Representatives from Zimbabwe attended the 24th annual meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) from 21 April – 2 May 2025.

Introduction

The year 2025 was an especially significant one in Zimbabwe's history in terms of the well-being of Indigenous People and Marginalized Communities. In late January 2025, the United States suspended all foreign assistance to Zimbabwe and, indeed, to most other countries in the world. This aid had been provided to Zimbabwe through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). What this meant for Zimbabwe was an 83% cut in funding, which up until then had supported 1.3 million people. Zimbabwe had been receiving US\$200 million (approx. EUR 169 million) annually. According to UNAIDS, over 1,200 medical and technical staff were relieved of their duties, and hundreds of clinics and health posts had to close their doors.¹ Fewer than 80% of the Tshwa and Doma were supplied with commodities by the Government of Zimbabwe and NGOs under various programs in 2025. There was a rise in unemployment, school closures, children pulled out of school to work, and declines in agricultural production because of a lack of access to seeds. Both the Doma and the Tshwa San faced ongoing, discrimination, food insecurity, low employment levels, limited

political participation, and a lack of broad access to social and health services in 2025.²

There were no new policies issued or legislation passed regarding Indigenous Peoples and Marginalized Communities in Zimbabwe in 2025. The Tshwa have a chief, Christopher Dube, whose authority has been recognized by the Zimbabwe government; he called for greater attention to be paid to Tshwa socioeconomic issues in 2025.

Protected area issues

The area where Tshwa had previously resided for generations, Hwange National Park (HNP), is Zimbabwe's largest protected area, and it is a prime site for tourism. Covering an area of 14,651 km², Hwange is home to the largest and most diverse population of wild animals, reptiles, amphibians and birds in the country. It was the core residential area of the Tshwa until the late 1920s and has a rich archaeological history, containing the prehistoric and historic sites of foragers, farmers, traders, and explorers.³ Since the displacement of San and other people in the 1920s, Hwange has become an important economic engine for western Zimbabwe but has been a source of contention since its establishment in 1927. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Several dozen people described as poachers were arrested in the Hwange National Park area in 2025, according to the Bhejane Trust, a non-profit conservation organization that monitors poaching activities in the northern sector of Hwange. There is no evidence, however, that Tshwa were involved in any wildlife-related crimes or trafficking of wildlife products in 2025.⁴

In the mid-Zambezi Valley, the Doma were also experiencing arrests for alleged violation of wildlife conservation laws. The Doma complained that the arrests were illegal as they held that they had not engaged in taking any wildlife without a license. The Doma have also been facing difficulties because of floods over the past year. Their agricultural fields have been invaded by elephants and baboons, and their livestock preyed upon by lions, hyenas, and other predators. Doma lands had previously been restricted by the establishment of Chewore National Park and the Dande Safari Area. The Doma maintain that they are seeking

access to additional land that they can obtain legal right to but they were having little luck in these efforts in 2025.

Issues in Zimbabwe politics

There were anti-government riots in 2025 aimed at the President, Emmerson Mnangagwa.⁵ Tshwa and Doma were reportedly involved in some of these protests in Harare, the Zimbabwe capital, starting in March 2025. Mr. Mnangagwa is deeply unpopular in Matabeleland North and South, where the Tshwa reside today, because of his involvement in the Gukurahundi genocide from 1982-1987. Demonstrations commemorating the Gukurahundi genocide were broken up by government forces. The Zimbabwe President and his ministers were accused of massive corruption in 2025, and concerns were expressed that government officials were engaged in obtaining land in Matabeleland Province illegally.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) did not pay any visits to Tshwa or Doma communities in 2025.⁶ Despite of limited resources, however, the only San organization in Zimbabwe, the Tsoro-tso San Development Trust (TSDT) was very active. TSDT held workshops on climate change for 3,000 community members in mid-2025.⁷ These workshops produced useful knowledge about ways in which the Tshwa have adapted to climate change and how their strategies are useful in the long term.

The situation of Indigenous women

Tshwa and Doma stated in community meetings that they continued to be concerned about issues of women being exposed to gender-based violence (GBV) and children being exposed to domestic, physical and verbal abuse. Several women's organizations in Zimbabwe, including the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), and Women and Land in Zimbabwe (WLZ) called for greater attention to be paid to women's and children's issues, and for greater empowerment of women. Women's issues have been incorporated into the national curriculum that was introduced in Early Child De-

velopment Centres and primary schools in Tsholotsho with the support of the Tsoro-o-tso San Development Trust. Indigenous women sought to join women's organizations at an increased rate in 2025 in order to empower themselves.

Peace and security in Zimbabwe

The peace and security of Zimbabwe was, in many ways, under severe threat in 2025. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the severe cuts in development and humanitarian assistance, which were having dire impacts. Second, the security situation in the country, which was made worse by the anti-government demonstrations and the state's reaction to these. Third, the remittances coming from Indigenous and minority people outside of the country were in decline. At the end of 2025, the Indigenous Peoples of Zimbabwe were continuing to press the government for equitable and fair treatment before the law and full recognition of their social, political, economic and cultural rights. They were also seeking an expansion of access to health and social service facilities and especially to medicines for HIV/AIDS. There were hopes that the coming year would be better than was the case of 2025 for Indigenous People and Minority Communities.

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Asia



Bangladesh



Bangladesh is a country of cultural and ethnic diversity, with over 54 Indigenous Peoples speaking at least 35 languages, along with the majority Bengali population. According to the 2022 census, the country's Indigenous population numbers approximately 1,650,478,¹ which represents 1% of the total population. Indigenous Peoples in the country, however, claim that their population stands at some four million.² The majority of the Indigenous population lives in the plains districts of the country,³ and the rest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The state does not recognise Indigenous Peoples as “Indigenous”. Nevertheless, since the 15th amendment of the constitution, adopted in 2011, people with distinct ethnic identities beyond the Bengali population are now mentioned.⁴ Yet only cultural aspects are mentioned, whereas major issues related to Indigenous Peoples' economic and political rights, not least their land rights, remain ignored.

The CHT Accord of 1997 was a constructive agreement between Indigenous Peoples of the CHT and the Government of Bangladesh intended to resolve key issues and points of contention. It set up a special administrative system in the region. Twenty-eight years on, the major issues of the Accord, including making the CHT Land Commission functional, orchestrating a devolution of power and function to the CHT's institutions, preserving “tribal” area characteristics of the CHT region, demilitarisation and the rehabilitation of internally displaced people, remain unsettled.

The peace and security situation for Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh remained volatile in 2025. While Indigenous Peoples in the plains districts experienced attacks and forced evictions centred on their lands, for the hill Indigenous Peoples, the forms of violence were diverse and involved different actors. The experiences of Indigenous Peoples of the CHT included incidents of extrajudicial killings and criminalisation by state forces, as well as large-scale communal attacks by Bengali settlers, all linked to the stagnation of the CHT Accord

implementation process. The experiences of both the plains and hill Indigenous Peoples converged following a violent attack on Indigenous students in Dhaka, centred on their “Indigenous” identity.

Dire state of human rights in the CHT

The security and human rights situation in the CHT in 2025 remained appalling, with violations that included extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, communal violence, land grabbing, and suppression of democratic movements. Despite the interim government being spearheaded by Nobel Peace Laureate, Dr Yunus, and several renowned civil society activists, Indigenous Peoples of this region witnessed human rights violations throughout the year. At least 268 incidents of human rights violations were reported in 2025, affecting over 600 Indigenous people who fell victim to various forms of rights abuses.⁵

At least eight Jumma people were killed by members of the state forces, Bengali settlers and land grabbers, or in violent conflicts between Indigenous political groups.^{6,7} The security forces conducted military operations in at least 193⁸ Jumma-inhabited villages during which they arbitrarily arrested at least 117 innocent Indigenous people, with 70 sent to jail through fabricated cases.⁹ The year witnessed three large-scale coordinated communal attacks, including two in Khagrachari on 27-28 September that resulted in three Jumma deaths and the burning of over 120 houses, shops, and establishments belonging to Indigenous people.¹⁰ Members of the Bawm in Bandarban continued to face particular persecution, with three members dying in prison custody due to denial of medical treatment.^{11,12} Around 80 Bawm individuals—including women and children—remained imprisoned without trial following arbitrary arrests made in 2024.¹³

Indigenous Peoples also reportedly faced systematic land dispossession, with at least 300 acres of land illegally occupied by companies, influential persons, and Bengali settlers through forcible eviction and false cases.¹⁴ Internal conflicts among Indigenous political groups also contributed to violence, with Indigenous political parties accusing each other of human rights violations, including killings, kidnappings,

and extortion.¹⁵ Adding to the crisis, organised settler groups actively obstructed CHT Accord implementation efforts, forcing the postponement of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission meetings and other administrative initiatives through threats and strikes, while no effective legal action was taken against the perpetrators of violence, who remained unpunished.¹⁶

Plains Indigenous Peoples face forced eviction and land-related attacks

The human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples in the plains districts in 2025 was marked by systematic land dispossession, violent evictions, and attacks on the sources of their livelihoods. In Rajshahi district, five Indigenous Kol families from Babudaing village of Godagari Upazila had their homes demolished by an excavator on 28 October, by order of the Godagari Assistant Judge's Court, without adequate notice or time to remove their belongings, forcing them to take shelter under a bamboo grove.¹⁷ The families, who had lived on the land since 1998, believing it to be government-owned (*khas*), lost their court case—filed by a Bengali family claiming it as theirs—due to their inability to afford legal representation.¹⁸ In a separate incident in Rajshahi's Mol-lapara, 13 Paharia families who had lived on a 53-year-old settlement faced eviction threats in September from a Bengali resident claiming ownership, although the authorities intervened and halted the eviction pending investigation.¹⁹ Moreover, on 15 August in Gobindaganj Upazila of Gaibandha district, Indigenous Santals were attacked by a group of land grabbers, leaving at least three injured.²⁰ These incidents reveal a systematic pattern whereby Indigenous families of the plains are being targeted for dispossession.

Such eviction attempts in the plains also included attacks on the livelihood sources of Indigenous Peoples. In Sylhet district's Jaflong area, approximately 1,700 betel trees belonging to the Indigenous Khasi community in Lama Punji were destroyed by unidentified miscreants late on 28 July, with victims alleging the incident was part of a deliberate conspiracy to financially weaken and displace them.²¹ Betel cultiva-

tion constitutes the primary livelihood for the Khasi community. These land-related violations underscore the precarious land rights situation faced by different Indigenous communities in the plains.

Violent attack on Indigenous students in the capital

On 15 January 2025, a violent attack took place on Indigenous students in front of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) building in Dhaka, leaving at least 19 injured.²² The incident stemmed from a controversy over a textbook's content that began three days earlier when the NCTB removed graffiti containing the term "Adivasi" (Indigenous) from the back cover of the Grade 9-10 Bengali grammar textbook following pressure from an organisation called Students for Sovereignty.²³ The graffiti depicted a tree with five leaves labelled as Adivasi, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist, symbolising Bangladesh's diversity. Students for Sovereignty argued that recognising Indigeneity threatens Bangladesh's territorial integrity and demanded the removal of the term, claiming it was unconstitutional.²⁴ After the NCTB complied with their demands almost immediately on 12 January, Indigenous students and activists organised a peaceful protest under the banner "Aggrieved Indigenous Students-Masses" to demand reinstatement of the artwork.²⁵

When nearly a hundred Indigenous students marched from Dhaka University to the NCTB office on 15 January, members of Students for Sovereignty suddenly appeared and launched a pre-planned assault with cricket stumps and sticks, despite police presence at the scene.²⁶ A few attackers were arrested but dozens more remain to be brought to justice. The attack sparked widespread condemnation from Indigenous rights organisations and subsequent protests across the country. On 16 January, when Indigenous youths organised a march toward the Home Ministry, police responded with water cannon and baton charges, injuring seven more protesters.²⁷ Reports suggest that Students for Sovereignty is primarily composed of Bengali settlers from the Chitragong Hill Tracts studying in Dhaka and there are allegations of links to fundamentalist groups.²⁸ The artwork has never been reinstated into the textbook.

Violence against Indigenous women and girls

Violence against Indigenous women and girls remains a persistent concern in Bangladesh, affecting both the plains and the CHT. In 2025, Kapaeeng Foundation, a Bangladesh-based human rights organisation, documented 29 cases of violence against Indigenous women and girls. These reported incidents involved 32 Indigenous women and girls who had experienced sexual or physical assault. The breakdown of these cases is alarming: 3 victims were raped; 2 were killed, 5 were attempted rapes, 4 survived gang rape, 9 were tortured, and 7 sexually harassed.²⁹ These figures are likely to underrepresent the true extent of the problem. While all perpetrators were male, their backgrounds varied. The response from the state authorities regarding these cases has been inconsistent. Police cases were filed against the perpetrators in only 15 of the cases. In others, either no action was taken against the perpetrators or the support from the relevant state authorities was inadequate or delayed. This inconsistency in response suggests discriminatory treatment of Indigenous women and girls by some state authorities.

New Chair of CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission appointed

On 28 August 2025, through a government notification issued by the Ministry of Land, retired Justice Muhammad Abdul Hafiz of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court was appointed as the new Chair of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission.³⁰ He has been appointed to this post for a period of three years. This is the 6th appointment of the Chair of the CHT Land Commission. The previous commissions failed to settle any land disputes in the area according to their mandate.

The Chair of the commission has been appointed under the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2021, which was framed following the provisions of the CHT Accord 1997. This Commission is responsible for resolving longstanding land-related disputes in the hilly areas.

CHT Peace Accord Implementation Committee reconstituted and 10th meeting held

The CHT Peace Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee has been reconstituted in accordance with Section 3 of Part 'A' of the CHT Accord signed in 1997. This committee was reconstituted through a gazette notification of the Ministry of CHT Affairs on 12 January 2025.

Md. Touhid Hossain, the Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Dr. Yunus-led interim government, has been appointed as the convener of the committee. The other two ex-officio members of the three-member Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee are Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, president of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), and Sudatta Chakma, chairman of the Task Force on Rehabilitation of Returnee Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.³¹

It is to be noted that the scope of work of the CHT Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee is: to monitor and supervise the implementation process of the CHT Accord; to coordinate the activities of all ministries and departments, including all subordinate government, semi-government, autonomous organisations and authorities related to the implementation process of this Accord, and to provide necessary advice/instructions; to take necessary measures to resolve problems related to the implementation of this Accord and to provide recommendations to the government if necessary; to supervise activities related to the repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees; and to supervise activities related to the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons.

After reforming the Committee, the 10th meeting of the CHT Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee was held in Rangamati on 19 July 2025. The meeting, chaired by the convener of the committee, was attended by the two members.³²

In addition, the meeting was attended by Supradip Chakma, Advisor to the Ministry of CHT Affairs, Goutam Kumar Chakma, Member of the CHT Regional Council, Konkan Chakma, Joint Secretary to the Ministry of CHT Affairs, Deputy Secretary Mangal Chandra Pal and Deputy Secretary Shamsul Haque, among others.

The meeting discussed the appointment of the Chair of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission and the formulation of the Rules of the Land Commission. It was decided to send the draft Rules to the Land Ministry once more for the formulation of the Rules of the Land Commission.

In addition, it was decided to form a committee regarding the transfer of functions in the three Hill District Councils as per the CHT Accord. The decision was taken to form the committee with Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, President of the Jana Sanghati Samiti, as the head and Goutam Kumar Chakma, Member of the Regional Council, and concerned officials of the CHT Affairs Ministry as members.³³

Approval of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Ordinance 2025

The current Interim Government of Bangladesh approved the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Ordinance 2025 on 30 October 2025 with significant reforms aimed at transforming the commission into a truly empowered and effective institution. The ordinance got final approval of the Council of Advisers in a meeting with Chief Adviser Professor Mohammad Yunus in the chair.³⁴

According to the approved NHRC Ordinance article 5(3)–at least one member of the five-member Commission will be from the Indigenous and vulnerable communities. Similarly, according to article 7(1)(F), a representative from the Indigenous and vulnerable communities will be included in the seven-member search committee in order to form the NHRC.³⁵

After the July uprising in 2024, there was huge demand for a reform of the NHRC. Given the structural flaws, weak mandate, and poor mechanism for appointing the commission, the interim government has taken the initiative to form a stronger human rights commission.

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Bedouin in the Negev/Naqab



The Bedouin of the Negev/Naqab are widely regarded by scholars and UN mechanisms as an Indigenous population of the region. Their presence in the Negev predates the establishment of the State of Israel and extends back centuries, with tribal land tenure systems and semi-nomadic pastoral traditions shaping the region's social order.¹

Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, most Bedouin were displaced. Approximately 11,000 remained under military rule in a restricted zone known as the "Siyag" until 1966.² Today, the Bedouin population in the Negev exceeds 300,000.³ Approximately one-third reside in 35 "unrecognized" villages excluded from official planning frameworks and denied basic infrastructure.⁴

UN Special Rapporteurs and treaty bodies have repeatedly addressed the Bedouin situation in the context of Indigenous land rights, forced displacement, and discrimination.⁵ While Israel does not formally recognize them as Indigenous under domestic law, international standards increasingly frame their claims through Indigenous rights instruments, including UNDRIP.⁶

Summary

The year 2025 was characterized by regional escalation, renewed missile attacks, and ongoing internal displacement affecting the Bedouin citizens of Israel living in the Negev/Naqab region. While national discourse focused primarily on external threats, protection remained deeply unequal. Significant gaps in civilian shelter infrastructure, the demolition of homes during wartime, exclusion from emergency systems, and long-standing non-recognition policies exposed structural vulnerabilities. In the context of peace and security, the situation of the Bedouin in 2025 illustrates that insecurity can arise not only from armed conflict but also from structural inequality.

Peace and security: structural exposure in 2025

The events of 2025 demonstrated how the concept of “security” functions unevenly across populations.

Missile attacks following 7 October 2023, and renewed escalation involving Iran in 2025, exposed profound disparities in access to civilian protection infrastructure. According to research conducted by Nagabiya: The Bedouin Society Knowledge and Research Hub, the research center of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), approximately 65% of Bedouin families in the Negev lack access to a protected room (*mamad*) in their homes.⁷

Public shelter distribution is similarly unequal. Data presented to the Knesset State Control Committee in June 2025 showed that:

- Rahat (approx. 79,000 residents) has 5 public shelters.
- Segev Shalom has 5 shelters.
- Hura has 2 shelters.
- Ar’ara BaNegev has none.⁸

In contrast, nearby Jewish towns of comparable or smaller size have dozens and, in some cases, over 100 public shelters.⁹

The disparity was highlighted in a Haaretz investigation drawing on Nagabiya’s findings, which described a system of unequal civilian protection infrastructure across the Negev.¹⁰

Civilian casualties and human impact

On 7 October 2023, seven Bedouin children were killed by missile strikes in unprotected localities in the Negev¹¹

During the first direct Iranian missile attack in April 2024, the only civilian seriously injured was a young girl from a Bedouin village lacking adequate protective infrastructure. She continues to undergo recovery and rehabilitation.¹²

NCF’s War Situation Update (2025) documented testimonies of families sheltering under bridges, in drainage canals, and in improvised trenches due to the absence of formal protection.¹³ In some cases, res-

idents reported fearing administrative fines or demolition orders if they constructed makeshift protective structures without permits.¹⁴

Although mobile shelters were deployed in parts of the south in 2024–2025, government data presented in June 2025 indicated that only a minimal proportion had been installed in Bedouin localities.¹⁵ Emergency placements do not address the systemic absence of permanent infrastructure.

Legal framework and structural barriers

Under Article 3 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, states are obligated to ensure humane treatment and protection of civilians during armed conflict.¹⁶ Israel's Civil Defense Law (1951) mandates civil protection infrastructure for the population.¹⁷

However, planning policy directly affects access to shelter. Residents of unrecognized villages cannot obtain building permits because there are no approved outline plans. As documented in NCF's 2023 position paper and subsequent Knesset submissions, this planning exclusion prevents residents from legally constructing reinforced rooms.¹⁸

The State Comptroller's 2024 report also identified systemic deficiencies in nationwide shelter planning and approval processes, including delays and bureaucratic obstacles.¹⁹ For unrecognized villages, the barriers are categorical rather than procedural.

The result is a structural linkage between land recognition and physical security.

Education and infrastructure under fire

The shelter gap extends to educational facilities. NCF's supplementary submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to Education (June 2025) documented that hundreds of classrooms in Bedouin localities lack adequate reinforced protection.²⁰

During periods of missile alert, schools in affected areas were unable to operate safely. In unrecognized villages, where schools often lack permanent buildings, the situation is particularly acute.

Emergency remote-learning policies presume internet access and digital infrastructure. However, unrecognized villages continue to experience limited broadband access and infrastructure deficits.²¹ This compounds educational disruption during times of conflict.

Food insecurity also worsened in unrecognized villages following October 2023 and during the renewed escalation, as documented in joint research by NCF and partner organizations.²²

Security therefore intersects with infrastructure, education, and access to services.

Demolitions during conflict

In June 2025, shortly after the regional escalation involving Iran, demolition operations resumed in the unrecognized village of as-Sirr.²³ Families whose homes were demolished remained without permanent housing during a period of heightened security risk.

The continuation of home demolitions during armed conflict raises serious concerns under international humanitarian and human rights standards, particularly when affected populations lack alternative safe housing.²⁴

The Be'er Sheva District Court ruling regarding Ras Jarabah (June 2025) temporarily halted one expansion plan but did not resolve broader displacement dynamics.²⁵

Peace and security as equal protection

2025 demonstrated that security cannot be reduced solely to responding to external threats. For the Bedouin citizens of the Negev, insecurity is shaped by:

- Lack of village recognition
- Exclusion from planning frameworks
- Unequal shelter infrastructure
- Demolition policy
- Gaps in education and services

Repeated escalations in 2021, 2023, 2024, and 2025 have shown a persistent structural vulnerability. Without systemic reform, future conflicts will yield the same unequal results.

Peace, in this context, requires equal civilian protection, equitable infrastructure planning, and recognition of Indigenous land rights.

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The **Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF)** was established in 1997 to provide a space for Arab-Jewish shared society in the struggle for civil equality and the advancement of mutual tolerance and coexistence in the Negev/Naqab. NCF is unique in being the only Arab-Jewish organization that remains focused solely on the problems confronting the Negev/Naqab area. NCF considers that the State of Israel is failing to respect, protect and fulfil its human rights obligations, without discrimination, towards the Arab Bedouin Indigenous communities in the Negev/Naqab. As a result, NCF has set one of its goals as the achievement of full civil rights and equality for all people who make the Negev/Naqab their home.

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Cambodia



Cambodia is home to 22 different Indigenous Peoples, who speak at least 19 Indigenous languages.^{1, 2} With an estimated population of 170,000–400,000, they constitute approx. 1.1% of the national population. Disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples generally vary considerably between surveys.^{3, 4, 5} Numbers are likely to be ambiguous since government data classify Indigenous Peoples by language and not ethnicity.⁶ Furthermore, the contemporary stigmatisation of Indigenous Peoples in Khmer society, as well as a legacy of fear from the devastating Khmer-Rouge regime, result in some Indigenous Peoples being reluctant to officially self-identify as Indigenous, for fear of repercussions.⁷ The political system has been dominated by the Cambodian People's Party for four decades. In 2023, after 38 years in power, Prime Minister Hun Sen facilitated a transfer of power to his son, Hun Manet. The Cambodian government has continuously been criticised for its undemocratic and repressive leadership, including an oppressive crackdown on the opposition, independent media, and civil society.⁸

The Indigenous areas include the forested plateaux and highlands of north-eastern Cambodia, where the majority live in the provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Kratie, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom, and Preah Vihear. Indigenous Peoples continue to face discrimination and forced displacement from their lands, which is extinguishing them as distinct groups.⁹ These patterns are driven by ongoing state and transnational corporate ventures aimed at resource extraction (mainly mining, timber, and agribusiness) coupled with growing in-migration from other parts of the country. In addition, the recent conservation schemes in Cambodia also overlap with claims and affect Indigenous land and territories under the umbrella of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Cambodia voted to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) without reservation in 2007 and has ratified the CERD and the CRC but has still not ratified ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.^{10, 11}

Collective Land Titles

The issuing of Communal Land Titles (CLTs), a specific land right of Indigenous Peoples to ancestral territories enshrined in the Land Law of 2001, Sub-Decree No. 83,¹² remained constricted in 2025. Despite the introduction of simplified measures in 2020, the application process was primarily hampered by a complex, high cost, and time-intensive procedure. Eight new villages had obtained CLT as of December 2025. This means that 48 out of 488 Indigenous communities have had their land officially registered as CLTs by the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) since 2011. The inefficient process of granting CLTs to Indigenous communities^{13,14} demonstrates a disregard for Indigenous Peoples' traditional rights to adequate customary land and resources, guaranteed under both national and international law.¹⁵

Meanwhile mechanisms have enabled the encroachment onto Indigenous lands and resources, including the allocation of forests to corporate interests or individuals through economic land concessions, hydropower dam construction, and mining concessions. However, no new allocations or Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) on Indigenous land were issued to companies in 2025 although there are still ongoing issues within ELCs that have not been resolved.^{16, 17, 18, 19} More recent trends include conservation initiatives that have failed to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights, including some REDD+ projects.^{20, 21}

Since 2023, 15 protected areas have been expanded to incorporate adjacent biodiversity corridors, and 10 out of 15 protected areas are on Indigenous land.²²

The Environment and Natural Resources Code

In June 2025, following nine years of drafting, Cambodia's parliament adopted the Environment and Natural Resources Code. The government argues that the code, which incorporates the Law on Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Management (1996), the Land Law (2001), the Forestry Law (2002), and the Protected Areas Law (2008), will help Cambodia align its environmental goals with the Paris Agree-

ment pledges.²³ The Code is meant to expand protected areas and biodiversity corridors across Cambodia.²⁴

The adoption of the Code raised concerns among Indigenous communities and organisations, the custodians of Indigenous Peoples' landscapes, as they feared a loss of cultural traditions related to land, natural resources, and forest stewardship. Consultation and inclusion in the drafting of the Code was insufficient and the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was lacking. Among other things, the code disregards the rights of Indigenous Peoples and excludes them from the text by replacing the term Indigenous Peoples with "local community".²⁵

Since Indigenous Peoples are no longer mentioned as rightsholders, the terminology of the Code thus also omits their rights to traditional management of forests and landscapes, a right enshrined in the Land Law (2001) and the Forest Law (2002), as well as the UNDRIP to which Cambodia is a signatory. Indigenous organisations and members expressed concern at the code's potential to serve as a neocolonial law, pushing Indigenous Peoples off their land, forests, natural resources, and territories.

Indigenous Peoples are thus being denied their specific rights, such as access to non-timber forest products, traditional practices of rotational farming, traditional hunting, and customary land tenure. Since the Code came into effect, the Ministry of Environment has initiated a reclassification of biodiversity corridors, incorporating them into at least 15 protected areas across 13 provinces. Numerous environmentalists have raised concerns that this massive expansion could lead to conflict with the communities and hinder the ongoing land titling process for Indigenous communities, as the decision has been made by the government to incorporate the biodiversity corridors without proper consultation with the communities.²⁶

Virachey National Park is among the protected areas that is proposed for expansion under the Natural Resources and Environmental Code. Located in Ratanakiri and Steung Treng province, the Virachey National Park was established in 1993 by Royal Decree and covers a total of 332,500 hectares. The park is well known for its rich natural resources, biodiversity, and key habitat for flora and fauna.²⁷ The area has been inhabited by Indigenous Brao, Kavet, Kreung, and Lun for centu-

ries, for whom the park is not simply a natural resource but the heart-land and stronghold of their cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Following the sub-decree on expanding protected areas, the Ratanakiri Provincial Department of the Environment initiated a process of identifying the corridors that would be incorporated into the park. The proposed areas are largely covered by rotational farm land, spiritual forest, burial sites and the homes of Indigenous Brao, Kavet, Kreung, and Lun.

The demarcation process took place without prior information of or consultation with the affected Indigenous communities. Indigenous Rights Active Members (IRAM), among others, voiced concerns regarding the village of Trabok, which will suffer from encroachment. The village includes 17 families (71 individuals, of which 33 are women, and six have disabilities) who will be subject to eviction from their rotational farm land,²⁸ while 219 further families (735 individuals, including 354 women, and 115 people with disabilities) living in the vicinity will be indirectly affected by the expansion. The majority of community members are farmers who have been traditionally relying on forest products, traditional fishing, rotational farming, and seasonal cropping for centuries.²⁹

Impacts of hydropower dams in Mekong and branched rivers

Across Cambodia, the development of electricity has contributed to the climate crisis, and the devastation of biodiversity and ecosystems. In particular, for riverine communities, the construction of hydropower dams along the Mekong River and its tributaries has caused encroachment, flooding, loss of land, aquatic resources, and livelihoods.

In October 2025, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Vitit Muntarbhorn, raised concerns over the development of the Sesan dams, in particular the Lower Sesan II Dam, a hydropower dam in Stung Treng Province. The development of this dam has contributed to environmental depletion, including a loss of biodiversity, ecosystems, deforestation, fisheries, sediments, and the forced displacement of nearly 5,000 people, many of them Indigenous Bunong, Kreung, Jarai, Brao, onto unfavourable and poor land quality sites.³⁰

The environmental impact assessment from 2008 and subsequent consultation process for the dam have been criticised for the absence of FPIC, a right that is explicitly recognised by the UNDRIP which, among other things, requires respectful consultation, inclusive dialogue, freely agreed compromises, provision of adequate remedies, and the opportunity to reject a project. Consultation was limited to the villages that would be flooded by the dam, without gaining their consent.

Several affected Indigenous communities living upstream and downstream, however, did not receive prior information about the project, including the potential negative impacts on their traditional living, livelihoods, forest and cultural practices.³¹ In 2025, compensation claims from Indigenous communities for the loss of land, burial sites and crops destroyed due to encroachment and flooding caused by the Lower Sesan II Dam were rejected by the government.³² The deputy governor of Steung Treng, Meng Kun said that compensation had already been paid in 2023 and no more compensation was due.³³

In addition to the existing Lower Sesan II Dam, the proposed Srepok III Dam is likely to pose another massive threat to Indigenous Peoples living along the Srepok River, in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri provinces. The project is driven by the Roya Group, owned by a prominent Cambodian tycoon, in collaboration with Huaneng Hydropower International Energy, and PowerChina Huadong Corporation (HDEC).³⁴ The vast majority of community members have rejected the idea of relocation, in particular the Indigenous Peoples, who have been living here for centuries and still value their ancestral land as a significant part of their life.³⁵

Given that cultural heritage and natural resources are so closely intertwined with the lives of Indigenous Peoples, any development projects on or near Indigenous territories must seek their meaningful participation, including the right to reject a project, and must respect such decision.

Preah Roka and Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary

In Preah Vihear province, within the Preah Roka and Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, 2025 was inundated with pervasive threats to forests and Indigenous livelihoods.³⁶

Threats included the expansion of gold mining³⁷ (despite a 2023 moratorium on new mining licences), devastating illegal logging,^{38, 39}

the approval of construction of a large-scale cement factory⁴⁰ by a politically well-connected company previously linked to deforestation,⁴¹ and commencement of the construction of an electric power line.⁴² The 300 km line, which is projected to split the protected forest of the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary in two, is likely to cause further access for illegal loggers, pushing the forest frontiers back, with devastating consequences for the diverse forest ecosystems and rich biodiversity.⁴³

This protected forest is the ancestral forest and home of the Indigenous Kuy. The Kuy depend on sustainable forest practices for income, livelihood, and cultural connection. Among other things, Indigenous Kuy sustainably harvest resin from mature dipterocarp trees, a highly valued timber tree.⁴⁴ In November, the loss of 4,000 resin trees to illegal logging was reported by Indigenous Kuy in the Preah Roka Wildlife Sanctuary.⁴⁵

Despite rampant levels of documented deforestation, primarily due to large-scale illegal logging by corporate businesses such as Think Biotech, the Ministry of Environment has continued to reject the information⁴⁶ presented from satellite and ground-truthed data.⁴⁷

Criminalisation of Indigenous Peoples

According to the organisation Freedom House, Cambodia ranked low on its global scale of freedom in 2025, both in terms of political rights and civil liberties. It cited antidemocratic rule i.e., a repressive and, on occasion, intimidating and violent environment for the opposition, media, and civil society.⁴⁸ Fifty-four politicians and political activists and five human rights activists and environmentalists, including Indigenous persons (albeit detained and released immediately while pursuing lawsuits against them) have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, and imprisoned for defending their rights and territories.^{49, 50, 51}

In October, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples raised concern at reports of Indigenous Peoples facing criminal charges and prosecution when attempting to assert their rights, for example through speeches and demonstrations.⁵² However, as of 2025, the Cambodian government had not made any public statement on Indigenous issues apart from defending itself and rejecting the report.⁵³

In 2025, 158 Indigenous members and human rights defenders (30 women and nine persons with disabilities, two of whom were women) were accused of inciting discrimination (incitement to discriminate, which can include speeches made in public spaces, as well as written, audio or visual communications made to the public) and committing crimes (incitement to commit a felony), public defamation, and illegal encroachment onto state land and protected areas based on articles 495 and 496 of the Cambodian Criminal Code. Several individuals faced multiple lawsuits (20 people faced up to four different lawsuits, 56 people faced up to two different lawsuits, and 27 people faced up to three different lawsuits) when they spoke up for other Indigenous members who were involved in protecting their forests and land.⁵⁴

Notably, in 2025, over 100 Indigenous Brao residing in areas adjacent to the Virachey National Park faced lawsuits for practising their traditional rotational farming. The Brao people have been accused of illegal clearing of forest and encroaching onto protected areas.⁵⁵ Many of the defendants do not speak or write the Khmer language well and thus need interpreters present at every court hearing. If the Brao are convicted of practising their traditional rotational farming, they will each face imprisonment of one to five years and a monetary fine of between 100,000,000 and 500,000,000 Cambodian riels (approx. 25,000 -125,000 USD).⁵⁶

While the 2001 Land Law recognises Indigenous Peoples' rights to traditionally inhabit and manage their land and forest, including rotational farming, to this day the government has not presented a proper solution for those who were living in or adjacent to the protected areas.⁵⁷ The state should refrain from being partial and biased towards its own and/or corporate interests under development schemes that infringe upon Indigenous Peoples' rights that have been recognised by international human rights mechanisms, the UNDRIP, and other human rights standards.

Cambodia-Thailand armed conflict

The Cambodia-Thailand conflict happened in late May 2025 and left one Cambodian soldier dead. It was the starting point of the armed conflict over the long-running overlapping claims along the land border and the

ancient temples of Ta Maon Thom, Ta Maon Toch, and Prasat Ta Krabie (Ta Krabie Temple). After the death of the Cambodian soldier, the tensions escalated, land border checkpoints were closed, and both sides began sending extra troops and heavy weapons to the conflict areas. At the same time, dialogues were also held through the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC).

The dialogues were not upheld, however, and this resulted in both sides exchanging fire on the mornings of 24–28 July 2025, with further clashes occurring from 07 December to 27 December 2025.⁵⁸

The consequence of these armed clashes is that some 644,589 Cambodian people have been displaced to a safer location, including 204,000 children and 336,000 women.⁵⁹ Of these, the Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA) is unable to verify how many are Indigenous and how this is affecting their livelihoods due to limited resources. It is, however, important to note that there are also Indigenous Peoples living in Preah Vihear, Battambang, Odar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey, and Pursat, where another major conflict has taken place. The conflict has also directly and indirectly affected their daily living activities as well as their mental health. One further issue worthy of note is that many Indigenous people along the border also fell into arrears or were unable to pay off their debts to banks and microfinance due to being unable to generate an income through the sale of their labour or crops. On top of this, many Indigenous organisations also faced difficulties in carrying out their activities. We, for example, had to delay organising numerous workshops, training sessions, and meetings with community activists and NGOs due to safety and security concerns.

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*This article was produced by **Indigenous Rights Active Members (IRAM)**, an Indigenous working group established in 2009, which currently works in 15 provinces across Cambodia.*

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China



The People's Republic of China (PRC or China) officially proclaims itself to be a unified country with a diverse ethnic make-up and all nationalities equal in the Constitution. Besides the Han Chinese majority, the government recognizes 55 minority nationalities within its borders. According to the latest national census in 2020,¹ the combined minority nationalities' population stands at 125,467,390 or 8.89% of the country's total population. The "unidentified ethnic groups" in China are included in the "minority nationalities" population, numbering 836,488 persons. Minority nationalities are culturally distinctive and socially marginalized in the Chinese context.

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy is a basic law on the governance of minority nationalities in China. It includes establishing autonomous areas for nationalities, setting up their own local governance and giving them the right to practise their own language and culture. These regional national autonomous areas make up approximately 64% of China's total territory and include, among others, the vast territories of Tibet Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The Chinese government does not recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples in the PRC despite voting in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Changes in legislation affecting Indigenous Peoples

There are three laws that were adopted or revised at the national level in 2025 affecting Indigenous Peoples' access to natural resources, language use, and the maintenance of group and cultural identities.

National Park Law

On 12 September, the draft National Park Law (see The Indigenous World 2025) was adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and this took effect on 1 January 2026.²

The concept of *yuanyoujumin* (原有居民 in Chinese, tentative translation in English: original residents or native residents) used in the law is different from *tuzhurenmin* (土著人民 in the UN documents) and *yuanzhuminzu* (原住民族 in Taiwanese official documents) for Indigenous Peoples. While the law grants original residents (*yuanyoujumin*) – some of whom may meet the characteristics of Indigenous Peoples – certain rights to continue their traditional livelihoods within the parks, and could therefore be viewed as a small step towards legal recognition of Indigenous communities' rights to maintain their way of life, it remains inconsistent with international standards on Indigenous Peoples' rights, such as those set out in the UNDRIP. There is no recognition of the FPIC rule when resettling original residents based on the national parks' management needs (Article 29).

Revision of the Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language

The revised law was adopted on 27 December 2025 and came into force on 1 January 2026. This is the first revision of the law since it took effect in 2001, which expanded its contents from four chapters and 28 articles to five chapters and 32 articles. This revision further marginalizes Indigenous languages as it legislates the use of the national common language and script throughout the country, that its use should be to create a sense of community for the Chinese nation, and that it should be used to “cultivate and promote” Chinese culture.³

By strengthening the promotion of Putonghua (Mandarin) and standardized Chinese characters in China, more than 100 Indigenous or minority languages have been marginalized in their use and development, contrary to the freedom stipulated in the Chinese Constitution. The trend to promote the use of the national common language and limiting the learning of Indigenous or minority languages has been observed for the past two decades. And, reinforcing this trend, there is no information on any Indigenous or endangered language communities in

China that are participating in the programs of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032).

Draft Law on the Promotion of Ethnic Unity and Progress

In 2025, the draft law underwent two revisions by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC), in September and December.⁴

The formulation of the law is stated to be guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era on strengthening and improving ethnic work as well as implementing the decisions of the 20th CPC National Congress and the Second and Third Plenary Sessions of the 20th CPC Central Committee. The draft is said to be based on the “historic achievements and successful experiences in ethnic work since the 18th CPC National Congress”, with the idea “to promote the high-quality development of the cause of ethnic unity and progress by forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation as the main thread.”⁵

The draft signals an ideological shift from endorsement of the regional national (ethnic) autonomy model towards a more unitarian approach to ethnic policy.

Human rights NGOs commented that the proposed law would provide a broad legal framework to justify existing repression and force assimilation of minority populations throughout the country and abroad. Once passed, the law could be used to facilitate an intensifying of ideological controls, to target ethnic and religious minorities, including by erasing minority language rights, and even to foster Chinese authorities' control beyond China's borders.⁶

In addition to the national-level legislation, there are several pieces of legislation in the same field at the subnational level.⁷

Major national/local events relevant to Indigenous Peoples

The Ascending Dragon fireworks display

On 19 September 2025, at approximately 5,500 metres (18,000 feet) above sea level in Gyantse County, Shigatse in the Tibet Autonomous

Region, a fireworks display entitled *Ascending Dragon* took place at the foot of the Qionggangri (Qiongmu Gangri) mountain.

The show was a marketing collaboration between the outdoor brand Arc'teryx and renowned Chinese pyrotechnics artist, Cai Guo-Qiang. Despite claims of using biodegradable materials, debris, including plastic packaging and unburned gunpowder, was reportedly found on the fragile alpine tundra.⁸ The noise and light startled local wildlife and required the temporary relocation of livestock and herdsman. This event triggered significant controversy regarding environmental protection and cultural rights. Critics accused the organizers of the commercial brand and the artists of “cultural ignorance” for using a Tibetan sacred site for the show and for violating the “leave no trace” principle central to outdoor culture. Arc'teryx, founded in Canada and acquired by a consortium led by Chinese sports apparel giant Anta Sports, issued an apology on 22 September.⁹

As a result, some local officials were sacked and organizers apologized and pledged to be more “humble and respectful of nature”. However, this event reveals a collective lack of awareness among officials, companies, and artists of the rights of minority or Indigenous communities and environmental protection.

Yarlung Tsangpo downstream hydropower project

The groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the mammoth hydroelectric project on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo River at the eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau took place on 19 July 2025.

To this day, no information has been made available to the public on the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) or the resettlement plan for the affected communities. The project is expected to have a major impact on the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous communities, especially the Monpa, Lhoba and Mishmi in China, and many tribal communities such as the Adi in India. The construction, taking place in the controversial border area, has added complexity to the region's geopolitics and water disputes. India, angered by China's plans, is planning to build a “retaliatory dam” – the Upper Siang Multipurpose Storage Project, with a potential to submerge over 300 villages, including those inhabited by Indigenous Adi people, leading to loss of ancestral lands and disruption of traditional ways of life.¹⁰

Important input/outcomes from international processes

Since China rejects the optional protocols to treaty bodies and other procedures for individual complaints at the UN, the special procedures play an essential role in drawing attention to cases of violations of human rights conventions in the country.

In 2025, UN experts were in communication with the Chinese government on a number of cases relating to Uyghurs and Tibetans and other Indigenous Peoples. These cases concern environmental and human rights defenders, victims of arbitrary detention, enforced or involuntary disappearances, in violation of their rights concerning fundamental freedoms of religion and belief, language use, and cultural expression.

The five cases concerning Uyghurs, mainly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, include the alleged arbitrary arrest and detention of Mr. Ekpar Asat,¹¹ Mr. Mulizati Tayier,¹² artist Yaxia'er Xiaohelaiti,¹³ and Mr. Nuermaimaiti Maiwulani,¹⁴ as well as the unlawful deportation of 40 Uyghurs from Thailand to China.¹⁵

General concerns expressed in these cases include a lack of information about the detained individuals or their trials for years, the lack of independence of judges and lawyers, and the silencing of artists in the name of national security. The above cases are among a number brought before the UN experts in recent years, indicating a systemic practice of arbitrary detention in the country. The UN experts noted that some of these cases reflect deeply troubling patterns whereby cultural identity, artistic creativity, and academic work are treated as threats to national security in China.

Among the cases concerning Tibetans, two are regarding the rights to freedom of religion or belief, and Tibetan Buddhist institutions and leaders.

UN experts expressed concern at state interference in the process of succession of the 14th Dalai Lama and the alleged efforts to interfere in the “reincarnation” practice. They were also concerned at the continued enforced disappearance of Gedhun Cheokyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama recognized by the 14th Dalai Lama,¹⁶ as well as the death of Mr. Tulku Hungkar Dorje Rinpoche, a Tibetan spiritual leader, who died in custody in Viet Nam on 28 March 2025.¹⁷

The UN experts also expressed concern regarding two Tibetan activists in detention: Ms Namkyi¹⁸ and Mr. A-Nya Sengdra.¹⁹

Furthermore, in the field of cultural rights, the UN experts expressed concern at the alleged disappearance of the Tibetan nomenclature from the signage of the Quai Branly and Guimet museums, and its replacement with terms such as “Xizang Autonomous Region” and “Himalayan World”.²⁰

Additionally, in 2025 there was an occasion when UN experts communicated with the Chinese government regarding Chinese companies’ activities that were affecting Indigenous Peoples outside of China in 2025. This case relates to the violent physical attacks and intimidation attempts against Indigenous woman human rights defender Ms Dewi Anakoda, in apparent connection with her work exposing the human and environmental impact of nickel mining on the part of Chinese companies on Halmahera Island, Indonesia.²¹

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Due to the sensitivity of some of the issues covered in this article, the author prefers to remain anonymous.



India



In India, some 705 ethnic groups are listed as Scheduled Tribes. In central India, the Scheduled Tribes are usually referred to as Adivasis, which literally means original inhabitants or Indigenous Peoples.¹ With an estimated population of 104 million, they comprise 8.6% of the total population. There are, however, many more ethnic groups that would qualify for Scheduled Tribe status but which are not officially recognised and, consequently, the total population of the Scheduled Tribes is higher than the official figure.

The largest concentrations of Indigenous Peoples are found in the seven states of north-east India, and the so-called “central tribal belt”, stretching from Rajasthan to West Bengal. India has several laws and constitutional provisions, such as the *Fifth Schedule* for central India and the *Sixth Schedule* for certain areas of north-east India, that recognise Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land and self-governance. The laws aimed at protecting Indigenous Peoples have numerous shortcomings, however, and their implementation is far from satisfactory.

The Government of India has increasingly been using the term “Indigenous Populations” in official notifications such as the establishment of a High-Level Committee to look into the “social, economic, cultural and linguistic issues of the indigenous population in the State of Tripura”² or in its justification for the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019. The State government of Jharkhand declared the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, celebrated on 9 August every year worldwide, a state holiday.³

Peace and security of Indigenous Peoples

In December 2025, at least two persons were killed, and several others injured after a protest turned violent in West Karbi Anglong and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. The protesters were demanding the eviction of illegal settlers from Indigenous areas governed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, where land is legally protected for

Indigenous communities. They alleged large-scale encroachment by outsiders on Village Grazing Reserves (VGRs) and Professional Grazing Reserves (PGRs), which are meant to safeguard Indigenous livelihoods and land rights.⁴

This incident is not an isolated one. Across India, the peace and security of Indigenous Peoples are increasingly under threat due to illegal occupation of Indigenous lands, aggressive mining, hydropower and infrastructure projects, shrinking democratic spaces and the deployment of security forces in Indigenous areas. These tensions are closely linked to the way development projects are planned and implemented, often without respecting the deep and long-standing relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their forests, which are central to their livelihoods, culture and identity. Between 1 April 2021 and 31 October 2025, 91,650.10 hectares of forest land were diverted for non-forest use under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, including in Scheduled Areas and Fifth Schedule districts,⁵ affecting a large number of Indigenous communities. Instead of being treated as rights-holders and partners in development, Indigenous Peoples are frequently subjected to criminalisation, intimidation and violence.

Despite constitutional protections, many Indigenous communities face an increasing presence of police and paramilitary forces in their areas. Such actions, often justified in the name of maintaining “law and order”, only deepen mistrust, increase tensions and weaken Indigenous self-governance. They threaten traditional livelihoods, cultural identity and the long-term peace of Indigenous regions.

Some of the cases reported in 2025 illustrate this pattern.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the proposed 11,000 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) triggered protests in May 2025 after Central Armed Police Forces were deployed to conduct a survey-cum-pre-feasibility report without community consent. Indigenous organisations demanded the withdrawal of forces and meaningful dialogue, stating that the project threatened displacement, ecological destruction and sacred landscapes. They alleged the “forceful” survey was a blatant violation of their fundamental rights under the Constitution of India and they condemned the alleged arbitrary abuse of power, stating that it hurt and violated their sentiments and rights.⁶ The heavy security presence turned a development issue into a security crisis.

In Chhattisgarh, Indigenous communities in Raigarh district opposed an underground coal mining project by an Adani-owned company in a Fifth Schedule area. The project involves forest land, non-forest land and private land, including affecting 10 Indigenous villages. In October 2025, Gram Sabhas unanimously rejected the project under PESA, citing threats to forests, water and wildlife.⁷

In Odisha, prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 were imposed by the administration in Dhinkia village, Jagatsinghpur district on 28 October 2025 in connection with the proposed JSW steel project. These orders banned public gatherings for a month and followed a Gram Sabha resolution demanding the return of forest land handed over to JSW in 2022, which was allegedly transferred without consent and with police-backed coercion. The administration also ordered police deployment to the site to maintain law and order.⁸

The Vedanta Sijimali bauxite mining project in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts, Odisha illustrates the criminalisation of Indigenous resistance. In December 2025, lawyers from across India protested the arrest, intimidation and harassment of Indigenous villagers opposing the alleged illegal acquisition of Fifth Schedule land for the project. They alleged that 1,548.786 hectares of land had been leased to Vedanta, including 708.24 hectares of forest land following the Forest Advisory Committee's recommendation on 2 December 2025 for Stage-I forest clearance. The lawyers alleged that the lease was granted without free, prior and informed consent of the affected communities, in violation of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA), etc. They also alleged fake Gram Sabhas conducted under police presence. Indigenous villagers who rejected the project in their Gram Sabhas in September 2024 reportedly faced sustained police repression between 2023-2025, including arbitrary arrests and detentions. At least nine village leaders remained in custody. The lawyers demanded an immediate review of Vedanta's lease, a halt to arrests and the withdrawal of cases, the suspension of all project-related activities until voluntary Gram Sabha decisions could be ensured, and that any police deployment be subject to Gram Sabha approval.⁹

Beyond development-related conflicts, militarisation in conflict-affected states, particularly in the North-East and Naxalite-affected re-

gions, has led to serious human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples. These include extrajudicial killings, custodial torture, arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without due process, enforced disappearances and use of force during counter-insurgency operations. Indigenous communities, already facing historical and structural marginalisation, bear a disproportionate burden of these security measures, resulting in a pervasive climate of fear, insecurity, and distrust.

While the State has a legitimate responsibility to address insurgency and ensure public security, such measures must be lawful, proportionate, accountable and grounded in constitutional safeguards and human rights obligations. Peace and security for Indigenous Peoples cannot be separated from their rights to land, forests, and natural resources, nor from their right to self-governance. When consent is ignored and coercive, and security-driven approaches are used to impose development projects or suppress dissent, this generates conflict rather than peace. There is an urgent need to move away from militarised and coercive responses and towards inclusive, rights-based frameworks that respect the law, uphold free, prior and informed consent and recognise Indigenous Peoples as central actors in shaping their own futures.

As a member of the United Nations, India is obligated to carry out resolutions of the UN Security Council. There has, however, been little to no implementation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 by the parties to armed conflict to *“take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict”*.

In the ethnic conflict in Manipur, women and girls from both the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities have been severely affected, facing killings, injuries, displacement, livelihood disruption and various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual assault. On 19 June, a woman belonging to the Kuki tribe was killed in the crossfire between security forces and suspected Kuki militants in Chingphei village, Churachandpur district, Manipur.¹⁰ The conflict has created a fertile environment for crimes against women and children. The Manipur State Commission for Women (MSCW) reported that crimes against women and children increased in 2025, with a total of 61 cases recorded. These included

nine cases of rape, one gang rape and 18 cases of molestation. Violent crimes reported during the same period comprised 15 murders, five assaults and four suspicious deaths.¹¹

Although major cases related to the Manipur conflict, including the sexual assault of two women seen in a viral video being paraded naked, were transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and trials shifted to Assam,¹² justice remained elusive by the year's end. Meanwhile thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) continued to live in relief camps in this and other states, with women and children among the most vulnerable, facing insecurity, inadequate access to services and heightened risks of exploitation and abuse.

In Naxal-affected areas, Indigenous women and girls have become among the most vulnerable victims of the armed conflict, facing multiple and intersecting forms of violence. On 28 October, a 10-year-old Indigenous girl was killed in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast allegedly planted by the Maoists in a forest in West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand.¹³ The Maoists also exploited, coerced, and misled vulnerable Indigenous women and young girls into joining their ranks under false assurances of empowerment, equality and high-ranking positions. In reality, these women were instead subjected to emotional, social and psychological manipulation. Once recruited, they were exploited by senior Maoist leaders and disproportionately exposed to violence, often being used as foot soldiers and human shields during armed encounters, while top leaders remained insulated from harm. According to Chhattisgarh Police, 82 female Maoists were killed in encounters with security forces in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh in 2025.¹⁴

Despite bearing a disproportionate burden of conflict-related violence and displacement, Indigenous women remain largely excluded from formal conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding processes, which highlights a critical gap in the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in India.

Legal rights and policy developments

India saw significant positive policy developments at Central and State level in 2025. In a landmark judgement on 13 November 2025,

the Supreme Court ruled that mining activities were impermissible within national parks and wildlife sanctuaries or within one kilometre of their boundaries, applicable across India.¹⁵ In another judgement, *Sugra Adiwasī & Ors v. Pathranand & Ors*, on 23 September 2025, the Supreme Court examined conflicts between housing rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 and restrictions under the Forest Conservation Act and directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) to hold consultations and submit an affidavit outlining modalities for enabling housing within forest areas while respecting conservation mandates.¹⁶ In October 2025, the Government of India, through the MoTA, strongly defended the FRA before the Supreme Court. In its counter affidavit, the MoTA not only affirmed the legal validity of the FRA and its 2012 Rules, currently under challenge,¹⁷ but also emphasised that the law goes beyond mere land ownership to restore dignity, livelihoods, and cultural identity to millions of forest-dependent communities. The government further clarified that the absence of a sunset clause or fixed deadline for filing claims was a deliberate legislative choice, intended to prevent the imposition of arbitrary timelines on vulnerable communities who often lack the resources, awareness or institutional access to assert their rights promptly.¹⁸ In November, the MoTA issued the policy paper “Reconciling Conservation and Community Rights” and directed the MoEFCC to adopt a conservation framework permitting village relocation from tiger reserves only as a last resort and only when voluntary,¹⁹ marking a policy shift from “fortress conservation” to a rights-based, partnership approach.²⁰ At the same time, the central government continued to dilute the Forest Conservation Act. On 31 August, the MoEFCC notified the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Amendment Rules, 2025, which dilute the Forest Conservation Act by easing forest land diversion for linear infrastructure projects after only Stage-I approval, enabling pre-clearance activities, allow offline applications for defence and other projects thus reducing transparency, and weaken compensatory afforestation safeguards.²¹

At the State level, on 26 November the Assam government approved the report of a Group of Ministers (GoM) recommending the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities – Tai Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Motok, Koch-Rajbongshi and Tea Tribes (Adivasis).²² On

15 December, the Core Committee of the Coordination Committee of the Tribal Organizations of Assam constituted a Consultative Group headed by rights activist Suhas Chakma to examine the GoM's recommendations²³ and the Consultative Group rejected the report of the Group of Ministers on the grounds that it was unconstitutional by disregarding settled criteria for Scheduled Tribe identification and bypassing the prescribed process of objective assessment, expert evaluation and due consultation.²⁴ In another important development, on 23 December, the Jharkhand government passed the Rules under the Panchayat Extension of Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 to empower Indigenous communities (Gram Sabhas) with self-governance over their land, water and forests. In Jharkhand, 13 of 24 districts fall completely under the Fifth Schedule and two districts fall partially under it. With Jharkhand notifying its rules,²⁵ Odisha remains the only State which is yet to frame the PESA rules.

Continued violations of the right to land and forest resources

Attempts to undermine the Forest Rights Act continued during the year. On 3 July, the Forest Department of Chhattisgarh withdrew its 15 May circular on Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights following massive protests from Indigenous people across several districts. The directive was criticised as undermining the FRA, Gram Sabha supremacy and protections under the PESA Act and the Fifth Schedule for seeking to make the Forest Department the nodal agency for FRA implementation.²⁶

Illegal occupation of tribal land by industries and evictions continued. As in March, Indigenous land at Sarutari village in the South Kamrup Tribal Belt, Assam continued to be illegally occupied by M/s Superlite AAC Blocks Industry and Purbanchal Cement Pvt Ltd despite multiple eviction notices issued since September 2023, and again in January and March 2025. The failure of the administration to enforce these orders, in violation of Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 had led to growing unrest among Indigenous communities, who have warned of mass protests to reclaim their ancestral land.²⁷

On 12 August, the Gauhati High Court criticised the allotment of nearly 3,000 bighas of land (about 4,036,800 square metres) in Dima Hasao district, Assam to a cement firm, calling the decision “extraordinary” and questioning its legality. The Court recalled that Dima Hasao falls under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, whereby Indigenous Peoples’ rights and interests must take precedence over corporate land allotments. It directed the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council to submit records explaining the policy and procedure under which the land was allotted. The case involves petitions by local Indigenous villagers opposing eviction from their ancestral lands.²⁸

Indigenous and forest-dwelling families in Jamui district, Bihar faced forced eviction, harassment, and demolition of homes by the Forest Department in collusion with local strongmen after being branded as “encroachers” despite having lived in the forest for generations. On 28 April, hundreds of tribal villagers protested at the Jamui District Collectorate against the illegal eviction drives and destruction of their homes. Tribal families were also intimidated and falsely implicated in criminal cases with no rehabilitation or compensation provided.²⁹

On 4 December, a Member of Parliament from Bihar sought an urgent inquiry into alleged atrocities against the Indigenous Gadaba tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), in Anakapalle district, Andhra Pradesh, allegedly committed by relatives of a Zilla Praja Parishad Territorial Constituency member with the involvement of revenue and police officials. The allegations include attempted forcible occupation of around 10 acres of land, illegal deletion of names from land records, illegal detention and custodial torture of seven Indigenous persons in October, and the destruction of crops and trees on 21 November.³⁰

Displacement in the name of conservation and misuse of compensatory afforestation fund

In May, 52 Jenu Kuruba families (a PVTG) re-occupied their ancestral village inside the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, Karnataka after waiting over a decade for recognition of their FRA claims filed in 2011. On 18 June, with police support, the Karnataka Forest Department demolished

their makeshift huts citing the Wildlife (Protection) Act, leaving families with minimal shelter during the monsoon. The authorities rejected FRA claims, relying mainly on satellite imagery, while the community argued that the FRA permits local evidence such as oral histories, burial and sacred sites and official documents.³¹ The families had challenged the rejection before the Karnataka High Court.³²

In August, the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) directed the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka to halt further release of CAMPA funds and ordered an inquiry into their alleged misuse of the funds for the forced relocation of some 450 tribal forest-dweller families from the Kali (Dandeli-Anshi) Tiger Reserve. The relocations were reportedly carried out without free, prior, and informed consent of Gram Sabhas, violating the FRA, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the CAMPA Rules, 2018. Around Rs. 151.8 crore (approx. US\$16.85 million) approved under CAMPA for this purpose was allegedly misused. Ironically, while Indigenous Peoples were being displaced in the name of creating inviolate tiger habitats, the Forest Department had proposed nearly 30 trekking routes in the same sensitive areas, thus undermining the stated conservation rationale.³³

In July, 17 Indigenous families in Aarey Milk Colony, Mumbai, Maharashtra, bordering Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), were served eviction notices by the Forest Department alleging encroachment, without having settled their pending FRA claims. The notices ordered them to vacate their homes and farmlands by 3 August, threatening demolition and recovery of costs.³⁴

In April, the Odisha government declared an 845 sq. km. area of the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Mayurbhanj district as a National Park. Since then, 61 Indigenous families who reside in Bakua, located within the core area of the STR, have remained at risk of forced relocation. According to the Gram Sabha of Bakua, officials uploaded fabricated documents on the government's Parivesh portal, an online single-window platform for environmental, forest and wildlife clearances, falsely stating that the villagers had voluntarily agreed to relocation. The Gram Sabha denied giving any consent, stating that they were neither consulted nor informed and that free, prior and informed consent was never obtained.³⁵ The situation escalated with violent repression

by forest and police authorities, including physical and sexual assault of tribal women, restrictions on village access, intimidation on 16 June, and a midnight raid on 21 June aimed at mass arrests and eviction.³⁶ Instead of action against officials, fabricated criminal cases were allegedly filed against the villagers. Field documentation by the Community Network Against Protected Areas (CNAPA) confirmed these abuses and reported further obstruction of journalists, lawyers, and human rights defenders.³⁷

Violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights by security forces and armed opposition groups

Indigenous Peoples were the victims of human rights violations in 2025, including death in custody and torture. Some of the cases reported in 2025 included the death of a 25-year-old Indigenous man due to torture by police in Kathua district, Jammu and Kashmir on 6 February;³⁸ the torture of a mentally ill Indigenous youth by police officers attached to Pothia police station in Katihar district, Bihar on 26 February;³⁹ the death of a 45-year-old Indigenous man in Bharuch district, Gujarat on 14 March;⁴⁰ the death of a 17-year-old Indigenous boy belonging to PVTG, during illegal detention at Kalpetta police station in Wayanad district, Kerala on 1 April;⁴¹ the death of a 50-year-old Indigenous man, a daily wage labourer, allegedly due to injuries sustained during police interrogation in connection with a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 at Sarath police station in Deoghar district, Jharkhand on 12 April;⁴² the alleged custodial torture of four Indigenous youths at Naugaon police station in Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh after being detained on charges of stealing on 15 July;⁴³ the custodial torture of a 17-year-old Indigenous boy by four police officers, at Botad Town police station in Botad district, Gujarat on 19 August;⁴⁴ the custodial death of a 48-year-old Indigenous man at Aalo Women's Police Station in West Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh on 3 September;⁴⁵ and the alleged stripping and torture of three Indigenous men at the Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary range office in Balasore district, Odisha on 21 December.⁴⁶

The police were also accused of failing to act promptly and effectively, including by not invoking the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. On 9 December, Anjel Chakma (24), an Indigenous student from Tripura, was racially abused with words such as “Chinki”, “Chinese”, and “Momo”⁴⁷ by a group of six youths in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, and was stabbed when he objected. After battling for his life for 17 days, he died on 26 December. The incident drew widespread criticism of the police response, as the authorities initially refused to register a complaint and filed the First Information Report (FIR) only three days later following public pressure, while provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act were not invoked. Although five of the accused were arrested, the prime suspect absconded. On 27 December, the Chakma Development Foundation of India urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to enact a comprehensive anti-racial violence law, as recommended by the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2014.⁴⁸ A Public Interest Litigation was also filed before the Supreme Court seeking directions to address racial discrimination and violence against people from the North-Eastern states.⁴⁹

Several Indigenous Peoples in the North-Eastern region and the Naxalite-affected areas of the “tribal belt” were victims of human rights abuses in 2025, including extrajudicial killings, torture and detention by security forces. The victims who died at the hands of the security forces included a 38-year-old Indigenous man belonging to a PVTG who was shot dead during an anti-Naxal operation in Mandla district, Madhya Pradesh on 9 March on allegations of being a Maoist, despite his family and local residents asserting his innocence;⁵⁰ and a 35-year-old Indigenous man employed as a midday meal cook at a government school in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh, who was killed on 10 June in an alleged staged encounter, also on charges of being a Maoist after he had gone to the forest to fetch cattle.⁵¹

Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) continue to target civilians. Those killed by the AOGs include a 59-year-old Indigenous community activist and Chairman of the Thadou Literature Society by armed Kuki militants in Karbi Anglong district, Assam on 31 August⁵² and a 50-year-old village chief of T Khonomphai village in Churachandpur district, Manipur, by suspected cadres of the United Kuki National Army.⁵³

In central India, the Maoists continued to target Indigenous Peoples on charges of being “police informers”, in clear violation of international humanitarian law. The victims included: a 48-year-old Indigenous man who was killed and two other Indigenous persons tortured after their abduction in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh on 17 January;⁵⁴ two Indigenous men, aged 50 and 55, killed in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh in July;⁵⁵ a 24-year-old Indigenous man killed in Kanker district, Chhattisgarh on 15 August;⁵⁶ two Indigenous men, aged 25 and 30, abducted and killed in Malkangiri district, Odisha on 14 October;⁵⁷ and an Indigenous political leader killed in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh on 14 October.⁵⁸

Targeting of Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Defenders

In 2025, Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Defenders faced travel bans and criminal proceedings. On 4 October, Indigenous lawyer and anti-dam activist, Ebo Mili, from Arunachal Pradesh was stopped by immigration officials at the Kolkata airport in West Bengal while travelling to Bangladesh to attend the Regional Infrastructure Monitoring Alliance (RIMA) conference, which was to be held between 5 and 7 October.⁵⁹ Earlier, on 22 and 23 May, Ebo Mili co-led two successive peaceful protests against the proposed 11,000 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) in Beging village, Arunachal Pradesh along with more than 400 Indigenous villagers. In response, the authorities imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and filed an FIR accusing him of violating restrictions on public assembly.⁶⁰ On 26 May, an FIR was filed against Mili at the Boleng police station, citing violations of various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984.⁶¹

On 7 September, Ms Bhanu Tatak, legal adviser to the Siang Indigenous Farmers’ Forum (SIFF) and another activist against SUMP, was stopped by immigration officials at Delhi airport while en route to Ireland for a three-month course at Dublin City University. She was prevented from travelling due to a Look-Out Circular issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs at the request of Arunachal Pradesh police, citing pend-

ing cases related to protests against the SUMP. Several cases were filed against her in connection with a protest against the proposed SUMP.⁶²

On 20 April, a 35-year-old Indigenous man was crushed to death by an excavator engaged in the construction of a railway line to the Rorukela Steel Plant during a peaceful protest by local Indigenous villagers resisting eviction from their traditional land at Barkani village in Sundergarh district, Odisha. Furthermore, 19 people were injured, including 16 police officers, during clashes that ensued after the protesters were allegedly met with force.⁶³ It was also alleged that the police lodged FIRs against several protesting Indigenous villagers.

Situation of Indigenous women

The individual and collective rights of Indigenous women and girls are regularly denied or violated in private and public spaces. Sexual violence, trafficking, killing or being branded a witch, militarisation or State violence and the impact of development-induced displacement remain major issues faced by women and girls.

On 17 July, in a landmark judgement in *Ram Charan & Ors. vs. Sukhram & Ors.*, the Supreme Court upheld equal ancestral property rights for Indigenous women, holding that the exclusion of daughters violated the right to equality under Article 14. The Court ruled that, although the Hindu Succession Act does not generally apply to Scheduled Tribes, patriarchal customary laws denying women inheritance are invalid if discriminatory. Emphasising constitutional morality, the Court held that where customary law is unproven or unjust, principles of justice, equity and good conscience must prevail, marking a significant victory for Adivasi women's rights.⁶⁴

The trend in sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls continued both on the part of security forces/government officials and non-tribals. Some of the cases reported in 2025 included a 13-year-old Indigenous girl who was abducted and raped by a government official in Pakke Kessang district, Arunachal Pradesh on 16 January;⁶⁵ the sexual exploitation of an under-age Indigenous school girl, resulting in pregnancy and childbirth on the premises of a State-run residential school at Chitrakonda in Malkangiri, Odisha on 24 February;⁶⁶ the abduction

and gang rape of four Indigenous girls, including three minors, by seven individuals while they were returning home in Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh on 25 April;⁶⁷ the torture to death of a 45-year-old Indigenous woman following rape by a group of men as she went out to graze her goats in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on 4 May;⁶⁸ the gang rape, torture and murder of a 45-year-old Indigenous woman by two individuals in Khandwa district, Madhya Pradesh on 25 May;⁶⁹ the gang rape of a 17-year-old Indigenous girl by 10 individuals after her abduction in Godda district, Jharkhand on 7 June;⁷⁰ and the abduction and gang rape of a minor Indigenous girl by two non-tribals while she was on her way to a shop in Khowai district, Tripura on 28 July.⁷¹ In all these cases, the accused were arrested and the cases are at various stages of investigation and trial.

Situation of Indigenous Internally Displaced Persons in India

Indigenous Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) continue to face prolonged displacement, inadequate services and uncertain resettlement.

In Manipur, thousands remained in relief camps in unsafe conditions following their displacement in the 2023 ethnic violence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the State in September⁷² and President Droupadi Murmu in December, assuring steps for safe return and livelihood security.⁷³ On 1 December, the Manipur government formed State and District Level Committees for rehabilitation of all the IDPs by December.⁷⁴ However, only 389 Meitei IDPs have returned to their original homes in Bishnupur district, while Kuki-Zo IDPs, who constitute the majority of the displaced population, continue to remain in relief camps with inadequate services.⁷⁵

In Tripura, delays in implementing the 2020 Quadripartite Bru Agreement left some 320 Bru/Reang families without access to basic services. In July, Bru leaders appealed to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, highlighting ongoing gaps and demanding full implementation of welfare schemes.⁷⁶ In December, the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that all facilities were being provided to the Bru families, including free rations, with the construction of the remaining 257 houses in progress.⁷⁷

Similarly, Gutti Koya Indigenous IDPs, displaced from Chhattis-

garh in 2005 and living in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh faced new challenges. In December, the IDPs across states raised concerns about losing voting rights during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls as names were reportedly being deleted on grounds of “non-residence”, without verification, risking permanent disenfranchisement in both their home and host states.⁷⁸

NAGA HOMELAND

Even among the Naga people themselves, the notion of Naga nationhood as perceived today in the modern sense has not been around for long. Traditionally, Nagas were territorial and restricted themselves more or less to their own villages, the protection of which is their prime concern.⁷⁹ Nagaland covers an area of 16,579 sq. kms and has a population of almost 2.2 million people (as per the 15th Indian Census held last in 2011), 90% of which are Naga with significant Indigenous minorities in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Sagaing Division and Kachin State (Myanmar). The population is primarily agrarian with high literacy rates (approx. 80%) but they are facing severe economic stagnation due to the unresolved political conflict with the Indian state.

Its official boundary is with the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh to the north, Assam to the west, Manipur to the south and Myanmar (Burma) to the east, and it is one of the least populated states in India. To this day, the Nagas are divided into Burmese Naga and Indian Naga, the result of colonial and post-colonial arrangements. This means the Nagas are Indigenous to north-western Myanmar and north-eastern India. According to articles 371(a) and 371(c) of the Constitution of India, special provisions are provided for Nagaland and Manipur, protecting Naga customary law and land ownership.

However, the pursuit of peace and security by the Naga people has been marked by complexity. Despite years of striving for peace and security, the Naga people have experienced numerous political and social transformations. True peace, however, remains elusive. Political negotiations clouded by distrust and charades, coupled with the unilateral dismantling of traditional cross-border rights and the extension of repressive security laws, plus factional fighting within the Naga groups, are some of the issues that the Naga people faced in 2025.

Naga peace process: frameworks without fulfilment

The Naga political peace negotiation with the Indian government continues to remain stagnant without any significant progress. The negotiation, now in its 28th year, continues with the 2015 Framework Agreement being the foundation of the talks. However, progress has stalled due to a widening distrust, with Naga leaders accusing the Indian government of losing its political will to implement the letter or spirit of the agreed framework. There have been more than 600 rounds of political negotiations between both sides since July 1997. The contention between the Indian government and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) remains the Naga's insistence on a separate flag and constitution (*yehzabo*), which they argue are inherent to their recognised unique history and sovereignty. This demand is non-negotiable.⁸⁰

The long impasse in bringing a solution to the Naga peace process has created distrust not only between Naga leaders and the Indian government but also within the Naga family itself. It has deepened the trust deficit between the Naga public and factions, raising questions about the lack of transparency regarding the peace process.

Amidst all this, Naga civil society continues to play its role as a peacemaker. On 23 August 2025, leaders of NSCN-IM, the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and many other Naga factions, along with Naga tribe-based bodies, participated in an event convened by the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) and hosted by Ao Senden, the apex Ao tribe organisation at Ungma Village, Nagaland. During this event, a collective decision was made to reach a common position from which to articulate and pursue a shared political vision on the basis of the historical and political rights of the Nagas.⁸¹

The advent of drone warfare: a new security dimension

The year 2025 saw a new type of warfare method allegedly used by the Indian military. For the first time, use of precision drone strikes targeting

the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang/Aung Yung (NSCN-K (YA) camp at Khenmoi-Loiyi village, Myanmar, was reported, resulting in the death of five militants and two civilians, including an eight-year-old girl.⁸²

This shift toward technologically advanced, intelligence-driven military tactics has created a new environment of fear among the Naga people. These strikes signal a move toward precision warfare, marking a departure from traditional ground-based engagement. Such developments thus raise important questions regarding the protection of Indigenous civilians in conflict zones.

Paradox of peace and security: AFSPA and FMR

For decades, security for the Naga people has been defined by a heavy military presence, while simultaneously living under the shadow of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), *an act that confers special powers upon the Indian armed forces in disturbed areas and legitimises any actions they may take*. Although some on the outside might view the Act as a necessary instrument for peace and security, for the Nagas it remains a tool of suppression that reflects how the Indian government perceives them. It is quite a paradox that the government, which frequently celebrates its achievement in ushering in peace in the Naga region, continues to label the same areas as “disturbed” to justify extending the AFSPA.⁸³ The priority thus appears to be *the security of the state, and not human security*.

In line with this approach, the Indian government decided to abolish the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and commence the fencing of 1,643 km of the Indo-Myanmar border, covering mostly Naga-inhabited areas. This decision to fence the border will have a deep social and economic impact on the lives of Naga people. Although the artificial line drawn by the colonial rulers labelled the Nagas into different nationalities, because of the FMR, the border communities continued to maintain social-economic relations. However, with the abolition of the FMR and the coming of a hard border, it will divide the ancestral Naga lands, destroy cultural ties, and halt economic livelihoods.

In 2025, the commencement of border fencing in sectors of Manipur and Nagaland sparked widespread protests. Various elements of Naga civil society demanded the total rollback of the FMR, and a halt to border fencing, viewing them as a threat to Naga unity and ancestral territory. They have termed the FMR as a right upheld by international instruments such as the UNDRIP.⁸⁴ The United Naga Council (UNC), Manipur, Naga Student Organisation, Myanmar and various student bodies condemned the fencing as an act of geographical partition aimed at permanently severing the ethnic and cultural ties of the Naga people.⁸⁵ As a result of this protest, the border fencing work has been put on halt for now. However, there has been no official statement/order on the total rollback of border fencing.

Naga women

At a time of prolonged uncertainty Naga women's organisations represent an important civil society body that continue to advocate for peace, equality, and justice. The NMA (Naga Mothers' Association) and the NWU (Naga Women's Union) have been working together with other Naga civil society organisations such as the UNC, the FNR, and the NAGA HOHO to raise issue on the FMR and the factional war. In July 2025, the NWU, along with the UNC, the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights-South (NPMHR-S) served a "20-day joint ultimatum" on the Government of India (GoI) in connection with the abrogation of the FMR and the border fencing in the "Naga ancestral homeland".⁸⁶

The political future of the Nagas remains unclear due to the stalled peace process, which continues to be marred by distrust. The decision to fence the border will further add to the hardship of the Naga people living near the border unless the government overturns its decision. Ultimately, it will be for the Indian government to decide whether to continue prioritising state security or shift toward human security. For the Nagas however, the priority remains the recognition of their unique history and their right to live as one people, undivided by artificial fences.

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Indonesia



Indonesia has a population of approximately 250 million people.¹ The Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago – *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (AMAN), an independent Indigenous organization that represents 2,596 Indigenous communities throughout Indonesia, totalling around 21 million individual members – estimates that the number of Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia stands at between 50 and 70 million individuals.²

Since Indonesian independence in 1945, and as of 2024, the government's transmigration programme³ has moved more than 10 million people from the densely populated islands of Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok to places that have large areas of land on the islands of Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Papua. These areas have been considered empty but are in fact inhabited by Indigenous Peoples.⁴

The third amendment to the Indonesian Constitution recognizes Indigenous Peoples' rights in Article 18b-2.⁵ In more recent legislation, there is implicit recognition of some Indigenous Peoples' rights, including Act No. 5/1960 on Basic Agrarian Regulation,⁶ Act No. 39/1999 on Human Rights,⁷ and MPR Decree No. X/2001 on Agrarian Reform.⁸ Act No. 27/2007 on Management of the Coastal Zone and Small Islands⁹ and Act No. 32/2009 on the Environment¹⁰ clearly use the term *Masyarakat Adat* (Indigenous Peoples) and use the working definition (in terms of characteristics) of AMAN.¹¹ The Constitutional Court affirmed the constitutional rights of Indigenous Peoples to their land and territories in May 2013,¹² including their collective rights to customary forests. However, these recognitions are only declaratory in nature and establish a mandate that derivative laws be enacted governing the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia.

While Indonesia is a signatory to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), government officials argue that the concept of Indigenous Peoples is not applicable as the majority of Indonesians (apart from the ethnic Chinese) are Indigenous and thus entitled to the same rights. Conse-

quently, the government has rejected calls for specific needs from groups identifying as Indigenous Peoples. This position is widely contested by academics, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, and civil society organizations.

West Papua covers the western part of the island of New Guinea and has been under Indonesian control since 1969 when control was taken over from the Netherlands. In 2022, the Government of Indonesia established four new provinces or so-called New Autonomous Regions (DOBs) in West Papua. The four new DOBs are Papua Tengah Province, Papua Pegunungan Province, Papua Selatan Province and Papua Barat Daya Province. With these four DOBs, along with the two existing provinces, namely Papua Province and Papua Barat Province, West Papua is now divided into six provinces.¹³

Based on 2024 Central Bureau of Statistics data for each province, the total population in West Papua is 6.2 million people. This is up from a population of 4.4 million people divided across the two provinces in 2022. Since West Papua was divided into six provinces, there is no valid data on the number of Indigenous Papuans in each province. A portion of the population in the six provinces are migrants who came from other parts of Indonesia through government-sponsored transmigration programmes. In big cities such as Jayapura, Merauke, Manowari, and Sorong, the migrant population already outnumbers the Indigenous population, whereas in inland areas (mountains), the Indigenous population is still larger than the migrant population.¹⁴

West Papua has the most diverse range of cultures and languages in Indonesia. While Bahasa Indonesia is the official language spoken now, there are more than 250 tribal languages spoken by Indigenous Papuans today.¹⁵ West Papua is divided into seven distinct customary territories: Mamberamo Tabi (Mamta), Saireri in Papua Province, Mee Pago in Papua Tengah Province, La Pago in Papua Pegunungan province and Ha Anim in Papua Selatan province, and Doberai and Bomberai in Papua Barat Province and Papua Barat Daya Province.¹⁶

Since Indonesia took control of the region in 1969, West Papuans have continued to seek independence from Indonesia. Ever since, Indigenous Peoples in West Papua have been faced with forced displacements,¹⁷ land grabbing,¹⁸ restricted access of foreign journalists and human rights monitors¹⁹ and so on.

State militarization, the occupation of Indigenous territories, and security crisis in Indonesia

The political and economic situation prevailing throughout 2025 in Indonesia further restricted the rights and living space of Indigenous Peoples. The oppressions, deprivations of Indigenous territories, criminalization, and violence experienced by Indigenous Peoples continue to occur in various places and mark a worsening of the legal and political dynamics of Indigenous Peoples' recognition and protection. Indigenous Peoples' rights advocates have been targeted to silence and even murder them, and mass mobilizations have taken place to suppress critical voices and resistance by Indigenous Peoples.²⁰

The political-legal configuration that took place in 2025 did not indicate any change in the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia. This could be seen in three ways:

First, the state has consistently demonstrated little political will to recognize Indigenous Peoples. The lack of discussions to progress the Indigenous Peoples Bill²¹ for years, despite the growing attention and expressed concerns of the public and international organizations such as the UN, is one sign of the state's reluctance to recognize, respect, and protect Indigenous Peoples.

Second, the state uses complex and sectoral legal scenarios to separate the recognition of Indigenous Peoples from their Indigenous territories. Legal instruments such as the Job Creation Law²² and the Criminal Code are seen as tools with which

to legitimize land grabbing in the name of investment and National Strategic Projects (PSN).

Third, in 2025, the relationship between the state and Indigenous Peoples shifted to a repressive militaristic relationship in the management of natural resources and food and has narrowed the space for dialogue and increased the potential for physical violence on the ground.

The Prabowo-Gibran regime

Militarization continued to increasingly define the Prabowo-Gibran regime throughout 2025,²³ whereby a security approach is considered the primary foundation of state governance rather than a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights. This orientation has direct implications for Indigenous Peoples, who are perceived as objects of state control through criminalization, the seizure of customary territories, and the legitimization of violence in the name of stability and development.

The issuing of Presidential Regulation No. 5 of 2025²⁴ concerning the forest area regulation, whereby an understanding was reached between the Ministry of Forestry and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), has led to encompassing forest rehabilitation, forest protection, and forestry law enforcement.²⁵ This has raised concerns about the return of authoritarian leadership and led to further forced resettlement of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral lands in the name of state forest areas or National Strategic Projects.

Furthermore, the escalation of conflict and the increasing criminalization of Indigenous Peoples throughout 2025 cannot be viewed as incidental events but rather as a direct consequence of the strengthening of the state's security paradigm.

This phenomenon further creates vulnerability for Indigenous Peoples, as the military's increasing role in civilian affairs is disproportionate to policies that recognize, respect, and protect Indigenous Peoples. The implications of this disparity often lead Indigenous Peoples to confront the TNI in the field, frequently resulting in conflict and criminalization.

International attention during 2025

The absence of an Indigenous Peoples Law in Indonesia, which has resulted in increased vulnerability for Indigenous Peoples, received international attention in 2025, particularly from the UN. More specifically, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr. Albert K. Barume, expressed deep concerns at the continued lack of recognition and systemic human rights violations faced by Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia. Further, he also highlighted his concerns regarding National Strategic Projects and extractive projects being implemented by the government without ensuring Indigenous Peoples' right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). These projects have led to the seizure of Indigenous territories, human rights violations, environmental degradation, further impacts of climate change, and the militarization of Indigenous territories.²⁶

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had a crucial focus on the situation of Indigenous human rights defenders and Indigenous communities in Indonesia throughout 2025, as they are facing increasing criminalization, repression, and violence, including arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearances.²⁷ In addition, several Indigenous groups in Indonesia are being pushed to the verge of extinction and their physical and cultural survival is under threat as Indigenous Peoples are being forced to move and leave their customary territories.²⁸

Continued challenges facing recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights in 2025

To date, the area of customary land that has been mapped by Indigenous communities through participatory means covers 33.6 million hectares.²⁹ However, of this, only 6.4 million hectares or 18.75% of the 320 Indigenous communities have been recognized and designated by regional legal policies, while more than 81% of customary land remains unrecognized by the state. In addition, the customary forests that have been designated to date total 332,505 hectares spread across 156 Indigenous communities. To speed up the confirmation of customary forests, the Customary Forest Task Force formed by the Ministry of For-

estry, consisting of academics and civil society organizations (CSO) including AMAN, is currently working with a target of confirming 1.4 million hectares of customary forest, as announced by the Minister of Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia.³⁰

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN) has identified around 4 million hectares of customary land across 20 provinces. This presents both an opportunity and a threat to Indigenous Peoples. In practice, the Ministry of ATR/BPN prioritizes the certification of Management Rights (HPL) over the registration of customary land in the Customary Land Registration (PDTU).³¹ AMAN firmly rejects certification as stipulated in the Indonesian Constitution.

Finally, in the coastal and small islands sector, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries has designated 412 customary areas across 27 coastal regions.

Stagnation of the draft law on Indigenous Peoples

The Indigenous Peoples Bill³² continues to occupy the national legislative agenda. Despite being included in the priority national legislative programme several times, the Indigenous Peoples Bill has not been discussed by the government as of the end of 2025. Throughout 2025, the government has consistently served investment interests by issuing various regulations and policies that discriminate against Indigenous Peoples, including Government Regulation Number 28 of 2025 concerning the Implementation of Risk-Based Business Licensing,³³ Government Regulation Number 10 of 2025 concerning Indonesia's Sovereign Wealth Fund,³⁴ and Presidential Regulation Number 5 of 2025 concerning forest area regulation.

The lack of discussion of the Indigenous Peoples Bill can be seen as strongly related to priorities of national development, which still relies on extractivism and capital expansion. The legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples is perceived as a structural barrier to accelerating investment and strategic projects. Consequently, the state is delaying or even avoiding deliberation of the Indigenous Peoples Bill, while simultaneously producing sectoral regulations that expand the scope for impunity for corporations and security forces. This practice demonstrates a fundamental contradiction between the constitutional mandate that

guarantees the existence and rights of Indigenous Peoples and state policies that systematically position Indigenous Peoples as victims of development.

Militarization of forest area regulation and its impact on Indigenous Peoples

Presidential Regulation Number 5 of 2025 concerning forest area regulation has the potential to threaten the customary forests – which, according to Constitutional Court Decision Number 35 of 2012³⁵ – have been separated into state forests and customary forests. Efforts to regulate forest areas using military force have the potential to seriously impact the rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially in customary forests that have not received state recognition. Nearly 70% of the area in Indonesia is forested and, according to AMAN data from 2025,³⁶ there are 124 Indigenous communities in 10 provinces in Indonesia with a population of around 1.6 million people residing or living in forest areas. This means that the militarization of forest area regulation also threatens the security of Indigenous Peoples living in and around forest areas.

In general, the forest area regulation, as stipulated by Presidential Regulation Number 5, is implemented through the application of sanctions, both administrative and criminal, as well as the re-occupation of forest areas if there are individuals or corporations conducting activities within forest areas without permits. Sanctions for re-occupation of forest areas by the state can be used at any time as a pretext to seize customary territories in the name of development, especially in National Strategic Projects (PSN)³⁷ because Indigenous Peoples are considered to be occupying forest areas illegally.

Expansion of state control over Indigenous territories

As Indonesia aims to speed up its development agenda, energy transition, and the expansion of conservation areas, Indigenous Peoples are increasingly feeling pressure on their living space and sovereignty. The 2030 Global Agenda, including the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) and Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF),³⁸ which stipulate the protection of 30% of the world's land surface and 30% of the oceans by 2030, has become a powerful reference point, which significantly changes the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the state.

Southeast Asia, home to a large proportion of the world's Indigenous Peoples, provides a stark illustration of how the global agenda can become an instrument of marginalization for Indigenous Peoples, who are themselves most instrumental in maintaining the sustainability of their lands, territories, and natural resources. Conservation and development regimes are framed as commitments to climate change and biodiversity protection, yet their implementation often neglects Indigenous Peoples' rights.

At the same time, the Indonesian government expanded its National Strategic Projects (PSN) through Presidential Regulation Number 12 of 2025 concerning the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan, which lists 77 National Strategic Projects covering various sectors, from education, health, food security, infrastructure, energy, to industrial estate development.³⁹ In fact, more than 20.6 million hectares of forest have been cleared or allocated for national strategic projects in the food and energy sectors – from food estates to industrial plantations and energy infrastructure. These projects have not only accelerated the rate of deforestation but also triggered a series of evictions, criminalization, and loss of living space for Indigenous Peoples.⁴⁰ Global commitments that should strengthen protection have instead been manipulated to expand state control over Indigenous territories. The KMGBF 2030 ambition risks reproducing the same historical injustice, leading to the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their customary territories.

Conflict and criminalization of Indigenous Peoples

During 2025, there were 135 cases of customary land grabbing, with the area of customary land seized in the name of development, investment, and conservation amounting to 3.8 million hectares. These conflicts impacted 109 Indigenous communities and 162 Indigenous community members who experienced violence and criminalization.

Throughout 2025, cases of customary land grabbing predominantly involved Indigenous communities versus mining projects (69 cases), Indigenous communities versus plantation projects (34 cases), Indigenous communities versus infrastructure projects (11 cases), Indigenous communities versus forestry concessions (11 cases) and various cases involving energy, tourism, and agricultural projects. This indicates that development extractivism does not bring economic benefits to Indigenous communities but instead has disastrous impacts, leading to the loss of Indigenous territories. Examples of conflicts that occurred in 2025 and threatened the security of Indigenous Peoples included the attack and kidnapping of members of the Sihaporas Indigenous community by a number of employees of PT Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) in North Sumatra; the seizure of the Indigenous territories of the Soge and Goban Indigenous communities by PT Krisrama in East Nusa Tenggara; the criminalization and state violence against Indigenous communities in Pocoleok due to geothermal projects; the conflict and seizure of the Punt Kalo Indigenous territory by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in Tebo, Jambi; and the destruction of Kei Besar Island for the benefit of the National Strategic Project in Merauke.⁴¹

COP 30 and Indigenous Peoples' rights

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP30 became a platform for debate on deforestation. The ecosystem degradation and destruction on Indigenous territories remains low-level because they are protected by Indigenous Peoples. However, threats persist; the expansion of extractive industries, infrastructure development, and energy projects without FPIC. While the ecological value of Indigenous territories is increasingly recognized, legal protection remains weak. The energy transition is a controversial issue. Indigenous Peoples reject models that simply replace energy sources without changing the exploitative patterns that damage their territories. Mineral mining projects, large dams, and other energy projects on Indigenous territories are not climate solutions if they violate Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Indigenous Peoples' actions reflect both anger and hope. AMAN, along with the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, advocated

that COP30 had to result in concrete decisions leading to actual action.⁴² Overall, COP30 demonstrated increasing recognition of Indigenous Peoples' contributions but the gap between recognition and concrete commitments and action remains fundamental. At COP30, Indigenous Peoples explicitly demanded that land rights, FPIC, access to funding, and the protection of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge should be the foundation of every climate decision.

AMAN welcomed the Indonesian government's announcement at COP30 regarding the recognition of 1.4 million hectares of customary forests and the strengthening of Indigenous Peoples' tenure rights as part of its deforestation mitigation strategy.⁴³ Recognizing tenure rights and control over customary territories positions Indigenous Peoples as key actors in climate mitigation and adaptation. Indigenous Peoples are not merely beneficiaries but key guardians of forests, rivers, ecosystems, and Indigenous knowledge. With this position, Indigenous Peoples can strengthen customary territory-based climate action and ensure that government recognition of customary forests is not merely a political symbol, but a concrete foundation for sustainable social and environmental justice.

WEST PAPUA

The year 2025 was marked by increasingly complex dynamics for Indigenous Peoples in West Papua. Throughout 2025, Indigenous Peoples faced a combination of limited progress in policy recognition of their rights and increased threats to peace and security due to armed conflict, militarization of Indigenous territories, and the expansion of development projects and extractive industries. This article summarizes the main developments, both positive and negative, that occurred between January and December 2025, with brief references to previous editions of *The Indigenous World* for ongoing context.

Policies and legislation affecting Indigenous Peoples

In 2025, there were a number of initiatives at the regional level aimed at strengthening the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in West Papua, particularly through the promotion of regional regulations on Indige-

nous Peoples and customary territories. The West Papua People's Assembly (MRP) and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRP) promoted regulations that were expected to form the legal basis for the recognition of rights to customary territories, the mapping of customary territories, and the protection of customary-based management of natural resources.⁴⁴

At the national level, advocacy for accelerating the ratification of the Indigenous Peoples Bill continues to grow stronger.⁴⁵ In 2025, a public consultation and declaration by Indigenous Peoples regarding the Indigenous Peoples Bill was held in Sorong. In fact, the large Mairasi tribe in West Papua also issued a call reaffirming their demand for an Indonesian legal framework to provide certainty regarding their rights to land, customary territories, and sources of livelihood, as well as recognition of the role of Indigenous women. However, by the end of 2025, this Bill had not yet been passed, so legal protection for Indigenous Peoples remained partial and dependent on sectoral policies.

Rights to land, territory, and natural resources

Several Indigenous communities in West Papua, such as the large Mairasi tribe in West Papua Province, have mapped their customary territories covering approximately 1.4 million hectares. Further, they have carried out various other activities to preserve their natural resources, such as replanting the Indigenous Merbau Trees in their forests, which were destroyed by logging companies. This initiative demonstrates the efforts of Indigenous communities to use available state mechanisms to obtain formal recognition of their customary territories.⁴⁶

However, reports from civil society organizations (CSOs) indicate that the overall recognition of customary forests remains very limited compared to the total area of customary lands in West Papua. This imbalance increases the vulnerability to land conflicts, especially in areas targeted for large-scale development projects and extractive industries, such as the Merauke National Strategic Project (PSN).⁴⁷

Conflict, security, and human rights

Throughout 2025, the security situation in West Papua remained a serious concern. The escalation of armed conflict between Indonesian security forces and pro-independence armed groups in West Papua

has had a direct impact on Indigenous Peoples as civilians. Human Rights Watch reports that repeated security operations and fighting have increased the risk of human rights violations, including internal displacement, restrictions on access to basic services, and prolonged trauma among Indigenous communities.⁴⁸ According to the latest data from Human Rights Monitor, the number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) due to conflict in West Papua amounted to more than 105,878 people as of 1 January 2026. This figure includes various districts such as Nduga (58,981 people), Intan Jaya (12,859 people), and others, where the majority are Indigenous Peoples affected by military operations and armed conflict. The humanitarian situation is worsening, with shortages of food, medicine, clean water, and limited access to aid, as well as the refusal of refugees to return before military forces are withdrawn.⁴⁹

The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) monitored dozens of alleged human rights violations in Papua during 2025, many of which were related to security operations and armed conflict in customary territories.⁵⁰ This situation reinforces the fact that security approaches not based on the protection and respect of Indigenous Peoples' rights have the potential to deepen and perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Peace and security: impact on the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples

The militarization of customary territories throughout 2025 has had a significant impact on the daily lives of Indigenous Peoples in West Papua. The long-term presence of armed forces has restricted communities' access to gardens, forests, rivers, and sacred sites, all of which form the economic, spiritual, and cultural foundations of the Indigenous Papuans. This situation has also weakened customary mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution. Moreover, the army has openly formed a number of battalions that enter civilian spaces with a focus on territorial and development functions, known as the Territorial Development Infantry Battalion (Yonif TP) or Regional Support Battalion. These battalions support "food security" projects such as the Merauke National Strategic Project (PSN), which seize Indigenous territories by military force and lead not only to land grabbing and forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples but also deforestation, ecosystem degradation and

pollution.⁵¹ The formation of these battalions has been intensively carried out in West Papua since 2024 with a target of creating one battalion per district, and around 150 new battalions per year.⁵²

In his interim report to the UN General Assembly in October 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples emphasized the urgent need for recognition, demarcation, and legal protection of customary lands as a prerequisite for sustainable peace and security.⁵³ The report asserts that the state's failure to protect customary land rights increases the risk of criminalization and violence against Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous women are in a highly vulnerable position in the context of conflict and insecurity. During 2025, Indigenous Papuan women not only bore the brunt of displacement and food insecurity but also played a major role in maintaining family continuity, Indigenous knowledge, and social cohesion. However, the role of Indigenous women in conflict resolution and peace processes is still minimally recognized in formal policies.

Indigenous youth also face significant challenges due to limited opportunities for participation and a declining sense of security. However, at the same time, Indigenous youth are becoming involved in initiatives to document Indigenous territories, digital advocacy, and human rights education, which have the potential to become the foundation for long-term community-based peacebuilding.

Although Indigenous Peoples have a long tradition of conflict resolution and restorative justice, this knowledge and practice remains largely unintegrated into state security policies or international peace frameworks. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) emphasize the importance of the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in peace and security processes, from the local to the international level.⁵⁴ In West Papua in particular, Indigenous Peoples continue to be pitted against each other, with the Indigenous institutions of West Papua's Indigenous Peoples being disrupted by state-created Indigenous institutions for the purpose of controlling Indigenous territories, as seen in the PSN project in Merauke and the construction of new battalions.

Development and extractive industry projects

Pressure on customary territories from large-scale development projects and extractive industries continued in 2025. These projects were consistently reported as proceeding without adequate Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), triggering land conflicts and threatening the environmental sustainability of Indigenous communities.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the revocation of a number of nickel mining permits in Raja Ampat following public protests shows that there is room for practices that are more responsive to environmental protection and Indigenous Peoples' rights, although this step does not yet fully guarantee their structural protection.⁵⁶

International engagement

The issue of Indigenous Peoples in West Papua continued to be raised in international human rights mechanisms throughout 2025. Statements by UN human rights experts and the continued attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples emphasized that the state has an obligation to recognize Indigenous Peoples as partners in development, peace, and security, not merely as objects of policy.⁵⁷

Outlook 2026/2027

Going forward, the situation of Indigenous Peoples in West Papua will be largely determined by the direction of state policy on conflict, recognition of customary rights, and space for Indigenous Peoples' participation. The passage of the Indigenous Peoples Bill and the strengthening of regional regulations have the potential to be positive steps, if done correctly and without a security approach that does not respect human rights. Meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the peace process is essential. Otherwise, the risk of conflict escalation and insecurity is expected to remain high and even increase.

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Japan



The two Indigenous Peoples of Japan, the Ainu and the Ryūkyūans (or Okinawans), live on the northernmost and southernmost islands of the country's archipelago.

The Ainu territory stretches from Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (now both Russian territories) to the northern part of present-day Japan, including the entire island of Hokkaido. Hokkaido was unilaterally incorporated into the Japanese state in 1869. Although most Ainu still live in Hokkaido, over the second half of the 20th century, tens of thousands migrated to Japan's urban centres for work and to escape the more prevalent discrimination on Hokkaido. Since June 2008, the Ainu have been officially recognized as an Indigenous people of Japan. The most recent government surveys put the Ainu population in Hokkaido at 11,450 (2023) and in the rest of Japan at 210 (2011), although experts estimate the actual population to be much higher.

The Ryūkyūans (Okinawans) live in the Ryūkyū Archipelago, which constitutes what is now known as "Okinawa Prefecture" in Japan. Okinawa is the largest and most populated island of the archipelago. The Ryūkyūans have unique cultural characteristics and are composed of six major Indigenous language groups.¹ In 1879, Japan annexed the Ryūkyū Islands to Japanese territory and established "Okinawa Prefecture". After World War II, the Ryūkyū Islands were relinquished to the U.S. military in exchange for Japanese independence, returning to Japanese sovereignty in 1972. Today, approximately 1.45 million people live in Okinawa Prefecture. The Japanese government still does not recognize the Ryūkyū people as an Indigenous group in Japan and the proportion of Indigenous peoples among the total population of Ryūkyūs is difficult to estimate. A significant part of Okinawa Island is occupied by U.S. Army and Japanese Defense Forces' military installations.

Japan has adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – although it does not recognize the unconditional right to self-determination. It has not ratified ILO Convention 169.

Ainu

The topic of peace and security for the Ainu people is one that entails ongoing challenges to rights and recognition. Although, unlike their Indigenous brethren in other countries, threats to physical safety such as ethnic strife, militarization or hate-related violent crimes are virtually non-existent for the Ainu, the peace-of-mind that would accompany a culturally-safe living environment and free access to the resources necessary for maintenance and development of Ainu cultural and social practices remains curtailed by a lack of free-and-unlimited access to Ainu land and resources. Additionally, Ainu continue to be subject to distress and anxiety both as a result of hate speech, and as a consequence of a lack of coverage in public education of such unresolved histories as suppression of their culture and language and the issue of their unrepatriated ancestral remains. Moreover, in 2025, the matter of free, prior and informed consent in regard to nuclear energy and nuclear waste disposal was a further issue on the table.

Legal and social developments surrounding the Ainu

One of the largest disappointments for Ainu interested in achieving policy gains in 2025 was a 13 December announcement by the Japanese Cabinet that, despite the Cabinet itself having conducted 20 hearings in line with a legally mandated review with Ainu in various locations in Hokkaido, the Japanese government would not be revising the Ainu Policy Promotion Act (APPA). This was despite an in-house advocacy gathering held at the Diet building in May 2024,² a meeting by two Ainu organizations with Cabinet bureaucrats in Tokyo in June 2025³ to discuss Ainu demands, and an end-of-November joint statement by four Ainu organizations.⁴

Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of the existing APPA's Article 4 (Prohibition of Discrimination) in preventing hate speech came under the spotlight when Sapporo City approved a civilian exhibition in the crowded Sapporo Underground Shopping Arcade whereby panel displays effectively turned history on its head by arguing that the Ainu were not an Indigenous people entitled to any special interest rights but that it was rather the ethnic Japanese who had civilized them.⁵ Officials of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido were consequently quick to point

out the shortcomings of Article 4 at a meeting of the Council on Ainu Policy accompanying the 13 December policy announcement,⁶ and other advocacy groups are planning to release protest statements against the government inaction.

Meanwhile, progress on surveys regarding the potential construction of nuclear waste storage facilities in Hokkaido has proceeded without consultation with the Ainu,⁷ and Hokkaido Governor Suzuki has approved the restarting of the Tomari nuclear facility, also without consulting them.⁸

Ongoing Ainu advocacy

Regardless of the challenges and setbacks, Ainu cultural and legal activism has continued.

In 2025, the Shimin Gaikou Centre (Citizens' Diplomatic Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), a Japanese association advocating for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Japan and abroad, organized two advocacy events as part of the Indigenous Navigator project to highlight the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Japan. The first event, held in March at the Parliamentary Museum of the National Diet (the Parliament of Japan) and co-organized with AinuToday and ERD-Net (the NGO Network for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), focused on the Indigenous rights situation of Ainu communities in Hokkaido and the Indigenous Navigator surveys with them. The second event, held in October, brought together Ryukyuan and Ainu representatives to reflect on their engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Both events attracted significant interest from Japanese politicians and civil society representatives.

While not an independent Ainu institution, the National Ainu Museum celebrated its fifth anniversary by ushering in Ainu, Mr. Nomoto Masahiro, as its first Ainu Director⁹ in July, and it has announced plans¹⁰ to hold Japan's first international symposium on Indigenous museums in February 2026.

In September, Biratori Town and the Biratori Ainu Association jointly sponsored a five-day international symposium on Indigenous cultural maintenance, which included discussion of Indigenous rights. This was attended by 50 Indigenous representatives from six countries and regions.¹¹

In October, the Ainu had the honour of holding the 10th International Jew's Harp Congress, thereby drawing Japanese attention to worldwide similarities in musical culture reflected in this Indigenous instrument.¹² On 26 November, Ainu musician and artist Oki Kano was awarded the Japan Association of Audiovisual Producers' *Excellence in Planning Award* for his debut documentary film about the life of a Hokkaido Ainu family, "Ainu in Everyday Attire".^{13, 14}

Gains in Japanese society

Despite the absence of gains on the legal front in 2025, several indicators of potential positive social developments occurred. Firstly, in September, in conjunction with the repatriation of the remains of 35 individuals to Ainu in the City of Otaru, Tokyo University issued an official apology to the Ainu people for previous misdoings with regard to Ainu ancestral remains.¹⁵ Secondly, in December, the three academic societies: the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, the Japanese Archaeological Association, and the Anthropological Society of Nippon, issued public statements condemning hate speech, and two of them simultaneously delivered official apologies to the Ainu for the excesses of past academic research.¹⁶ Finally, in advance of the final hearing of the Raporo Ainu Nation litigation scheduled for 4 February 2026, in September the presiding judge in the Raporo trial made an onsite visit to the mouth of the Urahoro Tokachi River to attend and observe the welcoming ceremony for the first spawning salmon.¹⁷ While the final verdict is yet to be decided, the fact that a judge would make an onsite visit is a rare occurrence in the Japanese legal field and may have positive implications for the verdict, forecast to be delivered in July 2026.

Expectations for 2026

While hard-fought battles regarding the APPA ended unfruitfully, Ainu activists have by no means given up the struggle for Ainu Indigenous rights, and negotiations are expected to continue on multiple fronts and at various venues. In August 2025, the MIP Movement¹⁸ was launched through the formation of the Ainu Mosir no Kai as a parent organization. Like the Raporo Litigation, the MIP Movement intends to use the absence of treaties or other deeds regarding Ainu land, resources and cultural rights to negotiate for obtaining these rights, first through ef-

forts at direct negotiation, and then, should this prove fruitless, subsequently, via the courts.

Meanwhile, as Hokkaido University approaches its “150th Anniversary” in August 2026, and following the official apology by Tokyo University, Hokkaido University Chancellor Houkin Kiyohiro has publicly declared that he will soon be making a statement regarding the university’s relationship with the Ainu people.¹⁹ Given the university’s involvement in the colonization of Ainu lands and its ongoing public influence to this day, the statement could have major ramifications for the betterment of Ainu social and economic conditions.

Ryūkyūans (Okinawans)

Continued militarization of the Ryūkyūs

A series of joint U.S.-Japan military exercises occurred in the Ryūkyū Islands in 2025.

The “Iron Fist” exercise, aimed at simulating the recapture of remote islands, was conducted in Kin Town on Okinawa Island from February to March.²⁰ Additionally, in September, alongside the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF), the U.S. military conducted military drills known as “Resolute Dragon” on Okinawa Island, Ishigaki Island, and Miyako Island, all part of the Ryūkyūs. The Okinawa Prefectural Government appealed to the Defense Bureau to limit the disruption to local residents and seek their consent for training exercises.²¹ Despite public opposition, including protests, the U.S. military and JSDF however proceeded with their operations.^{22, 23}

In August, the Okinawa Defense Bureau, a structure of the Ministry of Defense of Japan, informed Okinawa Prefecture of the indefinite retention of unmanned warships at Naha Military Port, without prior notice.^{24, 25}

In October, to address the ongoing problem of sexual abuse committed by U.S. military personnel, the U.S. military undertook its first solo patrol in Naha City. The deployment of military police in civilian contexts has been met with criticism by the public. In November, U.S. soldiers detained a non-military foreign civilian during the patrol in Okinawa City. The incident was captured on video, and disseminated via social media. In the recording, military police officers slammed the

man to the ground. The detained man is seen inquiring as to whether the U.S. military police were also authorized to detain Japanese individuals for failing to present identification, to which the U.S. military police responded affirmatively.²⁶ After acknowledging the wrongful detention of a civilian, the U.S. military announced a temporary suspension of independent U.S. military police patrols.²⁷

Meanwhile in November, at Oura Bay in Henoko, the new U.S. military base construction site, the Defense Bureau launched full-scale land reclaiming operations for the base. Despite continued significant opposition to the establishment of the new U.S. military base in Henoko, the Japanese government continues to dismiss the concerns of civilians.²⁸

Violence against women by U.S. military personnel

In March 2025, Ryūkyūan women reported U.S. military violence against women at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).²⁹ Two Okinawa Christian University students stated that, since 1945, the U.S. military presence had endangered human rights through various incidents such as U.S. military helicopter crashes, falling parts accidents, and sexual assault cases.

In April, Okinawa Prefecture urged the U.S. military to enforce discipline after a service member was accused of sexual assault.³⁰ This incident involved a male U.S. Marine sexually assaulting a woman on a military base and injuring another. In response, the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly unanimously passed a resolution condemning the incident and calling for preventive measures and a review of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).³¹ The U.S. Department of Defense reported that, from 2013 to 2020, nearly half of the 2,070 sexual violence incidents at military bases in Japan occurred in Okinawa (949 cases [45.8%]).³² This underscores the concentration of human rights violations against the Ryūkyūan people in Japan.

In December, it was publicly revealed that the Naha District Public Prosecutor's Office had decided not to indict two U.S. soldiers accused of sexual assault on Okinawa Island in May and June.³³ The Office justified its decision by emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the victims' dignity and privacy.

Cultural suppression and appropriation

Japanese oppression of Ryūkyūan cultural traditions continues. In August, the Japan High School Baseball Federation admonished Okinawa

Shogaku High School for using the Chondarā cheer during the National High School Baseball Championship semifinals.^{34, 35} Chondarā is rooted in Eisa dance and holds significant cultural relevance for the Ryūkyūan people. The Federation explained the reason for the warning as “calling for restraint on face painting and ethnic costumes”. However, it allowed Japanese high school cheer squads to wear Japanese traditional garment, such as the *hakama* (skirt-like pants, typically worn over a kimono).³⁶ Shogaku subsequently ceased the use of the Chondarā cheer in the finals.

Moreover, the JSDF was scheduled to participate in the annual All-Island Eisa Festival in September 2025. Established in 1956 to promote postwar recovery, this festival features local youth demonstrating their skills.^{37, 38} Local citizens and assembly members expressed concerns to the mayor and the JSDF, arguing that their involvement contradicted the festival's peace-oriented ethos amidst military expansion, particularly on Nansei Islands.³⁹ They requested the cancellation of the JSDF's performance but this request was ignored and the JSDF performed. Some Okinawa Prefectural Assembly members labelled it as “discrimination against the JSDF” and proposed a resolution to the Prefectural Assembly demanding an end to discriminatory attitudes toward the JSDF personnel and their families. On 8 October, the resolution passed with a majority vote.⁴⁰

Ancestral remains

In March, Japanese newspaper Ryūkyū Shimpō awarded the “Higashionna Kanjun Prize” to the Japanese anthropologist, Naomi Doi. The Higashionna Kanjun Prize recognizes notable contributions to Ryūkyū studies. The award was conferred upon Doi for her analysis of ancient human bones, illuminating the Ryūkyū Islands' people. Doi is an apprentice of Takeo Kanesaki, who infamously appropriated Ryūkyūan remains in the 1920s. Doi's research focuses on Ryūkyūan remains from wind burial sites, which she frames as inquiries into the Japanese people's origins.⁴¹ The *Nirai Kanai nu Kai*, an association that advocates for the repatriation of Ryūkyūan remains, publicly criticized the award to a colonialist researcher, deeming it an insult to Indigenous communities. Despite submitting over 200 signatures from various Indigenous groups, such as Ainu and Kanaka (Hawai'i), the Ryūkyū Shimpō declined to revoke the award to Doi. Inquiries directed by Nirai Kanai nu Kai and

its individual members at Doi and the selection committee received no replies.⁴³

In May, it was disclosed that Kyoto University transferred Ryūkyūan remains from the Mumu Jana tomb to the Nakijin Village Board of Education, contingent upon preservation as academic materials rather than returning them to descendants.⁴⁴ No prior notification was issued to the descendants or plaintiffs involved in the lawsuit for the remains' repatriation. The *Nirai Kanai nu Kai* conducted a memorial service at the Nakijin Village History Center and consulted with the center's director, requesting to have the remains returned to their original burial site. The request was denied by the director who thus affirmed adherence to the agreement with Kyoto University.⁴⁵

On 7 November, Kyoto University suddenly announced a list of Ryūkyūan ancestral remains and return guidelines on its website.^{46, 47} There was no communication or apology directed towards descendants or plaintiffs involved in repatriation lawsuits. The guidelines indicate that unidentified remains will be transferred upon local government request, yet 106 sets remain unidentified.⁴⁸ Yasukatsu Matsushima, co-representative of the *Nirai Kanai nu Kai* association, called for an apology and the return of the remains from Kyoto University. The university nevertheless dismissed the association's status and declined to apologize.

On 12 December, the University of Tokyo published a list of Ryūkyūan remains in its possession.^{49, 50} However, descendants and plaintiffs in the repatriation lawsuit were not informed of this either, and there was no apology or explanation regarding repatriation or transfer.⁵¹ In response, Mr. Matsushima, co-representative of the *Nirai Kanai nu Kai*, sent a protest letter to the University of Tokyo, demanding an apology and the return of all Ryūkyūan remains.⁵² As of 27 December 2025, there had been no response from the University of Tokyo.

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Ryoko Nakamura is an Indigenous Ryukyuan. Co-chair of the Nirai Kanai nu Kai, a campaign group for the repatriation of remains of Ryukyuan people stolen by Japanese researchers. In addition, she is involved in the campaign against the Japanese military (the Japan Self-Defense Force) and U.S. military bases.

Dr. Risako Sakai (she/her/hers) collaborated in translating the section on Ryūkyūans. She is originally from Okinawa and is currently a post-doctoral researcher at Cornell University, USA. Her research interests include rematriation, Indigenous feminism, and Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies.



Laos



With a population of some 7.6 million,¹ the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR or Laos) is the most ethnically diverse country in mainland Southeast Asia.² The ethnic Lao, comprising around half of the population, dominate the country economically and culturally. There are, however, some provinces and districts where the number of Indigenous people exceeds that of the Lao and where their culture is prominent. There are four ethnolinguistic families in Laos; Lao-Tai language-speaking groups represent two-thirds of the population. The other third speaks languages belonging to the Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan and Hmong-Ew-Hmien families and they are considered to be the Indigenous Peoples of Laos. Officially, all ethnic groups have equal status in Laos, and the concept of Indigenous Peoples is not recognised by the government, despite the fact that Laos voted in favour of adopting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Lao government uses the term ethnic group to refer to Indigenous people.

The Lao government currently recognises 160 ethnic sub-groups within 50 ethnic groups. Indigenous Peoples, especially those who speak Hmong-Ew-Hmien languages, are unequivocally the most vulnerable groups in Laos. They face territorial, economic, cultural and political pressures and experience various threats to their livelihoods. Their land and resources are increasingly under pressure from pro-investment government development policies and commercial natural resource exploitation. Indigenous people lag behind the majority Lao-Tai at all economic levels. They have more limited access to health-care, lower rates of education, and less access to clean water and sanitation. 45.6% of the population belonging to Mon-Khmer and 17.8% belonging to Hmong-Ew-Hmien groups are residing in rural areas without road access.³

Laos ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1974, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2009. However, the

Lao government severely restricts fundamental rights, including freedom of speech (media), association, assembly and religion, and civil society is closely controlled. Organisations openly focusing on the plight of Indigenous Peoples or using related terms in the Lao language are thus not allowed, while open discussions about Indigenous Peoples with the government can be sensitive, especially since the issue is seen as pertaining to special (human) rights.

In late 2025, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) assessed Laos' implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In what amounts to international acknowledgement of systemic limitations affecting Indigenous communities, the Committee explicitly noted issues arising from non-recognition of Indigenous status.

Peace and security in Lao PDR

Laos is a paradigmatic case of the prioritization of East Asian security policy. The political environment in Lao PDR shapes how peace and security is discussed, interpreted, and implemented. Laos has a centralized governance structure, with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) guiding the functions of government, the judiciary, the military, and the media. The government focuses, primarily, on traditional state-centric conceptualizations of security, and top-down, macroeconomic models and mega-projects to develop the country out of insecurity.⁴

Historically, the peace process in Laos has been a complex and multifaceted journey that reflects the country's tumultuous history and the aspirations of its people for stability and development. The Lao government has engaged in various initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue among different political factions and with Indigenous Peoples toward cultural reconciliation and the forging of a cohesive national identity and has made concerted efforts to promote a unified national identity while respecting the cultural diversity of its ethnic groups.⁵

The Lao regulatory environment for civil society/international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) is tightly controlled; explicit peace advocacy is often framed within development, gender and governance work. National security is seen as the purview of the government, and a key pillar of the government's development plan is "stability". For these reasons, the term security is usually translated as "stability". For instance, the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs translates Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as "Women, Peace and Stability".⁶

This requires a cautious and strategic approach by international agencies and CSOs and other actors working on peace-related issues. Peacebuilding efforts supported by INGOs are thus typically implemented under terminology of community empowerment and resilience, conflict prevention, rights awareness, and social cohesion, all of which are related to peacebuilding, even if not labelled as such.

2025 marked the 75th anniversary of the Lao Front for National Development (LFND), a nationwide mass organization⁷ that unifies and mobilizes society to support development, stability, and ethnic harmony in Laos, and the 50th anniversary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The LFND plays a crucial role in the socio-political landscape of Laos, including involvement in ethnic minority and Indigenous affairs and being in charge of religious affairs.

In July, Laos organized the Lao Ethnic Cultural Festival to showcase the unity and cultural harmony of its 50 ethnic groups in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Lao Front for National Development (LFND). It aimed to promote unity and solidarity among Laos' 50 ethnic groups while preserving and showcasing their unique customs, traditions, music, literature, and everyday life.⁸ This event was not simply a folklorization of Indigenous cultures within a socialist context of state oversight but allowed for creative appropriation, reflecting the active agency of Indigenous Peoples through cultural performances. Meanwhile, in January, Oudomxay province launched its own Ethnic Traditional Festival with the aim of promoting tourism; there are nine Indigenous groups in the province, including the Hmong, Khmu, Bid, Lamed, Lu mien, Akha, Phounoy and Hor.⁹

In March, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam approved a program of training and knowledge-sharing on ethnic affairs for Lao and Cambodian officials. It aims to contribute to

enhancing the capacity of Lao and Cambodian officials when performing their duties and responsibilities and increasing effective cooperation on ethnic affairs between the two countries and Vietnam. Each year, the program will also organize exchange activities and experience-sharing between representatives of influential organisations among the Indigenous Peoples living along Vietnam's borders with Laos and Cambodia.¹⁰

Human rights status

In May, the UN Human Rights Council reviewed Laos' human rights record under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Member states commended Lao authorities for engaging constructively in the review process, showing their willingness to participate in international dialogue on human rights.¹¹ Several recommendations from member states explicitly addressed issues affecting Indigenous and ethnic minority communities, including concerns about forced relocations and the protection of Indigenous groups — indicating that these issues are recognized at the international level. New Zealand, for instance, especially recommended legislation on the recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples.¹²

This has led to a cautious and strategic approach by international agencies and CSOs and other actors working on peace-related issues. The Lao regulatory environment for civil society/INGOs is tightly controlled; explicit peace advocacy is often framed within development, gender and governance work. INGOs typically implement programs that build stability and community resilience, and which are peace-relevant even if not labelled as traditional peacebuilding. Because formal peacebuilding is sensitive in Laos, international peace work often aligns with human security, women's empowerment, governance, legal access and community resilience, which contribute to a peaceful, stable society.

Consequently, peacebuilding and peace-oriented projects in Laos that involve Indigenous Peoples and local communities operate under community empowerment, conflict prevention, rights awareness, and social cohesion.

The reintroduction of 640 sub-districts nationwide

A recent constitutional amendment, promulgated in March 2025, included changes that signified steps toward a decentralization of governance. Local governments are currently responsible for formulating and implementing their own development, budget, and security plans. The change will see the reintroduction of sub-districts, known as “Ta Saeng”, as part of a nationwide administrative restructuring aimed at improving local governance and public service accessibility. This move, introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), was expected to establish approximately 640 sub-districts across the country by mid-2025.¹³

Under the new framework, sub-districts will take over key administrative responsibilities previously handled by village authorities, including public service delivery, local planning, and implementation of state policies. Each sub-district will be governed by a committee, supported by administrative staff overseeing daily operations. In addition to their administrative responsibilities, sub-districts will focus on four main areas: governance, economic planning, cultural development, and national security.¹⁴ In parallel, villages will shift to a community-focused role, concentrating on cultural preservation, social affairs, community cohesion, and local security. This separation is intended to professionalize public administration and streamline governance.¹⁵ If committee leadership and membership are mainly appointed by the state without transparent mechanisms for Indigenous inclusion, the reform may not offer meaningful improvement for Indigenous voices — and could reinforce centralized control at the local level rather than genuine community representation, inadvertently marginalizing Indigenous governance in a shift from informal Indigenous village authority to formal sub-district committees.

Infrastructure development

In April 2025, Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone reiterated Laos’ ambitious target for the energy and mining sector aimed at increasing its contribution to 25% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP)

by 2030.¹⁶ Meanwhile, on 28 February, the Lao Ministry of Energy and Mines temporarily suspended the issuance of new mining licenses in order to improve the regulations governing the trade of minerals and mineral products.¹⁷ Many large-scale projects in mining and energy are committed to operational excellence and sustainable growth and some have made considerable economic contributions to Laos. However, many projects authorized or inaugurated in 2025 are located in areas inhabited by, and with substantial impacts on, Indigenous communities and may have a negative impact on the livelihoods and social cohesion of these communities.

On 28 November 2025, Laos celebrated the successful launch of Monsoon Wind Power, the country's first and Southeast Asia's largest wind farm. The USD 930 million project features 133 fully-installed turbines spread over 68,000 hectares across Dakcheung district in Xekong province and Sanxay district in Attapeu province. The project extends over land belonging to 31 Indigenous communities, mostly populated by Banharic-speaking groups of the Mon-Khmer ethnolinguistic family. The project is planned to produce 600 MW of clean energy, which will be exported to Vietnam under a 25-year power purchase agreement with Vietnam Electricity (EVN). The power transmission will use a 500 kV line. Despite the project developers' efforts and their support of community development initiatives, over a thousand grievance cases have been filed relating to soil erosion, disputes over boundary issues for expected compensation, impacts on culturally significant areas, forest sanctuaries, cemeteries, etc.¹⁸

At the Lao-Vietnam Investment Promotion Conference 2025 in Vientiane on 03 December, Laos and Vietnam unveiled plans for their first joint railway, set to connect the landlocked nation of Laos to Vietnam's Vung Ang Port. The railway, spanning 452 kilometers within Laos will facilitate the transport of goods between China, Laos, Vietnam, and further into mainland ASEAN.

Laos and Vietnam have also signed a concession agreement to start construction of the second 203.8-kilometer section of the Vientiane Hanoi highway.¹⁹ While both projects promise to significantly reduce transport costs, strengthen supply chains and improve regional efficiency, they may potentially have a substantial impact on Indigenous communities' livelihoods, and interrupt access to sacred sites, burial

grounds, and traditional landscape features since there are persistent concerns that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes are either inadequate or not meaningfully implemented.²⁰

There may be a glimmer of hope because, while FPIC is not yet embedded in the national regulatory framework or has not yet become a comprehensive statutory requirement for all decisions affecting ethnic and Indigenous communities nationwide, in 2025 it was formally recognized in practice and this symbolizes a tremendous achievement for the Indigenous Peoples. The approval in September of *Promoting the right of Lao peoples' Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in land-use rights in forest areas* by the Director General of the Department of Forestry and the Head of the Department of Ethnicity of the Lao Front for National Development (LFND) made FPIC a standard procedure to be followed by all government departments and projects, supporting recognition of the land tenure rights of 2,958 villages that are home to some one million Indigenous people inside forestland, providing opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' empowerment in unprecedented ways.^{21, 22}

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Malaysia



The 2020 Census shows that the Indigenous Peoples of Malaysia were estimated to account for around 11% of the 32.4 million national population. They are collectively known as Orang Asli. The Orang Asli are the Indigenous Peoples of Peninsular Malaysia and, according to a special report by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the Orang Asli population in Peninsular Malaysia was estimated at 227,900 in 2025.¹ The 18 recognised Orang Asli subgroups within the Negrito (Semang), Senoi and Aboriginal-Malay groups account for 0.8% of the population of Peninsular Malaysia. In Sarawak, the Indigenous Peoples are collectively known as Natives (Dayak and/or Orang Ulu). They include the Iban, Bidayuh, Kenyah, Kayan, Kedayan, Lunbawang, Punan, Bisayah, Kelabit, Berawan, Kejaman, Ukit, Sekapan, Melanau and Penan (plus 12 new ethnic groups which are discussed below). They account for around 1.2 million or almost 50% of Sarawak's population of 2.45 million people. In Sabah, the 39 different Indigenous ethnic groups are known as Natives or Anak Negeri and make up some 2.1 million or 62% of Sabah's population of 3.4 million. The main groups are the Dusun, Murut, Paitan and Bajau groups. While the Malays are also Indigenous to Malaysia, they are not categorised as Indigenous Peoples because they constitute the majority and are politically, economically and socially dominant.

In Sarawak and Sabah, laws introduced by the British during their colonial rule recognising the customary land rights and customary law of the Indigenous Peoples are still in place. However, they are not properly implemented, and are even outright ignored by the government, which gives priority to large-scale resource extraction and the plantations of private companies and state agencies over the rights and interests of the Indigenous communities. In Peninsular Malaysia, while there is a clear lack of reference to Orang Asli customary land rights in the National Land Code, Orang Asli customary tenure is recognised under common law. The principal act that governs Orang Asli administration, including occupation of the land, is the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954.

Malaysia has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and endorsed the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples but has not ratified ILO Convention 169.

Legal, policy, and emerging governance frameworks

As noted in *The Indigenous World 2025*, legal and policy reforms affecting Orang Asli in Malaysia have been characterised by incremental change, prolonged uncertainty, and limited Indigenous participation. Developments in 2025 largely reflected a continuation of these patterns rather than a substantive transformation in how Indigenous rights are recognised or implemented..

In Peninsular Malaysia, proposed amendments to the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (Act 134), initiated by the federal government through the Department for Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), remained unresolved throughout the year. The proposed revisions were framed by the government as efforts to modernise administrative provisions and empower Orang Asli communities through seven focus strategies, namely land, education, health, economy, leadership, infrastructure and culture.² However, Orang Asli organisations continued to raise concerns about the lack of transparency and meaningful consultation in the amendment process.³ Memoranda submitted by Orang Asli groups reiterated demands for legal recognition of customary land rights, self-determination in village governance, and the incorporation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) into law. The government has responded that they will hold public hearings in early 2026.⁴

In Sabah, 2025 also saw renewed public and political attention on questions of authority and governance in the context of the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63). The Malaysia Agreement, which governs the terms under which Sabah and Sarawak joined the federation of Malaysia, defines constitutional arrangements related to autonomy, revenue sharing and decision-making authority between the federal government and the Bornean states. A High Court ruling affirming Sabah's constitutional right to a 40% net revenue entitlement was widely regarded as

a landmark decision and contributed to heightened discourse on state autonomy and long-standing grievances over marginalisation.⁵ This renewed emphasis was reflected in the 2025 Sabah state election, where voting patterns indicated growing support for local-based political parties and an increased assertion of “Sabah for Sabahans” sentiment.⁶ Meanwhile, proposals to replace the existing Native Courts Enactment with a revised version⁷ similarly illustrated the slow and uncertain pace of reform. Native Courts play a central role in Orang Asal systems of justice and governance, particularly in matters relating to land, family, and *adat* (customary law and Indigenous norms governing social relations, land use and community life). While the state government announced plans in 2024 to raise the minimum age of marriage within Native Courts’ jurisdiction, including tabling cabinet papers to end child marriage in native communities,⁸ no legislative amendments had been enacted by the end of 2025.

At the national level, other legislative initiatives also advanced with limited consideration of Orang Asal rights. The proposed Seed Bill, intended to regulate plant varieties and seed management, raised concern among Orang Asal farmers and civil society organisations, who warned that the Bill could restrict traditional seed-saving, exchange, and cultivation practices central to Indigenous livelihoods, food security, and the transmission of agricultural knowledge.⁹

In parallel, new governance frameworks related to climate and carbon management were introduced at both federal and state levels. In 2025, Malaysia enacted the Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) Act,¹⁰ while Sabah passed the Climate Change and Carbon Governance Enactment.¹¹ Although framed as responses to climate commitments and economic opportunities, Orang Asal organisations noted that these laws were developed without explicit safeguards for Indigenous land rights, FPIC, or Indigenous participation, despite their potential implications for forests and customary territories.^{12, 13}

Taken together, these developments reinforced concerns that reforms affecting Orang Asal remain fragmented, slow-moving, and largely procedural, offering limited protection from ongoing land dispossession and resource encroachment and without adequate involvement and consultation with Indigenous Peoples.

Land rights, development pressures, and economic interventions

Land remained the primary source of insecurity for Orang Asal in Malaysia in 2025.

In Peninsular Malaysia, developments involving state-linked economic interventions and carbon-related initiatives highlighted ongoing tensions around Orang Asli land governance and consent. The Pahang Orang Asli Corporation (ORACO), a state-linked corporation established by the Pahang State Government to manage and implement commercial development projects on Orang Asli land, continued to be presented by the state as a vehicle for Orang Asli socio-economic development, particularly through the management of commercial agricultural schemes on Orang Asli land.¹⁴ At the same time, Orang Asli organisations and their allies raised concerns regarding the concentration of decision-making authority within ORACO, limited transparency, insufficient community consent, limited community control over land use, and the longer-term implications of corporatised land management for customary tenure and self-governance.¹⁵

Similar concerns were reflected in debates surrounding a forest carbon initiative in Pahang linked to Enggang (Pekan) Sdn Bhd, a private company, which was authorised under an agreement with the Pahang State Government to manage, restore, and commercialise carbon credits from forest reserves covering approximately 97,000 hectares.¹⁶ Orang Asal organisations and allies working on Orang Asli rights highlighted the fact that the project framework treated Orang Asli primarily as “stakeholders” rather than rights-holders, and raised concerns regarding engagement and consent processes that did not meet genuine FPIC standards.¹⁷ Taken together, these developments contributed to heightened uncertainty among Orang Asli communities regarding land security and governance.

In Sarawak, Orang Asal communities continued to pursue legal challenges against plantation and logging operations alleged to have encroached on Native Customary Rights (NCR) land. Disputes over land clearing, forest access, and compensation remained unresolved in many areas. Opposition to large-scale infrastructure projects, including hydropower development, also persisted, reflecting long-standing

resistance to projects perceived as threatening Orang Asal territories, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.¹⁸

Furthermore, although the shelving of the Papar dam project in Sabah reduced immediate displacement risks, no formal binding commitment was announced, leaving communities uncertain as to whether the project might be revived.¹⁹

Peace and security

Although Malaysia did not experience armed conflict in 2025, Orang Asal continued to face peace and security challenges rooted in structural inequality, land insecurity, and shrinking civic space. Across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, unresolved land claims, development pressures, and governance decisions translated into prolonged tension, social stress, and mistrust toward state institutions.

In Kampung Kelaik, Kelantan, ongoing land encroachment progressively restricted the Temiar community's access to areas used for customary practices, including rituals and ancestral burial grounds, undermining livelihoods, cultural continuity, and social cohesion.²⁰

Meanwhile, in Kampung Sena, Pahang, the Jakun community faced acute legal insecurity when they were compelled to defend their customary land in the Kuantan High Court against a lawsuit filed by 96 individuals claiming 99-year leasehold titles over the village territory. Rather than engaging in physical protest, the community responded through collective legal action supported by Indigenous leadership networks and legal advocacy bodies. After being served with a legal summons on 28 August 2025, giving them only four days to prepare a defence, community members mobilised rapidly with the support of neighbouring villages and traditional leaders. The case was heard on 2 September. Although Kampung Sena had been officially recognised by the Department for Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) for more than four decades, the village was never gazetted as an Orang Asli Reserve, enabling leasehold titles to be issued between 2020 and 2022. The plaintiffs sought eviction orders, demolition of homes, and control over existing oil palm planted on the land.²¹ On 26 September 2025, the court directed that the matter be considered for conversion from an originat-

ing summons to a writ of summons, a move that would require a full trial with oral testimony, including evidence based on customary use and oral history. On 14 October 2025, the plaintiffs withdrew their originating summons and were ordered to pay RM6,000 (1,300 Euros) in costs to the Jakun defendants, before refileing the case as a writ.

Both cases underscored how unresolved land recognition and fragmented governance expose Orang Asal communities to prolonged stress, eviction risks, and insecurity despite long-standing occupation and recognition.

The resurgence of autonomy discourse in Sabah was reflected across political debates, media commentary and public forums. It also coincided with renewed attention on the Keningau Oath Stone, a customary site symbolising historical commitment, Indigenous systems of authority and moral accountability, particularly following severe flooding and infrastructure neglect, highlighting ongoing governance failures affecting rural Indigenous communities.²² This renewed attention occurred alongside persistent material insecurity in rural Orang Asal territories. For instance, two villages, Kampung Sonsogon Makatol Darat, Kota Marudu, and Kampung Minusuh, Tongod, filed a lawsuit in November 2025 against their elected representative and the Sabah state government, citing decades of neglect and a failure to provide basic services. According to court filings, the communities alleged violations of their constitutional rights to life and equality, pointing to the absence of roads, electricity, clean water, healthcare access, and education facilities. Community representatives stated that repeated appeals to authorities over many years had gone unanswered, leaving legal action as a last resort. The case underscored how prolonged marginalisation and lack of infrastructure in Indigenous territories constitute not only development failures but also ongoing peace and security concerns, deepening feelings of exclusion and mistrust toward state institutions.²³

In Sarawak, peace and security challenges were particularly pronounced in interior regions such as Baram and Ulu Baram, where Orang Asal communities continued to oppose proposed hydropower projects, citing risks to ancestral territories and cultural heritage. In other forested areas, Orang Asal communities defending their Native Customary Rights (NCR) land from logging and plantation activities faced arrests, investigations, and legal action. In mid-2025, two Indigenous Penan

men were arrested following community actions to stop logging activities in interior forest areas.²⁴ They were subsequently released but were required to attend further court proceedings on charges of obstructing forestry officials during operations. According to community sources, the men were asked to sign documents upon their release that were later understood to form an admission of guilt. As of the end of 2025, the case remained unresolved and with a final decision still pending into 2026. The Penan men continue to be subject to monitoring by the government. At the organisational level, Orang Asal and environmental groups supporting affected communities also faced heightened scrutiny. The Indigenous-led organisation SAVE Rivers publicly stated that it was a non-profit organisation after being questioned by the Sarawak Forest Department regarding its activities.^{25, 26} Civil society actors expressed concern that such actions were contributing to a climate of intimidation and discouraging legitimate Indigenous organising.²⁷

These developments demonstrate that peace and security challenges faced by Orang Asal in Malaysia are non-violent but deeply structural, arising from legal uncertainty, prolonged land disputes, criminalisation of Orang Asal defenders, and the erosion of customary governance systems.

Moving forward

While legal and policy reforms continued to advance slowly, and with limited Indigenous participation, Orang Asal themselves remained the primary drivers of progress through leadership, collective organising, and knowledge-sharing. One positive development was the appointment of the Chairwoman of Pertubuhan Wanita Orang Asal Malaysia (PWOAM) as a permanent member of the National Women and Family Council, which was welcomed as a step toward greater representation of Orang Asal women's perspectives in national policy spaces.²⁸ Orang Asal-led gatherings also played an important role in strengthening networks and articulating shared priorities. National and regional platforms such as the 3rd Malaysian Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (MIPCE-3)²⁹ and World Indigenous Peoples' Day commemorations brought together Orang Asal leaders, women, youth, and organ-

isations from Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak.³⁰ In Peninsular Malaysia, Orang Asal organisations facilitated dialogues on Orang Asli health and well-being through the *Bicaraq Kesihatan* gathering, which centred community perspectives on access to healthcare, Indigenous healing practices, and systemic inequalities.³¹

Taken together, these developments reflected not a resolution of structural challenges but rather the continued resilience and organising capacity of Orang Asal in the face of ongoing land encroachment, regulatory expansion, and criminalisation. Moving forward, the experiences of 2025 reaffirmed that lasting peace and security will depend on the recognition of Orang Asal as rights-holders, the protection of customary lands, and the institutionalisation of Indigenous participation in decision-making, all conditions that remain largely unmet despite gradual reforms.

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Myanmar



There is no accurate information on the number of Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar, partly due to a lack of understanding in the country of the internationally recognized concept of Indigenous Peoples. The government claims that all citizens of Myanmar are “Indigenous” (*taing-yin-tha*) and, on that basis, dismisses the applicability of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to Myanmar. Indigenous Peoples’ rights activists use the Burmese language term *hta-nay-tain-yin-tha* to describe Indigenous Peoples, based on international principles that use the criteria of non-dominance in the national context, historical continuity, ancestral territories and self-identification.¹

According to the 1982 Citizenship Law, ethnic groups that have been present in the current geographical area of Myanmar since before 1823 (the start of the first British annexation) are considered *taung-yin-tha*² (national races). Eight ethnic groups are recognized as national races: Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Chin, Mon, Burman, Arakan and Shan. In the government’s classification, smaller groups are lumped into larger groups and subgroups. However, there are some ethnic groups that are considered or see themselves as Indigenous Peoples, such as the Naga, who would not identify with any of those groups.

In accordance with the 2008 Constitution,³ Myanmar is divided into seven states, seven regions, and one union territory. The seven states are named after seven large ethnic groups: Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Kayin (Karen), Chin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. The Bamar (Burmese) do not have a specifically named state. They are nonetheless the dominant ethnic group in those seven regions (Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, Yangon, Ayeyarwaddy, Thanintharyi, and Bago) and the Union Territory of Nay Pyi Taw. There are also five self-administered zones and one self-administered division that form part of regions or states, each named after the ethnic group that forms the majority in the area (Naga, Danu, Pa-O, Palaung, Kokang and the Wa).

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) attempted a coup d’état by deposing Aung San Su Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) and forming the State Ad-

ministration Council (SAC) as a “*de facto*” government. In response, in April 2021, ousted members of parliament formed the National Unity Government (NUG), which continues to seek to act as the legitimate government in exile. In the post-coup era, the overall trajectory of the conflict in Myanmar has been one of expanding control by revolutionary forces, including newly-formed People’s Defence Forces (PDF) acting under the NUG, independent local defence forces, and well-established Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that have been fighting for the self-determination of the ethnic groups they represent for decades. As such, Myanmar is presently a patchwork of mixed control areas, where receding SAC control fluctuates, and resistance actors attempt to solidify governance mechanisms.

Myanmar voted in favour of the UNDRIP, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, but has not signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) nor ratified ILO Convention No. 169. It is party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Myanmar has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In 2025, the peace and security landscape for Indigenous populations in Myanmar continued to deteriorate. The junta’s push to stage elections was marred by yet further escalations of violence in attempts to solidify governance of Indigenous areas, compounding the situation for 3.4 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and creating fresh displacement of Indigenous communities living in the border regions.⁴

Election law weaponized by junta

In July 2025, the junta enacted the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections, which criminalized speaking out or “expression in writing” deemed “disruptive”.⁵ Jail sentences under the law ranged from three years to a maximum of life imprisonment or even

the death penalty. The election monitoring group, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), reported that, “Rather than ensuring peaceful, competitive elections, the Election Protection Law is being deployed to silence dissent, deter protests, and block independent scrutiny – turning any form of election monitoring into a criminal risk.”⁶

By December 2025, at least 229 people had been charged under the law for “attempting to sabotage election processes”, according to a junta-controlled media outlet.⁷ While the majority of arrests took place in urban areas in central Myanmar, where the junta has firmer administrative control, people speaking out against the elections in ethnic states also fell foul of the law. In Karen State, 20 people were reportedly arrested; in Chin State, 18; and further arrests were reported in Shan, Kachin, Mon, Karenni states and Thanintharyi region.⁸ In September, a man from Shan State was sentenced to seven years’ hard labour for criticizing the election.⁹

Sham election

As the fifth anniversary of the 2021 military coup approached, the junta staged what was overwhelmingly condemned as a “sham” nationwide election and a calculated bid to present a veneer of legitimacy.¹⁰ The first of several election phases was announced for 28 December 2025, to be continued in stages into early 2026.¹¹

On 1 August 2025, the junta dissolved the State Administration Council (SAC) and, in its place, created the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), an “interim government” – led by the same junta leaders as within the SAC – tasked with overseeing the planned elections.¹² The SSPC was to run parallel to the cabinet, led by Prime Minister Nyo Saw, which managed day-to-day government administration.¹³

U.N. and government stakeholders widely condemned the election process, suggesting the elections would “perpetuate repression, division and conflict”¹⁴ and were “unfolding in a climate of violence and repression”.¹⁵ The European Union also raised concerns about the climate in which the elections were taking place, emphasizing that “addressing the underlying discrimination and human rights violations faced by persons belonging to all ethnic minorities must be a part of a political solution to the crisis in Myanmar.”¹⁶

ANFREL, which served as an accredited international observer during the 2015 and 2020 Myanmar elections, suggested the ballot would not align with international standards and could not be considered credible or legitimate.¹⁷

Participation in ethnic states and regions

A total of 57 parties that were registered with the junta-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) participated, and the ballot was held in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. With 25% of seats constitutionally reserved for military MPs, the USDP junta proxy party needed only to win 26% of seats nationwide to prevail. As the year closed, despite a reported low voter turnout, it was widely anticipated that this would be the outcome.¹⁸

In ethnic states and regions, largely populated by Indigenous communities, the ballot was held in 49 townships deemed secure enough. In the vast northern Sagaing Region – home to Naga, Chin and Kachin populations – and in Shan State, the ballot was held across 24 townships. The other 25 townships were made up of a selection from Kachin State (six townships), Karenni State (two townships), Karen State (three townships), Mon State (five townships), Chin State (two townships), Thantingtharyi (four townships), and finally Arakan State (three townships).

Some state-level (ethnic-based) parties registered for the ballot; however, because the UEC oversaw the registration process, newly-formed parties were considered junta-affiliated, such as the Kayah State People's Party (KySPP) in Karenni State.¹⁹ In other cases, Indigenous-affiliated party representation had historical and ongoing links to the junta, or, at times, direct affiliation. For example, in Shan State, the Pa-O National Organization's (PNO) vice-chairman Khun San Lwin sits on the junta's governing body, and Dwe Bu, who leads the Kachin State People's Party, is also a junta member.²⁰

In Chin State, preliminary results underscored the farcical nature of the process. In Hakha Township, the junta-aligned USDP seemingly claimed a sweeping victory across all three legislative tiers – the Lower House, the Upper House, and the Chin State Hluttaw (Assembly) – despite only 2,820 (10.32%) out of 27,324 eligible voters casting their ballots. This figure lay bare the absence of public participation and con-

sent, compared to 72% voter turnout in 2020, when over 19,000 people voted. Furthermore, over 600 “advance votes” received were from the junta’s civil service and through members of the public casting votes under duress.²¹

Bombs to ballot

The junta chief, Ming Aung Hlaing, framed the proposed elections as a “pathway to peace”; however, in the lead-up to the process, violence committed by the junta increased significantly. The surge in violence related to the junta’s push to re-establish a semblance of governance in contested areas, or areas considered “liberated”, both of which are largely populated by Indigenous communities.²²

Within a month of the election day announcement, the junta had conducted 27 airstrikes on 20 townships, killing more than 100 civilians.²³ The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported in September that the attacks seemed “intentioned to regain key contested areas where elections have been announced to take place.”²⁴

Airstrikes and ground assaults escalated dramatically in the months before the elections. From September onwards, the junta escalated military operations across Chin State aimed at suppressing resistance and intimidating the civilian population ahead of the planned elections. Between September and December, at least 30 airstrikes were reported across Chin State. These attacks killed 12 civilians, including six children, and injured at least 91 others, striking civilian infrastructure. Over 20,000 Indigenous Chin people were newly displaced as junta convoys made their way into Chin State.²⁵

On 10 December, the junta conducted an airstrike on the Mrauk-U Hospital in Rakhine State, killing 33 civilians, including a baby, and injuring 80 more people.²⁶ This continued the pattern of attacking hospitals, schools, and other civilian infrastructure that had persisted in other ethnic states and regions throughout 2025.

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The author and publisher of this article are well aware of the existing Myanmar name dispute; however, Myanmar is used consistently here to avoid confusion.

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Nepal



According to the Central Bureau of Statistics' 2021 Census of Nepal, the total population of Indigenous Peoples in Nepal is 35.08%, or 29,164,578 individuals. However, Indigenous academics and movement leaders believe they are the majority. Sixty Indigenous Peoples in Nepal are formally recognized by the government, and 19 more were identified in the 2021 census but are yet to be formally recognized. All have been facing systematic discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization because of colonization and continued racism from the dominant Hindu patriarchy for centuries.

These systemic issues include land grabbing in various forms, criminalization of customary practices, militarization, involuntary eviction, and displacement due to development aggression using the Constitution, laws, policies, rules and regulations, directives, plans, and programs. These practices are formulated and implemented without ever obtaining the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples and are manifested in many ways – visible and invisible. Nepal's Indigenous Peoples have serious concerns about the continued violation, interference, abuse, and non-compliance of international laws and human rights standards, including International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 39 (2022), which Nepal has ratified or adopted. Further, Nepal has done nothing to implement the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's (CERD) early warning and recommendations, or those made by the CEDAW Committee.

From state doubling down on atrocities against Indigenous territories to their constant struggle for meaningful inclusion in policy, 2025 was a year marked by the unyielding resistance of Indige-

nous Peoples in Nepal defending their lands from state-backed projects. Indigenous communities faced brutal force, from gunfire in the hills of Mukkumlung to violent crackdowns in the settlements of Boheni, as their sacred sites, homes, and ancestral lands were targeted for development. For Indigenous Peoples in Nepal, genuine peace has never existed within the formal state system. In 2025, they created it for themselves through collective care, art, and solidarity while defending their lands.

Continued land rights issues and resistance by Indigenous Peoples

The “No Cable Car” or “Save Mukkumlung” movement in 2025 was a profound struggle for peace in the face of escalating state-backed conflict, defined by judicial setbacks, violent repression, and systemic exclusion centred on defending the sacred Limbu (Yakthung) site of Mukkumlung against a government-backed cable car project. In January 2025, the Armed Police Force (APF) opened fire on protesters, critically injuring two. Yam Limbu, a farmer who was shot in the thigh, recalls hearing an officer say, “Throw this moron off the cliff and let him die. Who cares!”¹ A short-lived ceasefire was agreed upon with defenders, resulting in a six-point agreement that quickly foundered as the government insisted on bureaucratic talks and refused the community's demand for political-level dialogue.²

A month later, in February, a police crackdown³ involved beatings, arrests, and a climate of terror, with activist Sajeev Yongya describing how police entered hotels at night, pounding on doors taking people away.⁴ The movement faced a legal setback in May⁵ when Nepal's Supreme Court lifted a stay order issued on 26 March⁶ that temporarily halted construction, a move the community interpreted as judicial support for the project. The controversy was fuelled by a severely flawed Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) report, which critics argued exploited legal loopholes to avoid a full environmental impact assessment and vastly underreported the number of trees to be felled, as well as numbers of sacred and endangered species.⁷ The struggle was further intensified by an atmosphere of fear and surveillance, with one

frontline defender revealing a key tactic of suppression: “Many defenders’ phones were constantly monitored and tapped making them unsafe to visit the area. There were instances where supporters of the cable car project would come to our hotels and threaten us.”⁸ In a strategic effort, the “No Cable Car Group”⁹ filed a formal complaint with the World Bank’s accountability mechanism on 26 August 2025, arguing that the International Finance Corporation’s early advisory support to the project had failed to uphold its own social and environmental safeguards.¹⁰ Despite all attempts, the construction is still ongoing and the “No Cable Car Group” is preparing for another series of resistance actions in 2026.¹¹

In early 2025, the Tamang community in Bojheni, Shankharapur, faced a brutal escalation of force as the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), backed by APF personnel, moved to construct the ADB-financed Tamakoshi-Kathmandu Transmission Line on their ancestral lands. The communities, who had long protested the project for threatening their homes, farmlands, and sacred sites, were met with severe repression. On 16 January 2025, APF personnel “severely beat” community members, including women and the elderly,¹² during a protest that led to the arrest of 18 people¹³ Six detainees were held for nine days and attempts were made to sign agreements to stop their resistance, effectively criminalizing their protest.¹⁴ This created a situation of terror, with women and girls forced to flee their homes¹⁵ and hide, often under cover of night.¹⁶ Surya Bahadur Tamang, chair of Ward 3 in Shankharapur Municipality, confirms that the affected Ward Representatives collectively sent letters to relevant Ministries demanding the relocation of the substation construction but to no avail.¹⁷ On 22 August, after their formal complaint to the Asia Development Bank’s Office of the Special Project Facilitator had failed to resolve their core demand for relocation,¹⁸ the community officially filed a complaint with ADB’s Compliance Review Panel,¹⁹ which later deemed the complaint inadmissible for review due to insufficient preliminary evidence of policy noncompliance by the ADB.²⁰ Sabnam Lama²¹ highlights that older Tamang women and young girls are the frontline defenders of the Bojheni resistance, and their peace is never negotiated but imposed, leaving resistance to authority as their only recourse.²²

In another case of infrastructure trampling Indigenous rights, the Tanahu Hydropower Project stands at the midpoint of its completion;²³

however, the central conflict still revolves around the failure to secure the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Magar communities. The project was reportedly implemented without proper consultation, with community leader Til Bahadur Thapa Magar stating, “We were never consulted even if we wanted the project,” as they were forced to sell land at government-determined prices instead of receiving land-for-land compensation.²⁴ The situation remains unresolved, with new compensation demands emerging from residents whose homes are now at risk of submersion.²⁵

As Jhumlabang village in Nepal’s far west became news for the “biggest iron deposit in Nepal”,²⁶ residents expressed concern and opposition to the mining project, highlighting a complete lack of consultation, fears of displacement, and the potential destruction of their livelihoods, cultural heritage and spiritual practices.²⁷ Ajay Budha Magar, executive director of the Jhumlabang Village Foundation, stated that the community was not even informed about the initial surveys, let alone asked for their FPIC.

From Gen-Z protest to Gen-Z Peoples’ Movement: Indigenous identity questioned yet again

The Gen-Z Peoples’ Movement²⁸ in Nepal was a youth-led protest that began in early September 2025 and transformed the political history of Nepal. It was triggered by the government’s decision to ban 26 social media platforms,²⁹ which protesters saw as an attempt to silence dissent against widespread corruption, unemployment, and economic and political inequality, highlighted by the “Nepo Baby” trend referring to the corruption and luxurious lives of politician’s children.³⁰ Mobilized through social media, students and young people simultaneously gathered in different parts of the country for the Gen-Z Protest on 8 September.³¹ The peaceful gatherings in Kathmandu escalated into deadly violence as security forces used disproportionate and indiscriminate lethal force against the protesters, with reports showing the use of 2,642 rounds of live ammunition³² that killed at least 19³³ on the day and culminated in 76 deaths nationwide over two days,³⁴ during which security forces largely failed to protect people and property.³⁵

These two days were followed by deepening chaos and profound uncertainty³⁶ as the government collapsed with the resignation of the Prime Minister, Home Minister, and many other officials, creating a leadership vacuum,³⁷ evaporating public trust, and leaving questions about the future unanswered. Supreme Court Chief Justice Sushila Karki was appointed Interim Prime Minister, becoming the first female prime minister and announcing the dissolution of the House of Representatives on 12 September and national elections on 8 March 2026.³⁸

During this period of closed-door political negotiation,³⁹ Indigenous youth within the broader Gen-Z movement feared that Indigenous Peoples' rights would be sidelined in the new state-making process, just as they had been by the old political establishment.⁴⁰ Amid this, the Indigenous Gen-Z Collective (IGC) arose, releasing their first press release demanding proper investigation and action for the state-perpetrated violence of 8-9 September and the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision making.⁴¹ IGC representatives faced intimidation and accusations from non-Indigenous youth of dividing the country and diverting the focus by bringing inclusion into the discussion. They were constantly not informed of meetings, their voices were dismissed and their effort went largely unrecognized.⁴²

Despite this, the leadership of Indigenous women in the IGC was visible in institutionalizing the Gen-Z movement,⁴³ playing a critical role in the drafting and negotiation of the Gen-Z Peoples' Movement Agreement.⁴⁴ The IGC, as a part of the Gen-Z Movement Alliance,⁴⁵ also played a critical role in the peace-making process post-protest through multi-stakeholder dialogues,⁴⁶ coordination with the interim government and by bringing together Gen-Z groups for the Agreement.

The Gen-Z Peoples' Movement emphasized the historical, structural, and systemic exclusion of Indigenous individuals, which was again evidenced during the formation of the interim government when a young Indigenous woman, Tashi Lhazom, who had been recommended for a ministerial position, faced a slanderous campaign and an orchestrated media trial that attacked her fundamental existence as a Nepali citizen. Every aspect of her identity, her appearance, her accent, her regional background, was scrutinized and deemed "not Nepali enough". She was subjected to false claims about her citizenship and baselessly suspected of holding foreign allegiances.⁴⁷ To counter this,

IGC condemned the attack⁴⁸ and reached out to Indigenous Peoples' organizations,⁴⁹ activists, news outlets, the Indigenous Nationalities Commission (INC), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC),⁵⁰ and others to raise their voices against this attack.

Historic Supreme Court directive: nationwide implementation of treaties for Indigenous Peoples' rights

On 5 May 2025, in a significant move for Nepal's Indigenous Peoples, the Supreme Court of Nepal published a directive⁵¹ requiring all levels of government: federal, provincial, and local, to create laws, policies, and programmes that align with International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁵² This landmark decision was the result of a persistent legal challenge by a group of lawyers from the Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP). This marks an important win for the Indigenous movement in Nepal, which is often faced by immense challenges in advocating for policy change due to a lack of national laws and policies on Indigenous Peoples.

CEDAW Concluding Observations to National Roadmap

The 90th CEDAW Session took place from 3-21 February. The National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF) and National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NIDWAN) provided oral interventions at the Informal public meetings, with NGOs representing the Indigenous Women Consortium and Diverse Women with Disabilities consortium respectively. On 28 February, CEDAW issued the Concluding Observations on Nepal's 7th Periodic report, with 27 mentions of Indigenous Women and, specifically, recommendation 47 (a), which reiterates the recommendation from its 2018 Concluding Observations to "amend the constitution to explicitly recognize the rights of Indigenous women, including their right to self-determination, in line with the UNDRIP". A CE-

DAW implementation roadmap is underway at the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. Integration of General Recommendation No. 39 and the Concluding Observations will be a central focus for Indigenous Peoples.

Climate and biodiversity: policy wins and existing threats

2025 marked an important year for Climate and Biodiversity as Nepal finalized its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) 3.0 and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). However, preparation of both came with challenges for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' demands. Although NIWF and the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) were part of the NBSAP drafting steering committee,⁵³ NEFIN representatives highlighted the technical committee's reluctance to include Indigenous Traditional Territories, citing a lack of evidence and national laws.⁵⁴ This exclusion is compounded by the systematic use of the umbrella term "Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities" (IPLCs) in NBSAP, which dilutes the specific legal rights of Indigenous Peoples under UNDRIP and erases the distinct identity of Nepal's 61 state-recognized Indigenous Nationalities, effectively conflating them with local communities.⁵⁵

The preparations for NDC 3.0 marked a significant regression, as Indigenous Peoples as a constituency was entirely excluded from the initial consultations. The WE-Women from Indigenous Nationalities (WE-WIN) representative shared that no Indigenous Peoples had been invited to official technical workshops, forcing them to create their own space through strategic collaboration with UNESCO for inclusion.⁵⁶ The WE-WIN representative emphasized that only after this intervention were Indigenous Peoples Organizations officially included in the process. Despite subsequent consultations and multiple submissions, many substantial recommendations were omitted from the final draft.⁵⁷ However, recognition of the customary institutions of Indigenous Peoples for the first time marks an important win.⁵⁸

Nepal also hosted the first "Sagarmatha Saambad", a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum on Mountains and Climate Change from 16-18

May 2025,⁵⁹ which was also marked by the sheer absence of Indigenous Peoples and their organization.

Advances towards customary governance and autonomous regions

On 23 January 2025, Sandakpur Rural Municipality in Ilam adopted a landmark law formally recognizing the Thebe Limbu Indigenous Peoples' customary governance over their ancestral Kipat forests, biodiversity, land, and sacred sites. The law, officially published on 26 August 2025, legally affirms their stewardship, which, for generations, has been guided by their spiritual philosophy, Mundhum.⁶⁰ The Indigenous Nationalities Commission held its annual Indigenous Knowledge Conference on 14-15 December, focusing on Special, Protected, or Autonomous Areas. The event was aimed at building technical and ideological support for implementing Article 56(5) of Nepal's Constitution.⁶¹ Chief Guest, Minister Rameshwor Prasad Khanal, committed to enacting relevant legislation and requested a draft from the commission.⁶² In a parallel development, CIPRED organized the National Conference on Customary Governance in Nepal on 22-23 December, which concluded with a 10-point declaration calling for the recognition and development of customary governance systems.⁶³

2025 Human Rights and Business Award

LAHURNIP was named the recipient of the prestigious 2025 Human Rights and Business Award. This award, announced at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva, is significant international recognition of LAHURNIP's three decades of legal and advocacy work in Nepal. It underscores the critical role of Indigenous-led organizations in holding corporations, governments, and international financiers accountable to human rights standards, particularly the right to FPIC.⁶⁴ They also received the Late Dayaram Pariyar Memorial Award-2025 on Human Rights Day from the NHRC.⁶⁵

Indigenous art: resistance, collective care and solidarity

Indigenous art and artists were vital in documenting and amplifying the struggles of Indigenous Peoples throughout the year. “Save Mukkumlung” gained significant public traction through the play “Mukkumlung: Cho:t-lung of Yakthung”, which ran from 17 January to 9 February, exploring Yakthung Limbu worldviews, customs, and spiritual connection to the mountain threatened by a cable car.⁶⁶ Yakthung Cho (Yakthung Art Society)⁶⁷ has been instrumental in shaping the movement, creating artistic posters,⁶⁸ organizing symbolic demonstrations⁶⁹ and exhibitions⁷⁰ and spreading critical information, while also extending artistic support to the communities in Bojheni.⁷¹ Similarly, Artree Nepal,⁷² a group of Indigenous artists, has also been a key contributor to artistic organizing.

To spotlight the Bojheni struggle, Focus for Indigenous Girls (FIG) organized a photo exhibition entitled “*Yula sa Saparala Hang: We Belong to the Land and Soil*” showcasing images and narratives of frontline defenders.⁷³ At the opening of the exhibition, Rajman Tamang, a representative of Bojheni, shared that such support fuels the community to persist and resist. FIG also held a zine-making workshop using art and storytelling to explore personal and collective ties to land and memory. In Lalitpur, artist Sara Tara Koinch painted a public mural honouring five Indigenous Women Defenders for their unwavering resistance, literally inking their struggle onto the city's wall.⁷⁴

Indigenous Peoples' struggle for sovereignty in 2025 paved a path from the forests and streets to the courts and art galleries, proving that peace is built by communities, not granted by the state.

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Pema Wangmo Lama, a Mugum Indigenous Youth, is an Indigenous climate activist and feminist. She is the Founder and Vice-Chair of WE-Women from Indigenous Nationalities (WE-WIN) and a Working Group Member of the International Indigenous Youth Forum on Climate Change (IIYFCC). Her work focuses on the nexus of climate, gender, and Indigenous Peoples rights through capacity and leadership building, research and policy advocacy at both local and international levels, especially in UN mechanisms such as CEDAW and UNFCCC, also speaking at the opening plenary at COP28. She also led Indigenous Peoples' Engagement in the NDC 3.0 preparation in Nepal and the preparation of the CEDAW Shadow Report for Indigenous Women for the 89th CEDAW pre-sessional working group.



Philippines



Based on the 2020 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) report of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), there are 9,841,785 Indigenous people in the Philippines.¹ Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines are unevenly distributed across the country: 34% are in Luzon, 3% in the Visayas, and 63% in Mindanao. The largest concentration is in Mindanao, where the Lumad comprise a majority of the Indigenous population. In Northern Luzon, Indigenous communities in the Cordillera mountain range are collectively referred to as the Igorot. Smaller Indigenous groups include the Mangyan of Mindoro, the Ayta and Dumagat of Southern Tagalog and the Tumandok and Ati in the Panay Islands.

Indigenous Peoples' ancestral domains are central to the country's remaining forests and biodiversity. While Indigenous Peoples' ancestral domains cover 44% of the country's land area, an estimated 75% of the remaining forest cover is found within ancestral domains, highlighting the crucial role of Indigenous stewardship in forest protection.²

The Republic Act 8371, or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), was enacted in 1997 and has often been lauded for affirming Indigenous Peoples' rights to cultural integrity, ancestral lands, and self-determined development. In practice, however, the law has proven deeply contradictory. Rather than safeguarding these rights, IPRA has frequently been used to facilitate their violation. This gap between promise and reality has led many Indigenous organizations to call for a thorough review of the law, and even its scrapping. While the Philippines voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and enacted the 1997 IPRA, the situation of Indigenous Peoples remains marked more by violations than by recognition and respect. The government has yet to ratify ILO Convention 169, highlighting its continued refusal to commit to enforceable international standards on Indigenous Peoples' rights.

I. Corruption and fascism; corruption in fascism

The year 2025 marked a moment when the deep-rooted corruption of the Philippine government was laid bare before the public. Central to the exposés and investigations were massive anomalies in flood control projects under the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). Flood control projects existed only on paper, were left unfinished, or were built to substandard quality despite PHP 254.29 billion (approx. EUR 3.6 billion) allocated to DPWH's flood management program.³ Investigations revealed entrenched kickback systems, with officials and legislators earning large commissions in exchange for reserving projects for favored contractors.⁴

President Marcos Jr. allows this system of corruption to operate as he himself benefits from it. As President, he reviews and approves the National Expenditure Program, including the staggering PHP 1.055 trillion (approx. EUR 15.3 billion) allocated to the DPWH in 2025.⁵ His corruption is now the subject of impeachment complaints for Betrayal of Public Trust. These complaints strongly indicate that Marcos Jr. deliberately institutionalized a systematic mechanism to siphon more than PHP 545.6 billion (approx. EUR 7.9 billion) in flood control funds, channeling public money to favored contractors, cronies and, ultimately, to himself.

As always, the worst impacts are borne by the most marginalized and vulnerable sectors, none more so than Indigenous Peoples. Many Indigenous communities live in mountainous, upland, or coastal areas that are heavily affected by environmental degradation.⁶ Indigenous Peoples are not spared the devastating impacts of corruption. Long-overdue infrastructure such as roads and bridges is deliberately withheld from Indigenous communities, while corrupt officials and their networks siphon off funds for schools and hospitals. So-called “development projects” are often used to divide communities, corrupt Indigenous leaders, and force consent for destructive projects on ancestral lands.

The consequences of this corruption were felt sharply in 2025, especially when a series of strong typhoons—Crising, Dante, and Emong—battered large parts of the country. Flooding, landslides, and prolonged

displacement exposed the deadly cost of corruption and mismanaged development.

While essential sectors suffered significant budget cuts—education lost PHP 11.6 billion (approx. EUR 168.9 million), health services were reduced by PHP 25.8 billion (approx. EUR 375.6 million), and social welfare faced a steep cut of PHP 95.9 billion (approx. EUR 1.4 billion)⁷—larger portions of public funds were channeled toward militarization and fascist programs. Marcos Jr. approved a PHP 265.10 billion (approx. EUR 3.8 billion) budget for the Department of National Defense (DND), with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) alone receiving PHP 75 billion (approx. EUR 1 billion). These resources fueled aerial bombings, ground operations, and militarization of Indigenous communities facing corporate encroachment, violating human rights and international humanitarian law.⁸

Social services were repurposed to enforce a counterinsurgency operation. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), an agency implicated in numerous violations of Indigenous rights defenders and the subject of UN Special Rapporteurs' calls for abolition,⁹ used the Barangay Development Program (BDP) to pressure villages and communities to declare themselves "cleared" of insurgency in exchange for PHP 20 million (approx. EUR 291,000).¹⁰ Regions that received the largest funds for BDP were often those with the highest rates of killings and political arrests,¹¹ with many of the so-called "cleared" barangays being largely Indigenous communities. Core BDP projects, such as the farm-to-market roads (FMRs), were used to pacify communities rather than improve livelihoods, and even these projects were often unfinished and overpriced.^{12, 13}

This counterproductive logic was institutionalized through the National Action Plan for Unity, Peace, and Development (NAP-UPD), which Marcos Jr. adopted in May 2025. Modeled on Duterte's Whole-of-Nation Approach, the NAP-UPD embeds counterinsurgency objectives into social services, infrastructure delivery, and governance. It mobilizes the civilian bureaucracy, civil society, and local leaders to suppress dissent¹⁴ while facilitating corporate entry into Indigenous lands. Marketed as a peace-building program, the NAP-UPD is fundamentally militaristic and ignores the structural roots of armed conflict: landlessness, joblessness, and repression.¹⁵

II. Plunder and rights violations

Beyond budgetary theft and corruption, plunder manifests in the destructive projects that encroach on ancestral domains. Large-scale mining, destructive dams, renewable energy projects, ecotourism ventures, and plantations continue to expand across Indigenous territories under the guise of progress and national development. For Indigenous Peoples, these projects translate into land grabbing, environmental destruction, forced displacement, and disintegration of Indigenous ways of life.

Central to this plunder is the systematic violation of Indigenous Peoples' right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), an agency mandated to promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples, has a long history of facilitating the entry of destructive projects through coerced consultations, fabricated or manipulated consent, and the recognition of handpicked community representatives and fake tribal leaders.¹⁶

In 2025, complaints from Indigenous Peoples over violations of FPIC and the right to information intensified across several regions. In Benguet, Indigenous Peoples from Mankayan and Itogon raised objections against Crescent Mining and Itogon-Suyoc Resources Inc., citing sham FPIC processes, coerced signatures, and the reuse of outdated consent to justify expanded operations.^{17, 18} The residents of Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya, opposed Woggle Corporation for conducting consultations without full disclosure or genuine community participation.¹⁹ The Ayta of Mt. Pinatubo barricaded the entrance to a tourist site in response to unfair compensation from tourism agencies, highlighting that tourism in their ancestral land continues to operate without genuine FPIC.²⁰

Grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law go hand in hand with plunder projects as military forces are deployed to protect corporate interests. In the Cordillera, women leaders like Betty Belen and Elma Awingan-Tuazon were targeted for opposing destructive projects such as the Saltan Dams and Makilala Mining. The leaders of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance remain arbitrarily designated as "terrorists" in an attempt to delegitimize their resistance. In Mindoro, Mangyan communities resisting land grabs from Pieceland Corporation

and facing the threat of destructive wind farms and oil extraction endured harassment, restricted access to food and essentials, and two aerial bombardments by the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2025 alone.²¹

Similar patterns have emerged nationwide. Tumandok families in Panay were displaced as the Jalaur Mega-Dam occupied hundreds of hectares of their ancestral land. At the same time, Indigenous farmers in Negros were surveilled and intimidated by the military-backed Hacienda Asia Plantation Inc., operating without FPIC. In Palawan, the Molbog Indigenous Peoples faced criminalization as court summonses threatened nearly 300 residents defending their land against a San Miguel Corporation “ecotourism” project.²² In South Cotabato, the expansion of Tampakan mine continued to endanger B’laan territories, with state-backed enforcement silencing opposition.

The NCIP has shown no concern over these incidents. This is unsurprising given that it also benefits from the very system that enables them. The NCIP itself holds a long record of corruption. Over the years, the Commission on Audit (COA) has flagged the NCIP for excessive spending, undocumented expenses, and misuse of funds—including millions spent on luxury events, anti-insurgency workshops,²³ and a controversial PHP 7 million (approx. EUR 101,900) coffee table book funded through donations from mining companies.²⁴ In a landmark 2025 ruling, the Supreme Court confirmed that NCIP officials had misappropriated funds intended for the Mamanwa Tribes of Surigao del Norte, diverting royalties for their own operational expenses.²⁵ It underscored what Indigenous groups had long asserted: the agency meant to protect them had become an instrument of exploitation and oppression.

And yet, despite the harsh and relentless suffering Indigenous Peoples endured in 2025, the year was also marked by the strength of mass movements resisting corporate plunder. The relentless exploitation of ancestral lands by projects has pushed Indigenous Peoples to defend their territories, confirming that mass struggles and revolutionary movements in the Philippines are not born out of whim but out of centuries of historical injustice and systemic inequality.

In 2025, these same conditions drove other sectors of society to rise up, as injustice was further intensified by state corruption, fascism, and the regime’s puppetry to foreign interests.

III. Indigenous women and youth against corruption, fascism, and impunity

When the massive theft of public funds was exposed, it sparked widespread protests across the country, with Indigenous Peoples actively participating. On 21 September 2025, tens of thousands marched in Metro Manila alone, over 5,000 in Baguio City, and thousands more in Cebu City, Davao City, and other major cities. The protests continued until the end of the year, with the youth actively participating and taking a leading role, echoing movements in other parts of the world.

Movements to oust Marcos Jr. and Vice-President Sara Duterte were spearheaded by progressive forces, with Indigenous Peoples playing an active role. Many Filipinos had grown weary of the regime's sham accountability, as bogus investigations spared the most corrupt and fascist officials from any real due process.²⁶

Indigenous youth suffer most under this failed system. They are denied access to education, decent work, land, and a livable future. They are also the targets of state violence, as seen in the killing of Elioterio Ugking, a 25-year-old Manobo farmer, in June 2025.²⁷ Poverty and militarization force many to migrate to cities only to face the same harsh economic conditions that plague urban life.

The same is true for Indigenous women, who are often the direct victims of state fascism in their struggle for land and life. Compounded by gender-based violence, constant intimidation, and criminalization, they have suffered a severe toll on their physical safety, health, and ability to lead within their communities.

It is for these reasons that in 2026 and the years ahead, the active participation and leadership of Indigenous youth and women will continue to rise. From communities under siege to schools, workplaces, and the streets, they are asserting their right to land, life, and a future free from fear and exploitation. The conditions are ripe for Indigenous Peoples to organize, resist, and advance their collective struggles grounded in dignity and self-determination.

As the Filipino people push back against the oppressive NAP-UPD and the culture of impunity it protects, Indigenous youth and women will stand at the forefront with other Indigenous Peoples —linking arms with other marginalized sectors and movements nationwide. In defend-

ing their ancestral lands and communities, they are also defending the future of all oppressed peoples in the Philippines. Through unity, courage, and sustained struggle, genuine systemic change is not only necessary—it is within reach.

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Taiwan



The officially recognized Indigenous population of Taiwan numbered 629,456 people, or 2.7% of the total population, at the end of 2025, according to the data released by the Ministry of Interior.¹

Sixteen distinct Indigenous Peoples are officially recognized: these peoples enjoy representation at all levels of government, from parliament to central government's Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) and municipal governments, city and county councillors, and local district and township representatives.

Eleven lowland Indigenous Peoples' groups (Pingpu) are not recognized as Indigenous by the government and hence not extended the same rights as the recognized groups. They are thus also excluded from CIP policies and programmes. The eleven unrecognized peoples are: Babuza, Arikun, Lloa, Kaxabu, Ketagalan, Makatao, Papora, Pazeh, Siraya, Taokas and Taivoan.

In a step towards their recognition as Indigenous Peoples, in October 2025 the Taiwan Parliament approved the *Pingpu Indigenous Peoples Status Act* (平埔原住民族群身分法). The Act establishes a three-year interim period during which each of the eleven groups will undergo an expert-led, group-by-group evaluation to determine their eligibility for official Indigenous status.

Until their applications are approved, they are not considered Indigenous Peoples under the law.

Most of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples originally lived in the central mountains, on the east coast and in the south. However, nowadays over half of the Indigenous population lives in the urban areas of the country.

The main challenges facing Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan are their rapidly disappearing cultures and languages, encroachment onto their traditional domain, the denial of their rights and the exclusion of the lowland (Pingpu) Indigenous Peoples.

The CIP is the state agency responsible for Indigenous Peoples. Taiwan has adopted a number of laws designed to

protect Indigenous Peoples' rights, including the Constitutional Amendments on Indigenous representation in the Legislative Assembly, protection of language and culture and political participation (2000); the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law (2005); the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples (2004); the Status Act for Indigenous Peoples (2001); the Regulations regarding Recognition of Indigenous Peoples (2002); the Name Act (2003); and the Indigenous Languages Development Act (2017). Unfortunately, serious discrepancies and contradictions in the legislation, coupled with only partial implementation of these laws, has stymied progress towards the self-governance of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples.

Since Taiwan is not a member of the UN it is not a party to UN human rights instruments.

Passage of Pingpu Status Act: historic milestone

On 17 October, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed the Pingpu Indigenous Peoples Status Act,² the first law in the nation's history dedicated solely to the recognition of Pingpu Indigenous groups. The Act establishes mechanisms for group recognition, registration, cultural rights, and government responsibilities, marking a major legislative response to Judgement No. 17 (2022) passed down by Taiwan Constitutional Court,³ which affirmed that Pingpu Indigenous peoples fall within the Constitutional definition of "Indigenous Peoples".

For decades, Pingpu Indigenous groups have campaigned for official recognition, arguing that despite assimilation forces and marginalization by government bureaucracies, they have maintained cultural continuity, community traditions, and each group's collective identity, as recorded in historic documents. The new law signals the government's acknowledgement of the existence of these distinct Pingpu groups.⁴

The Act's implications are profound. It creates a new legal pathway to gain legal status for Pingpu groups, thus recognizing their cultural, linguistic, and political rights. Furthermore, the law requires the gov-

ernment to introduce supplementary legislation within three years to strengthen protection for Pingpu groups, on rights to political participation, land and natural resources, as well as cultural revitalization.⁵

For many activists, the law represents not only group recognition but the beginning of “restorative justice” for peoples whose identities were suppressed under past colonialism and post-war state structures. Yet debates remain—particularly over whether the new system may inadvertently cause divisions between Mountain and Plains Indigenous Peoples (for more on the divisions between Mountain and Pingpu groups, see *The Indigenous World* 2023). Nonetheless, 2025 will be remembered by the Pingpu status restoration movement as a year when, after their long decades of struggle, they were legally recognized as Indigenous Peoples.

Typhoon Danas affects Indigenous communities

Typhoon Danas struck Taiwan with intense and prolonged rainfall in July, leaving two dead and over 300 people injured. While most regions of Taiwan experienced flooding, the Siraya Indigenous communities, as well as other east-coast Indigenous groups, suffered property damage and severe environmental devastation. Mountain slopes collapsed, rivers overflowed, and several Siraya settlements faced road blockages, and disrupted electricity and water supplies, resulting in them being cut off from the rest of the country for days.⁶

The Siraya communities—historically pushed into lowland basins, river terraces, and marginal agricultural areas as a result of land dispossession and government relocation policies—remain highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. The impact of Danas reignited discussions on climate justice, as Indigenous groups continue to face the heaviest exposure to natural disasters, despite their contributing the least to climate change.⁷

The Council of Indigenous Peoples and Tainan city authorities established emergency shelters, temporary water access, and relief supply stations. However, the typhoon also exposed major gaps in early warning systems and the provision of emergency services in rural areas with majority populations belonging to Plains Indigenous Peoples. This

included slow restoration of roads and water systems, and limited support for Indigenous led disaster planning.

The Fata'an Barrier Lake overflow

On 23 September, the Fata'an landslide disaster lake took place. It became one of the year's most severe natural hazards affecting Indigenous regions.

Intense rainfall triggered a massive landslide above Hualien's Fata'an area—home to the Amis Fata'an community—blocking the upper Matai'an Creek to form a rapidly rising barrier lake.⁸ Two days later, the barrier lake overflowed and partially collapsed, unleashing a destructive surge of mud and water.

The outflow devastated bridges, farmland, and key access routes, isolating communities across the region. The disaster caused 19 deaths, injured hundreds more, and prompted large-scale evacuation and rescue operations. Emergency teams ultimately rescued over 700 people, many from valleys and upland settlements cut off from the rest of the country by the disaster.⁹

Months later, the instability of the landslide-dammed lake still continues to affect the Fata'an community's safety, livelihoods, with worrying damage to farmland and crops, and little access to transportation. Water outflow, sediment movement, and the risk of secondary collapse remain a concern, prompting repeated emergency inspections and temporary precautionary measures.¹⁰

To mitigate the impact of the disaster, in October the Taiwan Legislature fast-tracked a Special Act for Post-Disaster Reconstruction of the Matai'an Disaster, aiming to support affected residents through relief funds, infrastructure rebuilding, and long-term environment protection measures.¹¹

The Passing of Pan Ta-Ho: leader of the Pazeh Movement

On 05 July 2025, Taiwan mourned the passing of Pan Ta-Ho, widely respected as a key figure in the modern Plains Indigenous Rights move-

ment.¹² He was born and raised in Taba community, Luyutan Village in central Taiwan where, during his youth in the 1940s and 1950s, Pazeh families were in the majority, adults and elders still spoke the Pazeh language and retained their cultural traditions. In the 1960s, he began to document the Pazeh language, culture, old stories and historic accounts by elders.

Trained as an engineer at Taiwan's top technical college, Pan worked as a section head at the National Taiwan University Hospital. In the 1970s, he moved to Canada and was later employed at the headquarters of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria. During those years, he attended UN WGIP and other major IP and human rights conferences in Europe.¹³

After his retirement in the 1990s, Pan returned to Taiwan to devote his life to the Pingpu Indigenous Rights movement and cultural revitalization of the Pazeh people, demanding the Taiwan government recognize Pazeh and other Pingpu groups, have official status, and are included as Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples. He founded Pingpu national organizations, established language programmes, undertook research and wrote books, and played an instrumental role in shaping the discourse on Pingpu peoples fighting for justice, and restoration of their IP status.¹⁴

Pan's passing just months before landmark legislation added symbolic weight to the year's events. Many described him as a "Bridge between the Eras", whose decades of work had enabled the political progress that was now becoming reality. Tributes from across society and the Indigenous communities highlighted his leadership, intellectual contributions, including 16 books he authored and edited, and commitment to historical justice.

WIBN 2025 Forum: connecting with the global Indigenous media community

In August, Taiwan hosted the World Indigenous Broadcasters Network (WIBN) Forum. For the first time in the event's 15-year history, this took place in Taiwan. Representatives of Indigenous media organizations from across Oceania, North America, Scandinavia, and Asia gathered

to discuss media sovereignty, digital storytelling, language revitalization, and cross-regional collaboration.¹⁵

Taiwan Indigenous Television (TITV) and the Council of Indigenous Peoples co-organized the forum, which featured keynote sessions emphasizing the role of Indigenous broadcasters in preserving cultural memory and resisting disinformation. Vice-President Hsiao Bi-khim delivered the opening welcome in the Amis language, signalling Taiwan's commitment to Indigenous cultural visibility on the global stage.¹⁶

For the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan, WIBN 2025 served multiple purposes, strengthening ties with global Indigenous media networks and focusing on Indigenous broadcasters and journalists. It emphasized the need for Indigenous control over the narrative concerning themselves, and news representation in an era dominated by global media platforms.¹⁷

The forum concluded with commitments to cooperate on the production of documentaries, cross-border journalist exchanges, and digital archiving projects.

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Thailand



The Indigenous Peoples of Thailand live mainly in three geographical regions of the country: Indigenous fisher communities (the Chao Ley) and small populations of hunter-gatherers in the south (Mani people); small groups on the Korat plateau of the north-east and east; and the many different highland peoples in the north and north-west of the country (previously known by the derogatory term “Chao-Khao,” or “hill tribes”). Nine so-called “hill tribes” are officially recognized: the Hmong, Karen, Lisu, Mien, Akha, Lahu, Lua, Thin and Khamu.¹

Estimates put Thailand’s Indigenous population at around 6.1 million people, or 9.68% of the total population.² According to the Department of Social Development and Welfare (2002), the total officially recognized population numbers 925,825, distributed across 20 provinces in the north and west of the country. There are still no figures available for the Indigenous groups in the south and north-east. When national boundaries were drawn in South-East Asia during the colonial era and in the wake of decolonization, many Indigenous Peoples living in remote highlands and forests became divided. For example, you can find Lua and Karen people in both Thailand and Myanmar, and Akha people in Laos, Myanmar, south-west China and Thailand.

Thailand is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It voted in support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) but does

not officially recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples in the country. Section 70 of the 2016 Constitution refers to “Ethnic groups”.

In 2010, the Thai government passed two Cabinet resolutions to restore the traditional livelihoods of the Chao Ley³ and Karen, on 2 June and 3 August respectively.

Land and resource tenure insecurity remains a persistent problem faced by Indigenous Peoples in Thailand, and there is still no clear or concrete solution. Although the Thai government has begun to open up more space—particularly through amendments to laws governing protected areas in 2019 (B.E. 2562) and by adopting policies to address land issues in forest areas under the framework of the National Land Policy Committee (NLPC)—these approaches have been only temporary and short-term measures.

Addressing land issues in protected forest areas

In 2019 (B.E. 2562), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment proposed amendments to the National Parks Act and the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act in an effort to address longstanding problems related to forest and land management. These principles were incorporated into Section 64 of the National Parks Act and Section 121 of the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act, B.E. 2562.

To operationalize these provisions, the Cabinet passed a resolution on 15 November 2024 approving the issuance of Royal Decrees on conservation and natural resource management projects. These decrees apply to national parks under Section 64 of the National Parks Act, B.E. 2562, and to wildlife sanctuaries and non-hunting areas under Section 121 of the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act, B.E. 2562, as proposed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. This would result in limiting Indigenous Peoples’ access to their natural resources and farmland, and would decrease their security in general.

However, the Royal Decrees—issued as subordinate legislation that elaborate the details and methods of implementation—sparked widespread concern among Indigenous Peoples, particularly those living in forest areas. Many feared that the decrees would negatively affect their ways of life and livelihoods by decreasing their access to natural resources and demanding that they plant trees on their farms. As a result, these communities called on the government to address four key issues arising from the new regulations (see IWGIA Yearbook 2025 for further details).

The government's response was widely perceived as slow and lacking in sincerity. Consequently, villagers under the banner of the Assembly of Forest-Dwelling Communities (AFC/SCP), together with affected Indigenous community networks, organized another protest in front of the Chiang Mai Provincial Hall on 24 March 2025. During the demonstration, they submitted a letter—via the Deputy Governor of Chiang Mai, Mr. Sivakorn Buapong—urging the government to honor its commitments under the four-point agreement signed on 29 November 2024 and to expedite its implementation.

On 1 April 2025,⁴ Deputy Prime Minister Prasert Jantararungtong met with the protesters and informed them that the outcomes of negotiations on all six demands had already been submitted to the Cabinet. The Cabinet subsequently decided to accept the principles and to formally record agreements on guidelines for resolving the issues, including the following measures:

1. **Amendment of forest laws:** Expedite the appointment of a committee to amend the National Parks Act B.E. 2562 (2019) and the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act B.E. 2562 (2019), with equal representation from government agencies and civil society. During the amendment process, preparations to declare 23 additional protected forest areas will be suspended. The committee is to be appointed within 30 days, with coordination already underway with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The committee has been appointed with two Indigenous representatives.
2. **Verification of land rights:** Accelerate the verification of citizens' land rights (both individual and collective) in accordance

with Cabinet resolutions dated 11 May 1999 and 12 November 2024. The Office of the National Land Policy Committee (ONLPC) has been instructed to assign the Subcommittee on the Study and Amendment of the National Parks Act to carry out this task. In addition, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has been asked to direct the Royal Forest Department, as mandated by the Cabinet resolution of 29 October 2024 on farmland, to urgently proceed with surveys of landholdings, some of which were done in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples but many of which were done solely by state agencies, which was problematic due to incorrect information being gathered.

3. **Community Land Titles:** Request that Deputy Prime Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit, in his capacity overseeing the Community Land Title Office, expedite the signing of an order appointing qualified experts to the Coordination Committee for the Establishment of Community Land Titles, in accordance with the Prime Minister's Office of Regulation on Community Land Titles B.E. 2553 (2010). This process is expected to be completed within seven days.
4. **Nationality and legal status:** Closely monitor and advance measures under the Cabinet resolution of 29 October 2024 to accelerate solutions to nationality and legal status issues affecting approximately 480,000 long-term migrants residing in Thailand. The Minister of Interior, Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul, has acknowledged this matter.
5. **Forest and land-related legal cases:** Assign the Independent Subcommittee on the Study and Formulation of Accelerated Measures to Improve State Land Boundary Demarcation (the "One Map" initiative), established under National Land Policy Committee Order No. 1/2568 (2025), to consider and resolve forest and land-related legal cases involving the Assembly of Forest-Dwelling Communities and the Northern Farmers' Federation. This task has been delegated to Mr. Somkid Chuakhong, Deputy Secretary-General to the Prime Minister for Political Affairs. In parallel, coordination has been initiated with the Minister of Justice, Mr. Tawee Sodsong, to urgently draft a

forest and land amnesty bill for citizens affected by state forest and land policies. Indigenous Peoples were consulted, and an Indigenous member of parliament is in the taskforce.

- 6. Implementation and reporting:** Submit the outcomes of the negotiations to the Prime Minister, inform the Cabinet for acknowledgment, and instruct relevant agencies to urgently implement solutions in line with the agreed outcomes. These actions have been carried out as promised.

At the time, this was seen as a positive development; however, these demands were not pursued when the government changed from the Phuethai party to the Phumjaithai party in September 2025.

Continuing demands

Despite these developments, the demands of the Assembly of Forest-Dwelling Communities—particularly those related to the work of the subcommittee amending the two forest laws—lapsed with the end of the previous Pheu Thai Party-led government. The Assembly, together with the People’s Movement for a Just Society (P-Move), has since resumed protests, calling on the new government to continue and complete the reform process. To date, however, no clear outcomes have emerged.

Draft Amnesty Act for forestry and land cases

Policies and approaches to resource management that are centralized and exclude the participation of forest-dwellers, including Indigenous Peoples, have led to longstanding conflicts between the state and communities. Many villagers have been arrested and prosecuted for offenses such as forest encroachment or the collection of forest products, even though most of these activities form part of their subsistence livelihoods.⁵ According to data from a parliamentary ad hoc committee, more than 60,000 people have been affected by the “reclaiming forest land” policy, with over 1.2 million rai (192,000 ha.) of land seized, some 80% of which belonged to villagers.⁶

As a result, civil society groups and Indigenous Peoples have proposed enacting an amnesty law for members and communities affected by these policies and laws.

In 2025, representatives from two political parties—the Prachachat Party and the People’s Party—jointly proposed the Draft Act on the Exemption from Liability for Persons Who Have Suffered Damage or Have Been Affected by State Policies on Forestry and Land, B.E. 2568 (2025). The objective of this bill is to restore justice to citizens prosecuted in forestry cases arising from the declaration of state forest areas overlapping with their farmland. The bill seeks to grant amnesty to villagers in three groups:

Group 1:

Those who occupied and utilized land after it was first declared a protected or reserved area under the law but who were granted temporary residence under the Cabinet Resolution of 30 June 1998.

Group 2:

Those affected by the “reclaiming forest land” policy—namely, individuals who occupied and utilized land after it was first declared a protected or reserved area under the law but before receiving protection under National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Order No. 66/2557 dated 17 June 2014. This order was aimed at protecting the poor from being affected by policies targeting large capital investors; however, officials failed to implement it fairly, resulting in many poor and marginalized people being charged and prosecuted *en masse*.

Group 3:

People who suffered damage or were affected by cases in which the state declared state land boundaries overlapping with people’s farmland even though the people had lived there previously, thereby turning them into law violators. This group also includes those seeking the restoration of rights and legal status for individuals who occupied and utilized land before it was first declared a protected or reserved area, so that they may enter the process of land verification and apply for land rights under existing laws or current state policies.⁷

On 11 September 2025 (B.E. 2568), Parliament approved the principles of the draft bill and established an ad hoc committee to consider it.

The ad hoc committee held meetings and passed a resolution approving the bill on 11 December 2025; the bill was then ready for submission to Parliament for consideration and endorsement. This did not occur, however, because the government announced the dissolution of Parliament on 12 December 2025.

The bill is expected to be taken up and reconsidered once more after a further election has been held and a new government formed.

Passage of the Law on the Protection and Promotion of Ethnic Groups' Rights

Given the structural and policy-based problems facing Indigenous Peoples—including land and resource insecurity and lack of legal status—the Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand has been calling for legislation to protect and promote Indigenous Peoples' rights since 2010. This effort culminated on 18 September 2025⁸ when the government officially passed this law, marking a significant step forward in protecting and promoting the rights of ethnic groups, including Indigenous Peoples. It was, however, disappointing to the Indigenous Peoples' movement in Thailand that Indigenous Peoples were not mentioned using this internationally recognized term.

Rationale for the Act

Ethnic groups possess distinct identities, accumulated cultures, languages, ways of life, traditional knowledge, and belief systems, as well as historical and cultural continuity with Thai society. It is therefore necessary to enact legal provisions to protect their rights to live in dignity in accordance with international human rights principles. This is consistent with Section 70 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, which mandates that the state promote and protect ethnic groups' rights to live peacefully according to their traditional cultures and ways of life, provided such practices do not conflict with public order, morality, national security, or public health.

The Protection and Promotion of Ethnic Groups' Rights Act, B.E. 2568 (2025)—commonly referred to as the “Ethnic Groups Act”—was consequently enacted.

Key principles and provisions

The Act is based on three core principles:

1. Protection of cultural rights
2. Promotion of capacity and potential
3. Equality

It emphasizes five key components:

1. Principles for protecting the rights of ethnic groups
2. Mechanisms for the protection of rights and promotion of ethnic ways of life
3. Establishment of the National Ethnic Groups Council of Thailand
4. Development of an ethnic groups database for policymaking
5. Establishment of protected areas for ethnic ways of life

Sections 5 to 12 of the Act are particularly significant as they form the heart of the law. Notably, Section 9 guarantees ethnic groups' rights to land, natural resources, and the environment as necessary for livelihoods and community public activities.

Implementation challenges

Translating these legal provisions into practice remains a major challenge. Beyond raising awareness among Indigenous communities and target groups, the government must issue sub-laws to operationalize the Act. According to the prescribed timeline, these implementing regulations and guidelines are expected to be completed by March 2026.

Notes and references

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Vietnam



As a multi-ethnic country, Vietnam has 54 recognized ethnic groups, 53 of which are ethnic minorities. These groups comprise 14%¹ of the country's total population of around 100 million.² Each ethnic minority group has its own distinct language, culture and traditions. The term “ethnic minorities” is often used interchangeably with “Indigenous Peoples” by international agencies working in Vietnam.

All ethnic minorities have Vietnamese citizenship and Vietnam's constitution recognizes that all people have equal rights. There is a higher proportion of peoples living in poverty among ethnic minority communities.

Multidimensional poverty rates in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands regions, where the majority of ethnic minorities live, is more than double the national average. The proportion of people without education certificates in ethnic minority groups is twice that of the Kinh and Hoa (Chinese-Vietnamese) peoples. In addition, the gaps in income and expenditure between the ethnic minorities and Kinh and Hoa people have widened in recent years.³

Vietnam is a party to seven of the nine core international human rights instruments and continues to consider the possibility of acceding to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). Vietnam has not ratified ILO Convention 169 and, although Vietnam voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it does not recognize ethnic minorities as Indigenous Peoples.

Denial of Indigenous Peoples and escalation of repression in 2025

Vietnam is a pluri-national State with Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia offering a rich history of decolonization and demilitarization from multiple European and America conflicts in

the 19th and 20th century. Indigenous Peoples continue to challenge settler societies that arrive in their ancestral homelands to exploit the natural environment and subjugate Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples have inhabited their sacred lands since time immemorial, honoring their reciprocal relationship with their own community and bio-cultural landscapes to provide basic collective economic, social and cultural rights. Indigenous Peoples have had borders placed on their traditional lands as maps were redrawn and settler society governance forced upon them, denying the Indigenous language of places and imposing cultural norms on Indigenous nations. Currently, Vietnam denies Indigenous Peoples their self-identification and officially recognizes 54 “ethnic groups” within its constitutional and legal framework. The Government of Vietnam continues to assert that no Indigenous Peoples exist within its borders, despite the presence of communities that meet internationally accepted criteria for Indigenous status, including historical continuity within pre-colonial societies, distinct cultural and linguistic identities, and self-identification as Indigenous. While Vietnam voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it has neither incorporated Indigenous recognition into domestic law nor ratified ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

Many Indigenous Peoples who are demanding their rights under the UNDRIP in daily life are facing persecution and increasing reprisals. Indigenous Peoples from the Mekong Delta to the Mountain Highlands face common challenges from traditional spiritual honoring of ancestral sacred sites connected to the lands and waters through to modern religious practices at temples and churches denying fundamental freedoms.

In 2025, the persistent denial of Indigenous identity was accompanied by an escalation of repression against Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Defenders, particularly among the Khmer-Krom in the Mekong Delta and Montagnard (Indigenous Peoples of the Central Highlands) communities. Indigenous Peoples who are simply exercising basic human rights experience a denial of dignity and destruction of the natural environment from an authoritarian regime that denies both civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Indigenous Peoples who are commemorating cultural practices and honoring global dates of human rights recognition from International Women’s

Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day, experience a gross pattern of violations and violence. Arrests, prolonged pre-trial detention, allegations of torture and coerced confessions, and closed-door trials all raise serious concerns regarding Vietnam's compliance with international human rights obligations. Indigenous Peoples practicing their own culture are regularly criminalized and national laws are utilized to undermine recognized human rights.

While Vietnam has improved its ratification of international human rights instruments and appears at UN human rights treaty bodies, the laws on paper and the government responses to multiple concerns raised are ignored and Indigenous Peoples are rendered invisible. This practice continues with the multiple UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures that have raised concerns and the government denying any wrongdoing by blaming the Indigenous Peoples.

The lack of legal recognition for Indigenous Peoples further exacerbates their vulnerability. Indigenous advocacy—whether related to cultural preservation, religious autonomy, or dissemination of information about Indigenous rights under international law—is routinely treated as a political or security threat rather than as the exercise of protected rights. This structural denial provides the backdrop for the events that unfolded in 2025.

Arrests and prosecution of Khmer-Krom human rights defenders

Vietnam's legal framework contains several broadly worded national security and public order provisions that are frequently used to criminalize peaceful expression and association. Chief among these is Article 331 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State". International human rights organizations and UN experts have repeatedly criticized Article 331 for its vagueness and incompatibility with international standards on freedom of expression.

On 27 March 2025, Vietnamese authorities in Tra Vinh Province arrested three prominent Khmer-Krom human rights defenders: Venerable Kim Som Rin, Mr. Thach Nga, and Mr. Thach Xuan Dong. All three were charged under Article 331 of the Penal Code for alleged "abuse of

democratic freedoms”, reportedly in connection with peaceful social media activity and public statements addressing human rights violations, Indigenous identity, and religious freedom.⁴

The individuals are well-known within the Khmer-Krom community. Venerable Kim Som Rinh is a Theravada Buddhist monk and community leader; Mr. Thach Nga and Mr. Thach Xuan Dong have been active in peaceful advocacy related to Indigenous rights and cultural preservation. Following their arrest, all three were held in pre-trial detention for approximately eight months, during which time they were reportedly denied access to legal counsel and family visits. The Khmer-Krom raised the case at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and through various UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures.

On 18 November 2025, the People’s Court of Region 12 in Vinh Long Province conducted a closed-door trial and sentenced each defendant to three and a half years’ imprisonment. The trial was not open to the public, independent observers, or diplomatic representatives. According to statements by the Khmers’ Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the proceedings failed to meet basic fair-trial standards, including transparency and the right to an effective defense.⁵

On the same day, Ms. Thach Thi Hoa Ri, a Khmer-Krom woman involved in organizing International Women’s Day activities and Indigenous rights awareness events, was also reportedly arrested under Article 331, underscoring the widening scope of repression against civil society engagement within Khmer-Krom communities.⁶

Allegations of ill-treatment and incommunicado detention

Serious concerns were raised regarding the treatment of the detained activists, particularly Mr. Thach Nga, who was reportedly held incommunicado for several months. According to documentation from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Mr. Thach Nga displayed visible facial scarring consistent with having been beaten while in custody.⁷

In October 2025, multiple UN Special Procedures mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, issued a joint communication to the Government of Viet-

nam expressing concern at the arbitrary arrest, detention, and alleged ill-treatment of Khmer-Krom Indigenous Peoples, including monks and lay activists associated with independent Buddhist temples in the Mekong Delta. The communication highlighted prolonged incommunicado detention, denial of access to lawyers, and restrictions on religious freedom.⁸

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also issued a public statement in August 2025 expressing alarm at the “ongoing repression of Khmer-Krom Indigenous Peoples”, noting a pattern of criminalization linked to peaceful expression of Indigenous identity and religious autonomy.⁹

Transnational repression and the Montagnard case

Repression of Indigenous activists in 2025 extended beyond Vietnam’s borders. In late November 2025, Y Quynh Bđăp, a Montagnard (Êđê) human rights advocate and recognized refugee, was forcibly returned from Thailand to Vietnam. Prior to his return, multiple international organizations had warned that he faced a high risk of torture and other serious human rights violations if transferred.

UN experts and human rights organizations criticized the extradition as a breach of the principle of non-refoulement, noting that Mr. Y Quynh Bđăp had previously been convicted in absentia on terrorism-related charges widely regarded as politically motivated.¹⁰

This case illustrates the broader regional risks faced by Indigenous activists from Vietnam, including surveillance, cross-border cooperation between security agencies, and the shrinking availability of safe refuge.

Land law & Indigenous resilience response

The Vietnam 2024 Land Law (No. 31/2024/QH15) was enacted and took effect on 1 August 2024 and continued to be in force through 2025 and into 2026. While it includes mechanisms that support land access for ethnic minority households, it does not create distinct legal rights for Indigenous Peoples, and no major re-enactment occurred in 2025. Implementation guidance and secondary regulations were developed af-

ter its enactment to support its practical application but the core law remains unchanged.

Indigenous advocates and spiritual leaders that defend their lands continue to be sentenced and face a pattern of unjust detention and forced confessions.

In a remote corner of the Mekong Delta, nestled within the Tong Hung hamlet of Loan My, the Khmer-Krom community has been striving against all odds to uphold its cultural heritage and religious traditions. However, Vietnamese authorities in Vinh Long province have met their aspirations with hostility and oppression, culminating in the demolition by forces of a crucial religious hall, making it challenging for elders to access religious services and for children learning their native Khmer language at temples in neighboring hamlets. Mrs. Thach Thi Sa Bach and her fellow villagers valiantly defended their right to preserve their religious and cultural space but their resistance was met with indifference and hostility. Despite initial promises of support from the local authorities, the community faced escalating pressure and eventual destruction.

Impact on Indigenous Peoples

For the Khmer-Krom and other Indigenous communities, the events of 2025 only reinforced longstanding patterns of discrimination and marginalization. The criminalization of peaceful advocacy related to Indigenous identity, religion, and human rights has had a chilling effect on community leadership and civic participation. The use of closed-door trials and allegations of forced confessions further undermines trust in judicial institutions and the rule of law.

Vietnam's continued refusal to recognize Indigenous Peoples prevents meaningful engagement with international standards designed to protect collective rights, including cultural survival, religious freedom, and self-determination. Instead, Indigenous identity itself becomes a liability, exposing individuals to prosecution and imprisonment.

Khmer-Krom peoples want to speak their language, see their culture respected in daily practices, secure protection of sacred sites, and reverse decades of discrimination.

Khmer-Krom and other Indigenous Peoples in Vietnam recognize the need for immediate release of all peoples detained for peaceful exercise of their rights. The Khmer-Krom are also calling for fundamental freedoms, including fair trials with public hearings and independent legal counsel, to be ensured. Criminalization for being Indigenous under Article 331 highlights the need to repeal or, as a minimum, amend the penal code. There must be immediate investigations into the ill-treatment and torture faced by Indigenous Peoples. Overall, Indigenous Peoples must be recognized in domestic laws and policies consistent with the UNDRIP.

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**Mexico,
Central and
South America,
and the
Caribbean**

Argentina



Argentina is a federal country made up of 23 provinces and one autonomous city (Buenos Aires, the capital). According to data from the 2022 census, it has a total population of 45,892,285 million people. This latest census counted 1,306,730 people in private homes who identified themselves as Indigenous or descendants of Indigenous Peoples, accounting for 2.9% of the total population in this type of housing. In turn, the census results established the existence of 58 Indigenous Peoples. They legally have specific constitutional rights at the federal level and in most provincial states. In addition, a set of international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), among others, are in force and form part of the constitutional framework. ILO Convention 169 has supra-legal status (it does not form part of the body of constitutional law) and was ratified in 2000. It has been in force as an international treaty since 2001. In Argentina, the UN Declaration and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are in force with normative effect.

Adverse context, absence of public policies

The political context in Argentina is clearly unfavourable for the recognition and implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The policy setbacks have been documented in a special report;¹ however, it is important to emphasize the deinstitutionalization that has resulted from the relocation of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI) within the state organizational chart and its blurring, within a state framework that ignores the existence of Indigenous Peoples.

Alongside a rolling back of the national state, powers are being transferred to the provincial level, which enables local discretion (for example, to exploit Indigenous territories, recognize/disregard those

territories, or recognize/disregard legal entities, as in the case of Neuquén). This dynamic contributes nothing to achieving a minimum level of protection for Indigenous rights at the national level. The absence of public policies is being felt as territorial dispossession intensifies; when a strategy of stigmatization/criminalization is pursued (as in the cases of Facundo Jones Huala and Pablo Colhuan Nahuel, remanded in custody in Chubut, or as in the detention of leaders of the Wichí community of Misión Chaqueña in the province of Salta); or when their territories are exploited and contaminated.

This political scenario is exacerbated by the current government's express decision to ignore the historical demands of Indigenous Peoples. The national-level silence in response to their demands and lack of attention leaves implementation of the regulatory framework, the formulation of public policies and respect for their rights in the arbitrary hands of the provinces. At the same time, rights violations are being reported in numerous provinces, such as Salta, Tucumán, Neuquén, and Chubut, to name but a few. The provincial contexts mirror the national one, creating a situation that further weakens Indigenous communities, who lack contacts within the state through which to channel their demands.

2025 was marked by a rolling back of the state—in all areas, including those related to Indigenous Peoples—and the promotion of investments, some of which directly affect and impact Indigenous territories. The inclusion of a series of hydrocarbon and mining projects (e.g., the Vaca Muerta Sur oil pipeline, lithium projects such as Hombre Muerto and Río Tinto) in the large investment incentive regime (known as RIGI) is thus an example of the premise on which this government operates: an unpopulated territory, the non-existence of Indigenous communities and, therefore, an absence of rights, as well as a stubborn political decision to ignore historical claims.

Disputes over rights

2025 was marked by tensions and disputes over rights. Most notable were the struggle for territory and the management of natural resources, in addition to other rights that are relevant due to their close connec-

tion with the possibility of enjoying those already mentioned, such as legal status or free, prior and informed consultation and consent.

In the city of Neuquén, on 20 July 2025, violent repression took place at the government headquarters. The Mapuche communities had been holding a peaceful protest for several days to demand the granting of legal status to four communities. This demand, far from being abstract, is based on obligations assumed by the province, which has repeatedly undertaken to make it possible to enjoy this constitutional right. Time and again, we have witnessed state failures to comply, legitimate demands for conditions that will allow rights to be exercised, and violent actions by security forces that repress any hint of protest.

To explain these events, some relevant aspects of the context must be taken into account. The “*Vaca Muerta*” hydrocarbon field, and the entire oil industry that is expanding around it, requires a cleared territory. Not only is it a sacrificial territory but it also has to be an empty area that does not hinder production and does not require safeguards for those who still resist and coexist alongside the exploitation. The Mapuche communities have become a thorn in the side of oil exploitation which, in the case of *Vaca Muerta*, has reached its peak. Legal status is necessary for them to be recognized by the state, to exercise their right to consultation and to enjoy a set of rights, including their territorial rights.

In the province of Salta, the Wichí Misión Chaqueña community is protesting against the illegal clearing of their ancestral territory. As a result, they are being harassed by the businessman who wants to fence off and cut down trees, and their leaders have been prosecuted and imprisoned by the justice system, which disregards their rights and protects the economic interests of those who claim to have acquired territories that could not have been sold, precisely because they are Indigenous territories.

Indigenous communities across the country are mobilizing to stop evictions, which have been on the rise since the repeal of Territorial Emergency Law 26,160. This is the case in Neuquén (the Mapuche communities of Lof Xinkikew and Lof Melo, in Villa La Angostura); in Tucumán (the Mamani de Trancas family in Tafí del Valle); and in San Juan (the Huarpe Salvador Talquenca community in Encón), to name but a few examples of provinces where conflicts are taking place. The

demand is clear: respect Indigenous rights, stop further territorial dispossession and address conflicts in accordance with national and international regulations.

Judicialization with mixed results

These violations of rights inevitably lead to litigation. The judicial responses obtained are highly variable, with a tendency towards criminalization. It is, however, worth highlighting a ruling from July 2025 that upheld an environmental injunction precisely so that Indigenous communities could enjoy their rights, rights that had been violated so many times. This was the case of the Supreme Court of Justice of Jujuy, which ratified the right of the Indigenous communities of Salinas Grandes and Laguna de Guayatayoc to public environmental information. This injunction was filed by the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation (FARN) and the aforementioned Indigenous communities in order to access information on lithium and borate mining claims on their territories.

The Indigenous communities of Salinas Grandes have been fighting for decades to be heard. They were the first to formulate a consultation protocol in the country, a protocol that was never respected by the provincial authorities. Their struggle led them not only to resist the onslaught of lithium exploitation—the white gold found in the territory of the Indigenous communities in the north of the country—but also to oppose the province's constitutional reform, with negative results that led to the persecution and criminalization of the communities.

It is for this reason, and because of this long history of resistance and action against state powers, that this decision is so important. It recognizes the right of communities to receive reliable environmental information, as provided for in the National Constitution, international treaties and, in particular, the Escazú Agreement.

However, the judiciary has also become the executive arm of political power in order to discipline and intimidate. Two cases demonstrate this policy. The first is that of the Mapuche Pailako community. In January 2025, this community was evicted from Los Alerces National Park in the province of Chubut. More than four years after the commu-

nity—whose members are descendants of former settlers—decided to reclaim their territory, and after a long legal battle, the Federal Court of Comodoro Rivadavia finally upheld the eviction and authorized it, invoking the very Need and Urgency Decree that had repealed another decree extending the Territorial Emergency Law. This is the first case in the country in which the effects of this repeal are palpable: it opens the door to evictions by clearing the legal landscape of the law that ordered their suspension.

The second is the case of Facundo Jones Huala, a Mapuche *longko* (chief) who has been relentlessly persecuted by the state, and whose remand in custody was ordered on 10 June 2025. It was determined that his imprisonment would take place in a prison in the city of Rawson, in the province of Chubut, almost 1,000 kilometres from the city of Bariloche where his family lives. The arrest warrant came from the highest levels of government. Without any previous warrant for his arrest, without being caught in any criminal act, without his lawyers being aware of any open legal proceedings, he was simply deprived of his liberty. What was the justification for this political/legal decision? He was the alleged perpetrator of public intimidation, incitement to violence, apology for crime and unlawful association. It should not be forgotten that the RAM (Ancestral Mapuche Resistance), an organization of which he is a member, was placed a few months ago on the list of terrorist organizations proscribed in the country.

The judicial route remains an appropriate strategy for defending rights but it has to be understood that achieving a favourable outcome requires more than simply good arguments and good litigation. The legal field is often compromised by the political, and aligned with its interests, and legal claims therefore do not find a propitious place in which to remedy their demands. Even in the case of favourable rulings, their enforcement is a constant challenge, and those convicted often resist complying with the content of rulings that protect Indigenous rights.

Different forms of state violence

Evictions, raids, and repression are the violent forms that state actions take in response to the demands of Indigenous Peoples. Violence pre-

vails over dialogue and the building of relationships that could reconcile the interests of different sectors. Despite the strenuous attempts by Indigenous communities and organizations to create spaces for dialogue, these are frustrated by the actions of different state bodies, which opt for intimidation and threats against a backdrop in which Indigenous rights become obstacles to the policies they are seeking to implement.

In Esquel, Chubut province, in February 2025, a woman living in a Mapuche community was remanded in custody on suspicion of being responsible for a fire on a ranch near the town of Trevelin. After a series of violent raids, a suitable scapegoat linked to the Pillan Mahuiza Mapuche community was found, attributing responsibility for the events to a person close to them in order to implicate a group of Indigenous communities in the region. In a crude and grotesque display, and taking advantage of the presence of the provincial governor, it was loudly announced that one of those responsible had been arrested. At that time, two months of preventive detention were ordered so that the prosecution could continue its investigation of the case. There was, and still is, no evidence to prove the involvement of the woman, who is now a victim of state persecution and violence. At a hearing held a few days ago, it was decided to release her, precisely because the prosecution was unable to gather the required evidence. Who will compensate the woman detained for the damage caused, her suffering, her anguish, being deprived of her liberty and accused of such acts?

Almost a year later (January 2026), Mapuche communities are once again being linked to the fires ravaging Patagonia. Organizations and communities are responding by denouncing the state's neglect, the lack of prevention policies and the state's apathy, which once more resorts to the argument of arson to avoid responsibility for events which, yet again, strip communities of their territories.

In April 2025, the violent eviction of the Kolla Cueva del Inca community in the province of Jujuy highlighted a long-standing territorial conflict with hotel entrepreneurs. In this case, despite the fact that the community is recognized by the provincial government and has had legal status since 2001, the justice system is protecting the businessmen and, ultimately, tourism interests prevail over Indigenous territorial rights.

In Las Lomitas, in the province of Formosa, near the community of Campo del Cielo, in April 2025, a blockade of Provincial Route 28 led

to a serious confrontation with injuries to both the Pilagá community members and police officers. It should be emphasized that the road-block was the result of the desperation of communities, who saw their homes, animals and crops flooded while the state stood idly by and did nothing to mitigate the damage. State violence, then, by action and by omission. Not only does the state ignore the basic rights of Indigenous communities but, when demands are made, it orders the security forces to repress them.

These examples illustrate the different forms of violence that the state exercises over Indigenous communities, whether through the use of force or through the judiciary, persecuting and harassing them. It is striking that, in such dissimilar cases, the result is the same: a lack of protection, the violation of rights, arbitrariness and violence.

Resistance and offense, the greatest challenges

Against a backdrop of constant harassment—whether due to ignorance or rejection, criminalization, dispossession through evictions, or other issues—resistance is one of the ways to continue demanding and protecting the rights that have been achieved. The struggle for rights has become one of the central issues for Indigenous communities, who are aware of the dangerous rollback in public policies that is currently affecting them.

This situation has grown worse under the current government, which openly disregards Indigenous rights. Indigenous communities are now under threat, with few tools to stop the government's onslaught, very little room for political negotiation, and a national and provincial level of government that is totally insensitive to their demands and does not fear violating the Constitution in order to strengthen an economic and productive model that is far removed from Indigenous Peoples.

Institutional designs, the state matrix, and constitutions always have a claim to continuity and a vision for the future. But it is in concrete policies and political decisions that their impact and capacity for transformation are played out. Although it seems that we are witnessing a failure of legislative changes, these are still essential to push for transformations in other dimensions. They are clearly not enough, how-

ever. It seems that creativity and greater proactivity are needed to reverse a trend that demonstrates historical continuity. Reversing course is not impossible but it requires precise political strategies, unity and dialogue.

The challenges are multiplying. Courses of action can, however, be taken to reverse adverse situations. In Mendoza, by means of Resolution 130/25, the Mining Directorate of the Ministry of Energy and Environment set out the consultation process without first consulting Indigenous communities. The consultation created scenarios of supposed participation without the communities being able to influence the final decisions.

Following an appeal lodged by the Malalweche Territorial Identity Organization, Resolution 139-EyA ordered the revocation of Resolution 130 and the initiation of a dialogue process with the communities. The Indigenous organization and the communities are calling for a provincial law to regulate consultation in different areas of the state, in accordance with international standards set out in both ILO Convention 169 and rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

This revision of criteria that were adopted without consultation by the province of Mendoza provides some important lessons. It shows how a claim organized by Indigenous communities and their organizations can have such an impact that an adopted measure is reversed. The decision, at the administrative level, to review a resolution that deviates from the entire regulatory framework is a sign that Indigenous Peoples can demand to be heard and bring about change from that position. This single example shows that there are paths to follow, despite the difficulties ahead.

Notes and references

1. Ramírez, Silvina. *Los Pueblos Indígenas en la Argentina de la derecha libertaria*. Argentina: IWGIA, 2025. <https://iwgia.org/es/recursos/publicaciones/5818-2025-los-pueblos-ind%C3%ADgenas-en-la-argentina-de-la-derecha-libertaria-de-silvina-ram%C3%ADrez.html>

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Bolivia



According to the 2012 National Census, 41% of the Bolivian population over the age of 15 is of Indigenous origin, although 2017 projections by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) indicate that this percentage is likely to have increased to 48%. Of the 36 recognized peoples in the country, the majority of those living in the Andes are Quechua (49.5%) and Aymara (40.6%), who self-identify as 16 nationalities. In the lowlands, these peoples are largely the Chiquitano (3.6%), Guaraní (2.5%) and Moxeño (1.4%) and, together with the remaining 2.4%, they make up the 36 recognized Indigenous Peoples. To date, Indigenous Peoples have consolidated their collective ownership of 25 million hectares in the form of *Tierras Comunitarias de Origen* (Community Lands of Origin / TCO), and these account for 23% of the country's total area. With the approval of Decree No. 727/10, the TCOs acquired the constitutional title of Original Indigenous Peasant Territory (*Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* - TIOC). Bolivia has ratified the main international human rights conventions and has been a signatory to ILO Convention No. 169 since 1991. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has been in full force since the approval of Law No. 3,760 on 7 November 2007. With the new State Political Constitution in 2009, Bolivia adopted the name of Plurinational State.

General elections: Rodrigo Paz, President of Bolivia

General elections were held on 17 August for president and vice-president, as well as for the total renewal of both legislative chambers. Against all the odds, the election was won by the centrist candidates, Rodrigo Paz and Edman Lara, despite a strong electoral campaign from former president Jorge Quiroga¹ and businessman Samuel Doria Medina,² and polls which gave them very little hope. Under the banner of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the Paz-Lara duo won with 32.06% as opposed to 26.7% for Quiroga (Libre) and 19.69% for Doria Medina (Unidad).³ Further behind were then senator and suppos-

edly Evo Morales' protégé, Andrónico Rodríguez, with 8.71%; the current mayor of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, with 6.75%; and the candidate who ran for the MAS government party, the former government minister Eduardo del Castillo, with 3.17%, a percentage with which he managed to save this political grouping from extinction.

These results meant it had to go to a second round or *ballotage* between candidates Paz and Quiroga since neither of them reached 51% of the votes or a difference of 10% in their favour. This process only took place on 19 October, when Rodrigo Paz obtained 54.6% as opposed to 45.4% for former president Quiroga.⁴

Evo Morales had substantial influence over the whole electoral process, both in the first and second round. Since October 2024, he has been confined in his Chapare stronghold, a coca-growing area in the Tropic of Cochabamba, resisting an arrest warrant against him for rape, human trafficking and other crimes against his partner.⁵ The former president was prevented from participating in the elections due to the interpretation of his two previous mandates;⁶ however, he managed to influence the final results of both processes. Indeed, in the first round, and frustrated in his efforts to be recognized as the candidate for his party, MAS, and later the political grouping “Evo Pueblo”,⁷ he called for a spoilt or blank vote in the August elections. In that instance, 19.87% followed this course of action, which ranked third in popularity, ahead of Samuel Doria Medina. In this scenario, facing the second round, the profile of Rodrigo Paz and, above all, that of his vice-president, former police officer Edman Lara, who were very much in tune with the popular sectors of the countryside and the city, tipped a good part of the null votes towards the PDC option, which won by almost 10%.

Political reconfiguration and new Indigenous caucus in the Legislative Assembly

The composition of the legislative chambers has thus changed drastically, with almost no presence of the social sectors. The PDC won 70 deputies and 16 senators, giving it a majority in both chambers. The MAS of Evo Morales and outgoing president Luis Arce, who previously had total control of these chambers, has been reduced to two deputies.

In theory, the ruling party would need the votes of the other two “opposition” groups to achieve the necessary two-thirds should they intend to put forward important reforms, including reforms of the Constitution, as they had announced.⁸

The formal representation of seven seats elected in special Indigenous constituencies has been maintained although they are currently poorly linked to their organizations and agendas, given the demands that are being articulated in the territories and autonomous governments.

As a direct effect of this new political context, the annulment of the criminal proceedings against former president Jeanine Añez, who had been serving a 10-year prison sentence since 2021, is significant.⁹ The acting governor of the department of Santa Cruz, Luis Fernando Camacho, has also been released. He had been accused of several crimes, and unlawfully detained for almost three years,¹⁰ along with the former president of the Civic Committee of Potosí, Marco Antonio Pumari, for similar crimes associated with the protests that led to the resignation of President Evo Morales at the end of 2019.

Economic crisis and economic stabilization programme: fuel price hike and threats to the territories (D.S. 5,503)

2025, the “bicentenary”, passed almost unnoticed in the midst of an economic crisis that was in an almost terminal state. The 200th anniversary of the signing of the Act of Independence –generated under the influence of the victorious armies at the battles of Junín and Ayacucho in 1824, commanded by Simón Bolívar and Antonio José de Sucre, which ended the process of emancipation from Spain in South America that had begun in 1810 in Buenos Aires– did not take on the same significance as in other countries. The exhaustion of the economic model, sustained mainly by the flow of international reserves that had maintained a completely untouchable policy of fuel subsidies and social bonds, completely eroded the huge international reserves accumulated during the natural gas export boom. This was compounded by the shortage of dollars, inflation, and trade imbalance, among other issues.

The economic downturn was exacerbated by the internal political crisis within the ruling party itself, which saw Evo Morales and President Luis Arce at loggerheads, with the latter trying everything in his power to secure his candidacy for the general election.

There were road blockades once again in June on the part of peasants in the western regions of the country. The most serious were in the mining town of Llallagua (Potosí) and in the Tropic of Cochabamba, which claimed the lives of six people –four of them police officers who died from bullet and explosives impacts–, as well as more than 200 wounded civilians and a similar number of arrests.¹¹ Although the protest was ostensibly about the government's economic mismanagement, the shortage of fuel and U.S. dollars, the underlying issue was the authorization of the candidacy of former President Morales. After several days of blockades, instead of being seen as a legitimate measure by the population, these actions generated widespread rejection, especially from the opposition and ruling political leadership, as well as from the general public, and were lifted almost two weeks later without having achieved any tangible objectives.

The crisis of what was called the Process of Change, and its political and historical exhaustion, also dragged down the Indigenous organizations, especially those that had been key players in the Constitutional Assembly. The Assembly and its final output, the new Constitution, condensed a long process of struggle and vindication of rights, social inclusion and state transformation that was truncated in its practical implementation phase. One of the most evident liabilities has been the weakening of the national and regional Indigenous organizations, which have lost all legitimacy in the eyes of their grassroots members, and other more territorial processes, whose updated and concrete agendas have taken precedence over the leaders co-opted by the government. Currently, this deficit means that the Indigenous movement has no space to collectively develop proposals for all the peoples or to establish a unified voice that can legitimately challenge the government or the *de facto* regional powers, such as cattle ranchers, agribusiness or mining companies.

Although the structural advances and achievements, as well as the changes in Bolivia's social and political culture achieved during this process are undeniable, as in any political situation, they tend to be

short-lived and could regress if not supported by effective implementation. Proof of this could be seen not only in the regressive regulations of Evo Morales' second government, with decrees that relaxed Free, Prior and Informed Consultation for oil operations in Indigenous territories¹² and exploitation of these in protected areas,¹³ but also those recently approved by President Rodrigo Paz Pereira, in particular Supreme Decree 5,503, dated 17 December. This law includes a chapter which, in order to promote foreign private investment in the energy sector and the exploitation of natural resources, virtually repeals the entire section of the Constitution that refers to the environment, natural resources and land and territory (articles. 342-403 CPE).

The decree contained, as its main measure, a drastic reduction in subsidies for liquid fuels combined with social measures to mitigate the effects on the supposedly most vulnerable population.¹⁴ The immediate effect was the almost total disappearance of long queues in front of petrol stations and a sharp drop in the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar on the unofficial market, reassuring the population, especially those with greater purchasing power.

However, once the details of the regulation became known, the Bolivian Workers Union (*Central Obrera Boliviana* / COB) and broad sectors of society, including the bulk of those who voted for the presidential ticket, emphatically rejected Supreme Decree 5,503, which throws out several social achievements established in the Constitution, as mentioned above. Particularly sensitive for Indigenous Peoples is the wording of the articles that give binding legal effect, even over and above sectoral laws, to contracts signed by the state without legislative approval, as established in the CPE, referring to investments considered "strategic", such as mining, hydrocarbon, agribusiness and infrastructure operations (art. 10). Also those that provide for expedited approval of strategic investment projects, known as the "fast track" procedure, and protection from any administrative measure or procedure considered a "roadblock" to investments related to such activities.¹⁵ In this context, the rights of Indigenous Peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consultation, as well as other environmental rights, are exercised through administrative processes and protocols; under these provisions, they would be considered "roadblocks" to development and would therefore be removed.

At the time of writing, a social protest involving road blockades was being organized by the COB and several peasant federations, particularly those in the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba and Potosí, to demand the repeal of Supreme Decree 5,503.

FONDIOC case and arrest of former president Luis Arce

The Development Fund for Indigenous Peoples and Peasant Communities (FDPPIOYCC) was created by Supreme Decree 28571 of 22 December 2005, approved by President Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, Evo Morales' predecessor at the time. This was the regulatory enactment of the Hydrocarbons Law No. 3058 of 2005, article 57 of which established the allocation of 5% of the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons (IDH) to the creation of a fund to promote the autonomous development of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁶ It was one of the greatest social achievements, along with the recovery of state ownership of hydrocarbons and the state's leading role in the management of this strategic resource, which had been usurped by the privatization policies of the 1990s.

The FDPPIOYCC had a mixed structure, composed of the national government and the main leaders of the rural organizations, which at that time were the main agents of political and institutional transformation, mainly of rural origin.¹⁷ Forming part of the state bodies, which ultimately had the final decision-making power, were the heads of the Ministries of Rural Development, Popular Participation and Economy and Finance.

By 2025, the Fund had managed more than 3,100 projects amounting to nearly USD 100 million (approx. EUR 84 million). In that year, the Comptroller General's Office pinpointed more than 30 "ghost" projects in the accounts, worth close to USD 25 million (approx. EUR 21 million).¹⁸

When the scandal broke, one of the main defendants was the then Minister of Rural Development and Lands, Nemesia Achacollo, a long-standing women's peasant leader who was involved in several cases of land sales, including this Fund in particular. The government decided to radically modify the fund, creating FONDIOC, and removing the Indigenous and peasant organizations from the board, blaming

them for mismanagement, while linking it directly to municipal policies. Minister Achacollo was excluded from the case in court, and under pressure from the government, the investigation was directed towards Indigenous leaders and contracted technicians, unleashing a judicial persecution that disregarded all rights to due process and fundamental human rights.¹⁹

Former president Luis Arce was involved in this case, as Minister of Finance and member of the FDPPIOYCC Board of Directors, and who was responsible, albeit collectively, along with the other ministers of state who participated in this body. However, as a direct result of the electoral victory of the new president, Rodrigo Paz, Arce was remanded in custody in the San Pedro de La Paz prison. According to his supporters, this is a case of political revenge by former political and judicial persecutors who are now in power, although the current president has not taken any position on the matter.

Victories for environmental justice in Indigenous territories

In 2025, advocacy efforts and, above all, agri-environmental justice decisions in Bolivia became very evident and forceful in favour of preserving the rights of citizens and Indigenous Peoples to territory and the environment. Between January and September, the Environmental Court of Camiri, in the Chaco region of Santa Cruz, and the national Agro-Environmental Court, issued a landmark ruling regarding the Guaraní territory and conservation area of Ñembi Guasu (Great Refuge).²⁰ In January, the Agro-Environmental Court of Camiri issued ruling 01/2025 consolidating the Ecological Pause as a precautionary measure. This measure consisted of revoking permits for forest clearing and burning, reviewing and—where appropriate—revoking human settlement resolutions, as well as restricting access to and use of natural resources in the area, putting a definitive stop to attempts to appropriate this area.²¹

For several years now, the most important activity in the Bolivian Amazon has been undergoing a traumatic transition from an extractive economy based on the fruits of the forest and river to gold mining, very similar to what is happening in Peru, on the Madre de Dios River. In July,

leaders of the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory II (TIM II) filed a lawsuit denouncing the contamination of the river due to the presence of hundreds of gold mining dredgers.²² TIM II demanded the establishment of measures to prevent environmental damage to the Madre de Dios River, to its ecosystem, and to the territorial, environmental and socio-cultural integrity of the territory in the face of the impacts and threats of illegal alluvial mining activities in the region, which directly threaten the Madre de Dios River that originates in Peru. In its decision to admit the lawsuit, the Agro-Environmental Court considered the Madre de Dios River to be a “subject of collective interest rights”, as in the Ñembi Guasu case setting out precautionary measures such as the suspension of activities and a review of resolutions protecting mining rights, especially those that do not have prior consultation processes.²³

During 2025, communities in Nor Lípez province, Potosí department, organized in the *Central Única Provincial de Comunidades Originarias de Nor Lípez* (CUPCONL), initiated legal proceedings against the negotiation and approval of state contracts for the exploitation and industrialization of lithium in the Salar de Uyuni,²⁴ without Free, Prior and Informed Consultation processes and without sufficient environmental safeguards.

On 12 May 2025, CUPCONL filed a Class Action denouncing the violation and threat to the rights to territory, to self-determination and autonomy, to Free, Prior and Informed Consultation, as well as the rights of Mother Earth to life, to ecological balance, to the regeneration of her cycles and to water, with an emphasis on the water systems of the Salar.

At the first hearing, held on 27 May, the judicial authority granted precautionary measures, ordering the suspension of the legislative processing of the contracts, in line with the preventive nature of the Class Action and the obligation to prevent acts that could result in structural violations of collective rights. However, at the second hearing, on 5 June, the Court of Colcha K refused to rule on the merits of the case, arguing that a Class Action was not an appropriate way to challenge contracts or demand prior consultation, thereby regressively restricting the scope of this constitutional mechanism.

Faced with this decision, with the support of the Ombudsman's Office, the communities appealed to the agro-environmental court. On 20 August 2025, the Agro-Environmental Court of La Paz issued a favour-

able resolution and ordered precautionary measures. Among its main resolutions, it ordered the preparation of technical-scientific reports on the actual availability of natural resources, particularly fossil waters, in the areas of influence of the projects; it established that, prior to any legislative approval, a continuous, effective and culturally appropriate process of Free, Prior and Informed Consultation had to be guaranteed, aimed at obtaining the consent of the Indigenous and Peasant territories of Nor Lípez and south-western Potosí; and it decided that the Plurinational Legislative Assembly should request strategic environmental impact assessments and convene collegiate bodies to consider reports on the exploitation of strategic natural resources.²⁵

Ninth Indigenous government: Ch'alla, Cochabamba

The Soras Nation, Cochabamba department, has taken the most complex step in the long road to fulfilling the legal requirements for accessing the creation of its autonomous government, as established in the Constitution. On 7 November, Law No. 1,689 was enacted, creating the *“Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino Challa”*. The autonomous territory of Challa is located in the Tapacarí and Arque provinces.

The Indigenous authorities of Challa began the process to become an Indigenous autonomy in 2018 with the request for the first requirements for access: the certificate of Ancestral Territory Status and the Certificate of Governmental Viability, but these were only granted in January 2020 by the Vice-Ministry of Autonomies.²⁶

Within the framework of their highest collective decision-making body, they appointed a group of 45 assembly members tasked with collaboratively drafting the Statute of Autonomy, which was to be approved by the entire territory three years later.

The endless steps to obtaining autonomy meant that this document had to be submitted to the Constitutional Court for prior regulatory review, a requirement before it could enter into force. One of the biggest stumbling blocks, however, as is always the case with Indigenous autonomies seeking to consolidate their jurisdiction over their territories titled as collective lands, was the technical work of delimiting the

new territorial unit with the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA). The particular case of Challa involves three *ayllus* with ancestral ownership rights that have been regularized in 12 collective territories titled by the state. These territories are located, moreover, at the convergence of conflicting departmental and municipal boundaries, which were fortunately resolved in a timely manner.²⁷ Challa is the ninth territory to gain Indigenous autonomy, complying with the requirements established in the 2010 Framework Law on Autonomy. More than 20 others are still waiting, caught in the tangle of bureaucratic requirements imposed by the state to delay the exercise of their constitutional rights.

International seminar on cultural mapping

On 15 and 16 September 2025, the “International Seminar on Indigenous Mapping Practices” was held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, organized by IWGIA in collaboration with ORÉ as local organization. This was a highly significant event for the country's Indigenous organizations, attended by leaders and experts in mapping, researchers and support institutions from Latin America, Africa, Asia and international networks that use mapping as a communication and advocacy tool.

The seminar allowed for a rich exchange of mapping experiences across different countries and territories, highlighting the uses and importance they have acquired in the processes of territorial demands and defence, as well as for the planning and management of the spaces conquered, especially in the Amazon and other strategic ecosystems. The event also analysed the new threats looming over the territories as a result of the effects of climate change and projects to convert them into areas of occupation for the extractive exploitation of their natural resources. In turn, it addressed how cartography used in a political and social context represents a fundamental weapon with which to challenge this new and worrying context.

Notes and references

1. Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga was vice-president to General Hugo Bánzer Suárez between 1997 and 2001, and became president upon the death of the first

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- population, with informal and insecure employment in the majority. <https://inesad.edu.bo/dslm/2025/12/reduccion-de-subsidios-a-los-combustibles-en-bolivia-que-desafios-enfrenta-el-aumento-del-salario-minimo-subyacente/>
15. One of the first slogans coined by President Rodrigo Paz was that he was taking office to dismantle the “blocked State”, i.e., the bureaucratic structures that were preventing national and foreign private investment from committing to the country's development.
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Brazil



According to data from the 2022 Demographic Census, Brazil is home to 1,693,535 Indigenous people, representing approximately 0.83% of the total Brazilian population. The census identified 391 Indigenous Peoples (ethnic groups) and 295 Indigenous languages spoken across the country, reflecting a broader recognition of ethnic and linguistic diversity compared to previous estimates.

Nearly 45% of the Indigenous population lives in the Northern region of Brazil, which has the highest concentration nationwide. The state of Amazonas stands out as the state with the largest Indigenous population in absolute numbers, with approximately 490,000 Indigenous people.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil are formally recognized in a specific chapter of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Title VIII, "Social Order," Chapter VIII, "On the Indians"), complemented by additional provisions throughout the constitutional text and in the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act. Furthermore, Brazil ratified ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples on 25 July 2002, reinforcing the country's international commitments to the protection of Indigenous rights.

Land rights and insecurity

Developments in 2025 confirmed that, for Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, peace and security remain inseparable from the stability of their territorial rights. Rather than being experienced as abstract constitutional guarantees, land rights were lived as concrete conditions shaping everyday safety, health, mobility, and collective continuity.^{1,2} Judicial decisions, legislative initiatives, executive actions and climate governance intersected throughout the year in ways that repeatedly reopened Indigenous territories and rights to dispute, producing uncertainty, exposure to violence, and sustained fear.

From Indigenous perspectives, peace does not mean the absence of conflict but rather the possibility of living, governing, and reproducing

collective life in a territory that is not under permanent threat. Territorial stability was consistently identified as the foundation of safety, autonomy, and dignity. Conversely, instability is reflected in hunger, illness, displacement, intimidation, and the erosion of Indigenous governance institutions. In this sense, insecurity in 2025 was not episodic but structural.

Judicial recognition and its limits

In 2025, the Supreme Federal Court (STF) reaffirmed the unconstitutionality of the *Marco Temporal* thesis (Temporal Framework Thesis), maintaining that Indigenous territorial rights are original and not subject to time limitation. Indigenous organizations welcomed the decision as an important reaffirmation of constitutional principles. It was, however, widely described as a partial and fragile victory.

From Indigenous standpoints, judicial recognition did not automatically result in security on the ground. Numerous demarcation processes remained unfinished, leaving communities exposed to invasion, coercion, and forced displacement. Indigenous leaders emphasized that, when court rulings are not accompanied by enforceable timelines, binding administrative obligations, and effective protection mechanisms, legal recognition itself becomes unstable. Rights that can be reaffirmed and then politically contested once more do not produce peace; they reproduce uncertainty.

Legislative backlash and institutionalized insecurity

Throughout 2025, insecurity was intensified by legislative initiatives seeking to reintroduce restrictions on Indigenous land rights. The Constitutional Amendment Bill PEC 48/2023 advanced as a central instrument of backlash, proposing constitutional changes that would narrow the scope of Indigenous territorial recognition.

Indigenous Peoples interpreted this not merely as a legal dispute but as a political signal that their rights remained negotiable. This signal reshaped power relations in conflict zones, emboldening land grabbers,

mining interests, and other private actors. Insecurity was produced not only by means of physical violence but also through state narratives that that considered Indigenous legitimacy relative.³

From a decolonial perspective, democratic procedures were mobilized in order to reactivate colonial logics of dispossession under the appearance of legality.⁴ Indigenous organizations repeatedly stressed that such processes undermine trust in institutions and transform the state itself into a vector of insecurity rather than protection.

Administrative delays as a form of violence

In 2025, bureaucratic delays⁵ were widely understood by Indigenous organizations as a form of time-based violence.⁶ Administrative inaction was not perceived as neutral governance but as a political practice that prolonged their exposure to risk. Each postponed administrative act meant additional time under threat from invasion, contamination, and coercion.

Indigenous leaders insisted that peace cannot be postponed. When constitutional rights exist only on paper while administrative processes stagnate, insecurity becomes normalized. Time, in this context, functions as an instrument through which violence is indirectly reproduced.

Land demarcation policy: advances and limits

Despite these tensions, 2025 also saw concrete advances in demarcation. The federal government formally approved seven Indigenous Lands, presented as part of a renewed commitment to territorial protection.

In August 2025, three Indigenous Lands were approved in Ceará: Pitaguary, Lagoa Encantada, and Tremembé de Queimadas. In November 2025, during COP30 in Belém, four additional lands were approved: Kaxuyana–Tunayana (PA/AM), Parecis (MT), Uirapuru (MT), and Manoki (MT).

In addition, the Ministry of Justice signed ten declaratory ordinances, the National Indigenous Foundation (Funai) approved six Iden-

tification and Delimitation Reports (RCIDs),⁷ and a presidential decree regulated Funai's police powers, strengthening its authority to remove illegal occupants from Indigenous Lands.

Indigenous organizations recognized these measures as significant, particularly for communities who had been waiting decades for land recognition. However, they emphasized that the advances remained insufficient relative to the scale of pending land claims and territorial violence. From Indigenous perspectives, demarcation relates not only to land policy; it is also peacebuilding.⁸ When land recognition is selective or slow, insecurity persists.

Territorial conflict, criminal economies, and everyday insecurity

Across multiple regions in 2025, land conflicts were inseparable from criminal economies. Illegal mining, logging, land grabbing, and trafficking routes increasingly intersected with Indigenous territories, often accompanied by armed actors and private militias.^{9, 10}

These dynamics produced daily insecurity: threats against Indigenous leaders, restricted mobility, poisoned rivers, and disrupted food systems.

Indigenous organizations stressed that militarized responses alone were failing to dismantle these structures. Enforcement operations were often episodic, displacing rather than eliminating illegal activities. Defending Indigenous territories thus became inseparable from defending personal safety and political legitimacy,¹¹ particularly as Indigenous resistance was frequently met with criminalization, surveillance, and legal harassment.

Major national events: Indigenous mobilization

The *Acampamento Terra Livre* (ATL) 2025, held in Brasília, reaffirmed Indigenous mobilization as a central practice of peace and security. Thousands of Indigenous participants articulated demands against the

Marco Temporal, opposed PEC 48/2023, and called for urgent demarcation of Indigenous Lands and protection.^{12, 13}

ATL functioned not only as a protest but also as Indigenous governance in action. Women, youth, elders, educators, and health agents collectively produced political agendas across issues such as land, health, education, climate, and anti-racism. In this sense, mobilization itself operated as a security strategy: strengthening alliances, countering criminalization, and asserting Indigenous authority in national politics.

Indigenous women and youth

In 2025, Indigenous women and youth were central political actors within the Indigenous movement.¹⁴

Women's leadership foregrounded the links between territorial insecurity and everyday life, including food sovereignty, caregiving, community health, and protection from gendered violence. Youth activism connected land dispossession to mental health crises and exposure to urban and rural violence, insisting that security includes the right to a future.

Together, these perspectives challenged dominant security paradigms by redefining peace as care, continuity, and Indigenous governance.

COP30: Indigenous participation, climate governance, and the fight for territorial rights

The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was held in Belém, Pará, in Brazil, in November 2025. It marked an historic moment for Indigenous Peoples in Brazil and globally. COP30 brought together over 4,000 Indigenous people, including more than 3,500 representatives from every Brazilian biome (Amazon, Caatinga, Cerrado, Atlantic Forest, Pampa, Pantanal, and the Coastal and Marine Zone).

The *Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil* (APIB), the country's leading Indigenous organization, mobilized over 3,000 Indigenous

people to Belém with a central demand that land demarcation and territorial protection should be the conference's legacy in Brazil.

Dinamam Tuxá, APIB's executive coordinator, articulated the Indigenous movement's frustration with the structural exclusion from decision-making: "Our peoples, territories, and traditional ways of life are part of the solution to combat the climate crisis but, unfortunately, the Conference of the Parties does not officially consider Indigenous Peoples as negotiators. That is why we have been pressing them for months so that the demarcation of Indigenous Lands is at the centre of the agenda."¹⁵

The scale of unfinished demarcation

APIB presented compelling data at COP30 revealing the magnitude of Brazil's territorial debt to Indigenous Peoples. According to APIB's survey, 107 Indigenous Lands were ready to be demarcated and awaiting the finalization of administrative processes.

Conflicts and contradictions: Ferrogrão railway and extractive agendas

COP30 exposed deep contradictions within Brazil's climate policy. During the conference, the Brazilian government advanced plans for the Ferrogrão railway, a massive infrastructure project that would cut through Indigenous territories in the Amazon to facilitate soybean and mineral exports.¹⁶ Indigenous leaders denounced this as emblematic of a broader pattern: governments publicly celebrating Indigenous contributions to climate solutions while simultaneously pursuing extractive mega-projects that threaten Indigenous Lands and livelihoods.

The *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (CIMI), a Catholic organization supporting Indigenous rights, used COP30 as a platform to denounce "false solutions" and demand systemic ruptures with climate collapse, explicitly linking land demarcation to the dismantling of extractive capitalism.¹⁷

Achievements and limitations

Brazilian Indigenous organizations acknowledged some concrete achievements during COP30. The Brazilian government announced the approval of four Indigenous Lands during the conference (Kaxuy-

ana–Tunayana, Parecis, Uirapuru, and Manoki), framing these as part of Brazil's climate commitments.¹⁸ Indigenous leaders welcomed these demarcations but emphasized that they represented only a fraction of the 268 territories still awaiting recognition.

COP30 as a turning point

For Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, COP30 represented both an opportunity and a contradiction. It was the largest platform Indigenous movements have ever had within global climate governance, yet it also exposed the limits of participation without power. It generated unprecedented visibility for Indigenous demands, yet it unfolded alongside continued threats to Indigenous territories due to legislative backlash (PEC 48/2023), administrative delays, and extractive mega-projects.

Ultimately, Brazilian Indigenous organizations framed COP30 not as an endpoint but as a moment of mobilization—a space to strengthen alliances, articulate demands, and build pressure for the systemic changes required to address both the climate crisis and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous Lands. As Indigenous voices repeatedly emphasized throughout COP30: peace begins with territory, and climate justice is inseparable from Indigenous land rights.¹⁹

Outlook for 2026–2027

Looking ahead, two trajectories remain possible. On the one hand, continued legislative backlash and institutional challenges may prolong insecurity, particularly if land demarcation and enforcement mechanisms remain politically vulnerable. On the other, advances achieved in 2025—combined with Indigenous mobilization and international scrutiny—may open space for more stable, binding commitments to territorial protection.

The central question for 2026–2027 is whether Brazil will consolidate Indigenous land rights as irreversible foundations of peace or continue to treat them as negotiable variables within political and economic disputes.

Conclusion: peace beyond conditional recognition

The Brazilian experience in 2025 demonstrates that peace and security for Indigenous Peoples cannot be reduced to isolated legal victories or administrative acts. It depends on the stability of territorial rights, the dismantling of criminal economies, and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples as political authorities.

As articulated by Indigenous voices throughout the year, peace begins with territory.²⁰ Without territorial certainty and Indigenous governance, security remains rhetorical. But, with them, peace becomes a lived reality rather than a deferred promise.

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Chile



Despite steadily increasing since the 1990s, the Indigenous population has not seen any major variations since the 2017 census. 2,185,792 people thus self-identify as Indigenous, equivalent to 12.8% of the country's total population (17,076,076). The Mapuche are the most numerous people (almost 1,800,000 individuals), followed by the Aymara (156,000) and the Diaguita (88,000).¹ The trend highlights a sustained increase in the urban Indigenous population over the rural population, with 87.8% of Indigenous members being urban, compared to the 12.2% that live in rural areas.²

Law 19,253 of 1993, on the Promotion, Protection and Development of Indigenous Peoples, known as the “Indigenous Law”, has not been amended to comply with current international standards on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as ILO Convention 169, ratified by Chile in 2008. In addition, Chile has adopted the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the 2016 American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It is important to note that, to this day, Indigenous Peoples are still not recognized in the Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile, despite such recognition forming part of their historical demands. The 1980 Political Constitution imposed during the dictatorship remains in force and this makes no mention of Indigenous Peoples and their individual or collective rights. It was only on 30 June 2025, following the recommendations of the Commission for Peace and Understanding, that President Gabriel Boric submitted a Constitutional Reform Bill to Congress amending the Constitution to recognize Indigenous Peoples in the Political Constitution of the Republic (Bulletin No. 17.643-07).³ The bill proposes their recognition “within the framework of the unity of the state, guaranteeing their individual and collective rights in accordance with this Constitution, the laws and international treaties ratified by Chile and in force”. This bill is currently making its first passage through the Chamber of Deputies, with very little political support for its implementation.

Presidential Commission for Peace and Understanding, another wasted opportunity

On 07 May 2025, after almost two years of work, the Presidential Commission for Peace and Understanding (CPE) released its final report.⁴ The report analyses the historical, legal, political and economic context of relations between the state and the Mapuche people, as well as the growing conflict in the regions where its work was focused. The report also contains an assessment and quantification of the Mapuche land claims, and proposes a total of 21 recommendations, organized around five themes: Justice and Recognition, Reparations for Victims, Land, Territorial Development and Guarantees for Implementation.

Regarding land matters, the CPE recommended the creation of a new Land System to address the excessive waiting time for land restitution requests from Mapuche communities, which under current conditions are estimated to take up to 162 years to be resolved.⁵ To this end, it proposed the creation of a Reparation Agency and an Arbitration Tribunal, which would be the bodies responsible for resolving the land claims, mainly those arising from legal titles that have been channelled down institutional avenues, by means of four groups identified in the report, according to the status of the claim. The Reparation Agency would preferably carry out its task through land reparations. Where land is not available or the communities do not consider it adequate, alternative forms of redress may be applied. To this end, a one-off budget of USD 4 billion (approx. EUR 3.4 billion) was proposed for its resolution.

One of the main gaps in the proposal, from a rights-based perspective, is the fact that the CPE's recommendations do not consider recognition or reparation for the Mapuche people's claims to traditionally occupied lands, apart from in the exceptional case geographically limited to the provinces of Arauco and Malleco. Within this framework, the processing of such claims by the Arbitration Tribunal is limited in those municipalities where the titles granted by the state represent less than 4% of the municipal area. In addition, a time limit was established (five years from establishment of the Court in which to submit reparation claims) for processing such claims, a circumstance that does not resolve the Mapuche people's primary land claim.

Furthermore, the recommendations maintain the market as the central mechanism for addressing these claims, without using the expropriation mechanism provided for in the current Constitution. Its use for these purposes could have avoided the speculation that has characterized the land market in the area, identified as a critical factor in the current public policy on the matter. Most worryingly, it reduces the potential for subsequent land claims by Mapuche organizations in terms of procedure, time and budget.

Another issue of concern is the fact that the CPE's recommendations propose a partial amendment to the Statute for the Protection of Indigenous Lands, allowing the term of leases on Indigenous lands (Article 13 of Law 19.253) to be extended from 5 to 25 years, which has raised serious questions from the Mapuche organization.

These measures were submitted to an Indigenous consultation process⁶ launched by the government, which was questioned by various Mapuche organizations from the four regions consulted. There has been widespread opposition,⁷ on the one hand, to the scope of the measures and, on the other, to the way in which the prior consultation process was carried out. Some organizations attended the first meetings to express their rejection. Others even prevented them from taking place. Faced with such opposition, the government decided to suspend the process,⁸ arguing that the suspension would allow for more in-depth territorial dialogues to take place before resuming the consultation. This has not, however, borne fruit, and the suspension will remain in place until at least the start of 2026.

The work of the CPE represented an historic opportunity to create conditions that would ensure qualitative and quantitative progress towards putting together structural responses that could reconstruct the social balance and peaceful coexistence of all actors who inhabit the regions that make up the historic territory of the Mapuche People. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a rights-based approach and the process's lack of proximity to the Mapuche organizations, this historic opportunity is fading.

The national political scenario is not auspicious for the rights of Indigenous Peoples or, in particular, for the Mapuche people. The far-right president-elect José Antonio Kast is proposing regressive measures in terms of rights, making threats towards the regulatory bodies that rec-

ognize these rights, such as the Lafkenche Law, as well as the potential implementation of the proposals of the CPE.

Chile faces the challenge of meeting its international commitments to conservation and Indigenous rights

The implementation of the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Service (SBAP), the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP) and the updating of the National Biodiversity Strategy (ENB) will only mark a turning point in conservation policies in Chile if it is aligned with the rights and international standards of Indigenous Peoples.

Chile faces significant challenges in meeting its international commitments on biodiversity conservation and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly those derived from the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), adopted in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This agreement explicitly recognizes the key role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in conservation, especially through targets such as Target 3, which recognizes the importance and contributions of Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) to conservation, and Target 22, which requires ensuring their full, effective and equitable participation in decision-making.

This scenario takes on special relevance considering that, at the end of February, the States Parties must report on their progress in implementing the KMGBF, reports that will be presented and evaluated at the next CBD COP17, scheduled for October 2026. In this context, the current year is critical for observing whether Chile is effectively moving in the right direction towards fulfilling its international commitments, particularly with regard to respecting and guaranteeing the rights of Indigenous Peoples in conservation policies.

The implementation of the new law creating the SBACP and the SNAP, and updating the National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS), is a key opportunity to advance towards these commitments. Implementation alone, however, is not enough. It will be crucial that these processes are implemented from a rights-based conservation approach, overcoming

historical practices that have affected the rights of Indigenous Peoples and limited the recognition of their territories and their own systems of governance.

As part of the implementation of the SBAP, a process of Indigenous consultation took place⁹ in 2024 and 2025 on matters to be regulated in future regulations on protected areas and priority sites. This process is especially relevant given that the law allows, among other things, for the creation of Indigenous Peoples' Conservation Areas (Article 62), both terrestrial and marine, and expressly including the Marine Coastal Areas of Indigenous Peoples (ECMPO, Law 20.249). The consultation concluded in December 2025 with a national dialogue; however, to date, the final text of the regulations has not been made known. The way in which the proposals and observations of Indigenous Peoples are incorporated into the regulation governing the system and priority sites will be a key indicator for assessing the consistency of the new institutional framework with international human rights standards.

At the same time, the Ministry of the Environment launched a public consultation process as part of the updating of the NBS. Although this process allowed for comments and contributions from different stakeholders, no institutional feedback has been made public to date and nor is there any known updated version of the strategy. This lack of information generates uncertainty regarding the effective integration of the contributions received and the incorporation of a rights-based approach into a key instrument for the implementation of the KMGBF.

Chile is thus at a decisive moment in demonstrating whether it will be able to meet the challenges of its international commitments regarding conservation and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Environmental organizations have already raised the alarm about the uncertainty generated by the arrival in government of President-elect Kast in March 2026¹⁰ who, like other actors in his sector, promotes a vision that pits development against nature conservation. The way in which the SBAP, the SNAP and the NBS are implemented will make it possible to assess whether the country is moving towards a conservation policy that is consistent with international standards and capable of simultaneously contributing to biodiversity protection, environmental justice and effective respect for the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Attempts to amend the Law on Marine Coastal Areas of Indigenous Peoples and threats to defenders of the sea

Law No. 20.249, enacted and in force since 2008 and known as the “Lafkenche Law” is one of the main instruments for recognizing the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples in Chile in the marine coastal area. Through the creation of ECMPO, this legislation safeguards the customary use of the coastline by Indigenous communities, recognizing their spiritual, economic and cultural relationship with the sea and strengthening their own forms of local, inclusive and sustainable governance. In a context historically marked by the privatization of the coastline and a lack of legal recognition of the presence and specific cultural features of Indigenous Peoples in their relationship with the sea, the ECMPO have enabled progress in achieving internationally recognized Indigenous rights while operating as a mechanism of domestic law for the delimitation of Indigenous territories on the coastline. Eighteen years after its entry into force, this legislation has thus been increasingly and intersectionally used by various Indigenous Peoples in Chile, extending not only to the Mapuche-Lafkenche people, who were the protagonists of its development, but also to the Mapuche-Williche, Chango, Diaguita, Kawésqar and Yagán.

Nevertheless, due to the growing number of ECMPOs decreed and in process, as well as the increase in areas requested, over the last few years –and particularly in 2025– the Lafkenche Law has faced a particularly adverse scenario, resulting in strong opposition from certain public and private actors. This has manifested in aggressive disinformation campaigns, promoted mainly by business sectors –especially the salmon industry– and related political authorities, aimed at delegitimizing the ECMPO as an “abusive” regulation and an obstacle to development and investment. It has led to the emergence of openly discriminatory narratives that falsely pit Indigenous Peoples against other sectors, such as artisanal fishing.¹¹ As a result of the vote and the Chilean state’s decision to reject recent ECMPO applications, there has been a proliferation and intensification, at national and local level, of hate speech and racist rhetoric¹² –even in institutional decision-making spaces¹³ – against ECMPOs and the Indigenous communities that have

applied for them, which has even resulted in threats and other forms of intimidation against their leaders and representatives in their role as territorial defenders.^{14, 15}

Against this backdrop of hostility and racial discrimination, recent legislative attempts to amend the Lafkenche Law are particularly serious, as they have all been tabled and processed without prior Indigenous consultation under the terms established in ILO Convention 169, and in open contravention of the principle of non-regression in human rights. There are four bills, in particular going through National Congress –one of which made substantial progress during 2025¹⁶ – which, under the pretext of “improving” the implementation of Law No. 20.249, seek to limit its applicability and weaken the protection of ECMPOs and Indigenous customary uses in relation to other economic activities. It should be noted that amending the Lafkenche Law has found explicit support in statements by president-elect José Antonio Kast, who in July 2025 described ECMPOs as a “tool for political blackmail”, publicly stating his intention to “veto all those permits that are requested under the Lafkenche Law”.¹⁷

The expansion of the lithium industry in the salt flats of Andean peoples

The rapid development of the lithium industry in Chile's high Andean salt flats continues to have an impact on the rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Andes. This is a consequence of the National Lithium Strategy promoted by the current government, which encourages the development of lithium, promotes the participation of the state in its exploitation through its copper company, Codelco, and encourages the participation of foreign investors.

In the case of the Lickanantay or Atacameño people, in 2025 the state launched a process of Indigenous consultation on the operation and lease contracts signed with the Production Development Corporation (CORFO) to enable Codelco's involvement in the exploitation of the Salar de Atacama. This was the result of a partnership agreement between this company and the private company SQM, of Chilean and Chinese capital, planned for the periods 2025-2030 and 2031-2060.

This agreement will enable both companies to develop a large-scale joint project (Salar Futuro) until 2060, with an annual production of up to 300,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate. This is in circumstances where the current exploitation of lithium has had a major impact on the salt flat aquifers, severely affecting agriculture and livestock farming, which are ancestral activities of the Atacameño communities.¹⁸

The aforementioned consultation process was challenged in court by the Atacameño communities, particularly due to the limited time-frame for its implementation, the consultation methodology, and the exclusion from this consultation of a large part of the clauses (75%) of the agreement between CORFO and Codelco for lithium exploitation. These clauses cover matters such as control of the operating company, benefit sharing mechanisms, and the participation of Indigenous communities in the company's future decisions.¹⁹

On top of this are further three lithium mining projects undergoing environmental assessment in Salar de Maricunga, in the territory of the Colla people: the Paloma project, promoted by Codelco together with Australia's Rio Tinto; the Sales de Maricunga project, promoted by Simco Lithium, a Chilean-Taiwanese company; and the Salares Altoandinos project, promoted by the state-owned ENAMI and Rio Tinto. During the year, Indigenous consultation processes also took place for Special Lithium Operation Contracts (CEOLs) in the six salt flats in the regions of Tarapacá, Antofagasta and Atacama.

A common feature of these consultation processes is the proposal to share the benefits obtained from such projects, which distorts the communities' ability to express –or not– their Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

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Colombia



Colombia is home to some 115 Indigenous Peoples of diverse origins and linguistic and cultural traditions. They live spread throughout the country on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, in the Amazon, the Orinoco savannahs and the Andean areas. According to official projections,¹ in 2025 the total Indigenous population stood at 2,500,000 people, of which approximately 54.9% live in 935 legalized collective territories or reserves. The rest of the population is located in urban centres or scattered across rural areas. In addition to Indigenous Peoples, the Colombian Constitution and laws also recognize Afro-descendant communities, the Raizal communities of the islands, the Palenqueros of the Caribbean and the Roma people as collective subjects of rights.

Breaking the cycle of armed conflict in Colombia

The forms of social and political organization of Colombia's Indigenous Peoples are as diverse as their habitats, territories, languages and authorities. The 115 officially recognized peoples in the country have the power to govern their territories under the Political Constitution and other regulations that confirm their collective rights to own their lands, appoint their authorities, decide on their resources and choose the development model they consider viable to guarantee the reproduction of their societies and cultures for future generations.

Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities and, in general, peasants living in rural areas have, however, been disproportionately affected by the Colombian armed conflict, which evolved from a dispute between the dominant oligarchies and insurgent groups in the second half of the 20th century into something altogether more complex with actions on the part of paramilitary groups associated with state forces from the 1990s on. This confrontation spread and deepened its impacts alongside the struggle for control of territories and illegal economic routes –especially for drug trafficking– but also due to the covert involvement of political and economic sectors linked to the war.

The territorial presence of non-state armed groups and criminal organizations and their violent strategies of social control continue to impact the civilian population and generate risks for governance in the territories (...) This violence disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants, grassroots organizational processes and peasant communities. OHCHR has observed that non-state armed groups and criminal organizations continue to attempt to destroy the social fabric, co-opt, supplant and/or eliminate organizations with a historical presence in the territories, such as indigenous authorities, community councils and directors of Community Action Boards, and promote the creation of new organizations to defend their interests. In some cases, they seek to instrumentalize the population (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, 2025).

At the centre or on the margins of the conflict, the rights recognized to Indigenous Peoples to determine their destiny, govern their territories and live in peace have thus been undermined by decades of violence that refuses to relent despite advances in the recognition of collective rights, and recurring initiatives for dialogue and negotiation with the actors of the war and its sponsors.

The human rights situation at the start of the 21st century

The joy at the recognition of the multicultural nature of the Nation and the comprehensive collective rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia with the enactment of the 1991 Constitution was followed by dismay over the interrupted series of structural and systematic violations of their human rights, marked by the expansion of the internal armed conflict, territorial dispossession and state failures. The escalation of violence that characterized the 1990s and 2000s –including massacres, forced displacement, child recruitment, land dispossession and violations of international humanitarian law on the part of multiple armed actors– placed entire communities at risk of physical and cultural extermination.

In response to this situation of violence and state failure to provide guarantees, the Constitutional Court issued Ruling T-025 of 2004² and Follow-up Order 004 of 2009,³ marking a milestone in Colombian jurisprudence by recognizing and highlighting these violations and declaring a State of Unconstitutionality. Throughout these rulings and orders, the Court documented how the armed conflict and its underlying factors constituted an imminent threat to 33 peoples who were at risk of physical and cultural extermination. It highlighted the fact that forced displacement by armed actors not only meant the loss of homes and territories but also had a profound impact on collective rights, such as cultural identity. It identified disruptions in traditional food patterns, the dismantling of traditional medicine systems, the differentiated risks and impacts on women and children, and the difficulty for younger generations in maintaining cultural continuity. The impact on the social and cultural fabric was analysed not only as a collateral effect of the conflict but as a specific form of violation of the right to identity and to physical and cultural existence.

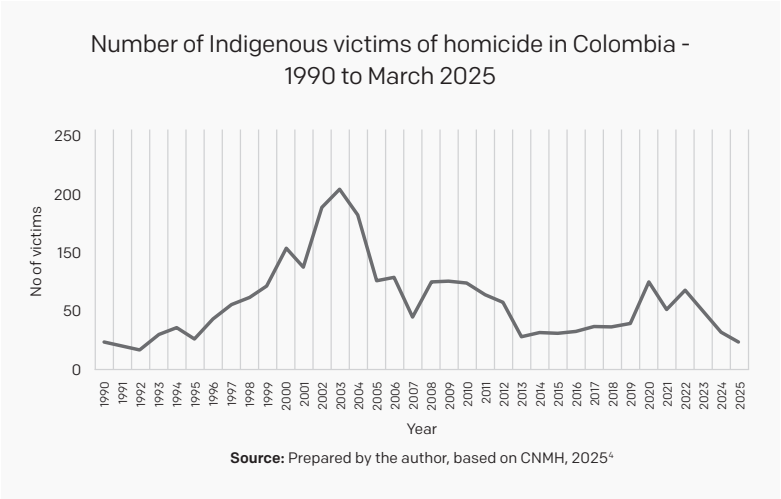
All those who have taken part in this armed conflict –mainly guerrilla and paramilitary groups but also, on occasions, clearly identified units and members of the security forces, as well as criminal groups linked to different aspects of the internal conflict– are participating in a complex pattern of warfare which, having been introduced by force of arms into the ancestral territories of some of the Indigenous Peoples that inhabit the country, has become a certain and imminent danger to their very existence, to their individual processes of ethnic and cultural consolidation, and to the effective enjoyment of the fundamental individual and collective rights of their members (Constitutional Court, 2009).

For their part, state institutions were singled out in these rulings for their systematic indifference in failing to fulfil their duty of protection in a timely and proper manner, thus exacerbating patterns of structural discrimination and marginalization. The Court characterized the state's actions to assist displaced communities as insufficient, belated and lacking a differentiated approach that could respond to the specific realities

of Indigenous Peoples. Some years later, in Follow-up Order 266 of 2017, the Court ruled that, despite certain regulatory advances, institutional barriers and practices persisted that were preventing the so-called “unconstitutional state of affairs” from being overcome with respect of ethnic victims, and that the state had failed to counteract the violations and their differential effects or to comprehensively address the consequences of displacement and violence, which continued to severely violate the collective rights to autonomy, territory and cultural identity.

The persistence of conflict over Indigenous territories

Today, in the context of active armed conflict in several territories, human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples continue to claim victims, although there has been a decline in lethal violence in recent years. According to data from the National Centre for Historical Memory (CNMH), between 1990 and March 2025, 2,538 Indigenous people were killed in the armed conflict –88.6% of them men–, with a record 191 victims in 2003.



Overall, the available data suggest that although high levels of violence and various risks such as containment, displacement and threats persist, homicide indicators showed a slight downward trend between 2023 and 2025, especially in Indigenous territories located in the departments of Cauca, Nariño, La Guajira, Antioquia, Cesar and Chocó.

These regions are still strategic corridors for drug trafficking and natural resource exploitation (minerals, land, and illicit trade routes) with a prolonged presence of multiple armed actors (paramilitaries, dissidents⁵ and criminal gangs) who continue to fight for territorial control. The ferocity of this confrontation continues to result in forced displacement, murders of leaders, containment and loss of control over Indigenous territories.

In the same vein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)⁶ has noted a decrease in some multiple homicides, attributable to temporary cessations in hostilities, regional dialogues and targeted institutional presence, even though threats, containment and forced displacements persist in Indigenous communities.

Recognition and protection of territories

Colombia's Indigenous Peoples have suffered historical and systematic dispossession of their territories, a situation that became even worse at the height of the armed conflict when massive forced displacements and occupations took place, encouraging the dispossession of land in rural areas, including in favour of companies and individuals. The usurpation of rural lands in parallel with the rise of the armed conflict is being documented by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a court created at the behest of the Final Peace Agreement signed between the state and the former FARC-EP guerrillas.

[Criminal Patterns favouring particular economic interests]. This category includes acts that are motivated by control of economic interests in the territory, its wealth and the seizure of land from rural inhabitants. A significant proportion of the crimes related to the counterinsurgency served the economic interests of legal and illegal actors by creating the conditions

*for the extraction of natural resources, the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the incorporation of new lands into the market (JEP, n.d.).*⁷

The process of territorial dispossession has nonetheless been partially reversed by the current government. According to official information, in the last three years –up to October 2025– the National Land Agency intervened and advanced processes of constitution, expansion, titling and regularization of more than one million hectares (1,392,473.7 hectares), thus contributing to a consolidation of the collective territories of Indigenous Peoples. This process guarantees legal certainty of ownership, clarifies the legal validity of titles of colonial or republican origin, and regularizes properties to make them imprescriptible and inalienable, thus strengthening the collective and integral nature of these territories according to the current legal frameworks.

Although administrative difficulties and territorial conflicts still exist, these actions represent an institutional paradigm shift in guaranteeing territorial rights, historical reparation and protection of Indigenous Peoples' ways of life in the country.

Progress in the governance of Indigenous territories

With regard to the governance of collective territories as a prerequisite for the legal and existential security of peoples, significant progress could be noted according to the assessment by the Organization of American States (OAS) Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia.⁸

The issuing of Decree 1,275 of 2024, recognizing Indigenous Peoples as environmental authorities in their reserves, and Decree 488 of 2025, regulating the formation of Indigenous Territorial Entities (ETI), represent a fundamental legal advance in realizing the right to autonomy and self-government. By directly strengthening Indigenous environmental governance and promoting the autonomous management of public resources, these regulations transfer real decision-making powers to the communities, enabling them to exercise effective con-

trol over their territories according to their own regulatory systems. This structural recognition is a momentous step towards reversing historical exclusions, although its full implementation still faces the challenge of harmonization with institutions and the ordinary legal system to make this autonomy effective.

In a similar vein, the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS) noted that, through Ruling T-106 of 2025, the Constitutional Court consolidated this prospect of self-determination by ordering the specific protection of threatened Indigenous authorities and, in a paradigmatic manner, endorsing the constitution of the ETI *Macroterritorio de Jaguares de Yuruparí*. The creation of this entity, which covers nearly 30 peoples in an area of approximately 8 million hectares (equivalent to 16.5% of the Colombian Amazon), is not only a physical protection measure: it is the concrete recognition of an Indigenous government unit with jurisdiction over a vast ancestral territory. This judicial act sets a crucial precedent by validating large-scale models of territorial autonomy where peoples can exercise their own forms of administration, justice and conservation, thus strengthening their capacity to comprehensively defend their cultures and ecosystems.

Inclusion in peace building

Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Agreement with the FARC

Despite setbacks and opposition to its implementation, Indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations succeeded in ensuring that the Peace Agreement signed in 2016 included an Ethnic Chapter, which constituted a legal and political innovation of historic significance by explicitly and comprehensively recognizing that the construction of a stable and lasting peace in Colombia must be pluralistic and differentiated. Its importance lies in the fact that it permeates the implementation of the entire Agreement, establishing an obligation to design and implement actions and measures with the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the ethnic peoples.

In essence, the chapter enshrined principles such as special protection for collective territories, peoples at risk of physical and cultural extermination, a guarantee of non-repetition of the disproportionate

violence they had suffered, and the creation of implementation and follow-up mechanisms, such as the Special High-Level Instance for Ethnic Peoples (IEANPE). This mechanism was designed to ensure participation with a differential approach and it operates as the main contact for and consultant to the Monitoring, Promotion and Verification Commission for the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVI) – a joint body between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP – to guarantee the rights and participation of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities in the implementation of the Agreement.

It is clear, however, that following the halt in the implementation of the Peace Agreement during the four years of Iván Duque's government, the Ethnic Chapter also suffered setbacks that prevented its full implementation, which is why its first fruits are only now beginning to be seen in some regions such as the Chocó:

The Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Agreement represents a historic recognition of the rights of Colombia's Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities. It establishes concrete measures to guarantee the protection of their ancestral territories, the preservation of their cultures and their active participation in peace building. However, it continues to be one of the areas that is lagging behind in its implementation, and which requires urgent efforts to ensure its progress. This exercise in the Chocó not only seeks to advance the implementation of the Ethnic Chapter but also aims to serve as a replicable model for other regions of the country. The dynamics developed demonstrate that collaboration between national, territorial and international authorities can generate concrete and sustainable solutions to close the historical gaps that affect ethnic peoples (IEANPE, 2025).⁹

Territorial peace councils

The territorial peace councils were created after the signing of the Peace Agreement with the aim of encouraging the active participation of citizens and communities in building peace and coexistence from the territories.¹⁰

In practice, however, this participation is not always uniform nor is it operational in all municipalities. In the case of Indigenous Peo-

ples, participation is marginal although, in some cases, the communities themselves have promoted the creation of these councils at their own initiative (as documented in community experiences in Jambaló, Cauca), bringing together traditional authorities, victims, community leaders and municipal authorities to discuss reparations, dialogue and local peace. The inclusion of Indigenous people in these councils also responds to legal and constitutional mandates for political participation and prior consultation, although their implementation depends on the will of the municipality and the recognition of their own authorities, having to overcome political obstacles and effective recognition due to the persistence of the conflict and institutional barriers.

The challenges to achieving peace

Colombian Indigenous communities have not only played a significant role as victims of the armed conflict: they have always shown themselves to be territorial forces willing to contribute to peacebuilding. Even so, it is undeniable that there is a critical gap between the rules, the formal design of peace mechanisms, and their effective territorial and cultural implementation. For peace to be stable and lasting, it is not only necessary to guarantee the will of the actors in the conflict and of the national and territorial governments but it is also imperative to move from a consultative form of participation to a binding and decision-making one that guarantees the presence and effective voice of Indigenous women, traditional authorities and community sectors in all spaces designed and created for peace.

In addition, as noted by MAPP/OAS in its report on the peace process, in order to continue peacebuilding in Colombia, despite its domestic and foreign adversaries, there remains a need to develop mechanisms for reparations to victims; measures for reintegration into civilian life in collective territories; the possible application of the Special Indigenous Jurisdiction to members of armed groups; and the incorporation of community methods for conflict resolution (MAPP/OEA, 2025).

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Costa Rica



The eight Indigenous Peoples who inhabit the country make up 2.4% of the population. Seven of them are of Chibchense origin: Huetar (in Quitirrisí and Zapatón), Maleku (in Guatuso), Bribri (in Salitre, Cabagra, Talamanca Bribri and Këköldi), Cabécar (in Alto Chirripó, Tayni, Talamanca Cabécar, Telire and China Kichá, Bajo Chirripó, Nairi Awari and Ujarrás), Brunca (in Boruca and Curré), Ngöbe (in Abrojos Montezuma, Coto Brus and Conte Burica, Alto de San Antonio and Osa) and Brörán (in Térraba). The eighth, of Mesoamerican origin, is the Chorotega in Matambú. According to the 2010 National Census, just over 100,000 people identified as Indigenous in the country.¹

Although 7% of the national territory (3,344 km²) is occupied by 24 Indigenous territories, a large part has been invaded by non-indigenous occupants: 52.3% of the Bribri area in Këköldi, 53.1% in Boruca (Brunca territory), 56.4% in Térraba (Brörán people), 58.7% in Guatuso (Maleku people) and up to 88.4% in Zapatón (Huetar territory).²

In Costa Rica, 20% of the general population lives below the poverty line but, in the case of Indigenous Peoples, the figures are alarming: Cabécar, 94.3%; Ngöbe, 87%; Brörán, 85.0%; Bribri, 70.8%; Brunca, 60.7%; Maleku, 44.3%; Chorotega, 35.5%; and Huetar, 34.2%.³

Costa Rica ratified ILO Convention 169 in 1993 and incorporated recognition of its multicultural character into the Political Constitution of the Republic. Even so, in 2021, the then Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples indicated that, “Although article 1 of the Constitution, amended in 2015, stipulates that Costa Rica is a multi-ethnic and multicultural State, it does not recognize the existence of the indigenous peoples”.⁴

Indigenous Law 6,172 of 1977 recognized Indigenous organizations and established the legal status of Indigenous Peoples, along with mechanisms to prevent the appropriation of land by non-indigenous persons, and procedures and funds for expropriation and compensation. However, this law remained unimplemented until December 2023 and, since then, there have been only timid attempts to recover territories, without respecting the spirit of the Indigenous Law or Indigenous

power structures.⁵ On the contrary, the state has tolerated the invasion and dispossession of Indigenous lands by landowners and local politicians. Indigenous organizations have been demanding the restoration of their lands for decades. The slow pace of studies and the lack of political will to address the problem have led to the emergence of a land recovery movement that has been evicting illegal occupants since 2011.

A regulation subsequent to the Indigenous Law imposed a concept alien to Indigenous traditional power structures, the Indigenous Integral Development Associations (ADII). These are supervised by the National Directorate for Community Development, an entity that lacks the capacity to understand Indigenous rights and does not have an intercultural approach. UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Francisco Calí Tzay, considered that “as imposed State institutions that report to the executive branch, [they] are not suited to guaranteeing representation for Indigenous Peoples, which have their own system of government.”⁶

The Indigenous organizations that enjoy legitimacy and act in defence of their rights include the National Indigenous Roundtable of Costa Rica, the National Front of Indigenous Peoples (FRENAPI), the Bribri-Cabécar Indigenous Network, the Ngöbe Association of the Pacific, the Regional Aboriginal Association of Dikes, the National Forum of Indigenous Women, the Inter-University Indigenous Movement, and the South-South Struggle Coordination (CLSS), a group of Indigenous Peoples’ organizations and peasant associations.

More than three decades waiting for the Indigenous Peoples’ Autonomous Development Law

The year 2025 brought no major changes in the Indigenous Peoples’ situation of socio-economic exclusion, with constant violations of their right to self-determination and numerous barriers faced in accessing justice.⁷

The draft Law on the Autonomous Development of Indigenous Peoples was published in the Official Gazette in 1994. By 2025, 31 years had passed since Parliament refused to discuss it and the executive branch failed to give it priority. In addition, there is still strong racist resistance among the private sector and conservative political parties, which do not accept a concept of territory that does not consider land as a commodity.

Imposition of forms of organization alien to Indigenous systems

As noted above, the state continues to violate the 1977 Indigenous Law and Convention 169 by imposing a form of organization on Indigenous territories: the Integral Development Associations (ADI). Many of these are controlled by non-indigenous people linked to absentee landowners or other invaders of Indigenous territories. In its statement of 26 February, the National Front of Indigenous Peoples (FRENAPI) denounced the seizure of authority within the ADI of the Cabécar Territory of Ujarrás, whose president is not a member of the Cabécar people nor recognized by any ancestral clan. In this regard, it stated: “The seizure of authority by Nelson Zúñiga in Ujarrás renders its actions null and void and even constitutes crimes with the complicity and support of the state, for example, the National Directorate for Community Development.”⁸

Persistent lack of access to justice for Indigenous Peoples

Given the historical impunity enjoyed by the murderers of Indigenous Peoples in a country that claims to be a model in terms of human rights, the Annual Report of the Ombudsman's Office repeated that the eight Indigenous Peoples of Costa Rica face a “historical lag in addressing structural barriers (...), as well as limitations on the full enjoyment of rights”.⁹ In August 2024, the Ombudsman's Office therefore held a Forum on Access to Justice for Indigenous Peoples in Costa Rica with the

aim of “creating a participatory space involving representatives of Indigenous Peoples, public institutions and human rights defenders”. The forum, which featured the distinguished participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Calí Tzay, “sought to highlight and reflect on the barriers and acts of discrimination that these populations face in accessing justice due to institutional omissions”.¹⁰

The Special Rapporteur emphasized the main barriers to accessing justice facing Indigenous Peoples, as observed during his official visit to Costa Rica in December 2021:

- *Right to land*: this is the most violated right in the country. Although Costa Rica has highly advanced legislation, it is rarely implemented due to an ignorance of the regulatory framework and a lack of political will on the part of state institutions. This situation causes delays in land titling and land consolidation, as well as delays in recovery due to the judicialization of procedures.
- *Actions of the National Children's Trust*: it uproots children from their culture, which is why it was recommended that it review its procedures.
- *Environmental protection*: the right to free self-determination over land and its resources must be respected.
- *Access to justice*: Indigenous Peoples distrust the local justice system due to: a lack of investigation of individual cases; a requirement for evidence that is not subsequently assessed adequately; and the ineffectiveness of internal mechanisms for sanctioning the actions of court officers. Furthermore, the judicial service has no gender perspective, and its staff are unaware of international standards on Indigenous rights. Finally, cultural expertise is used inappropriately, and Indigenous people are not consulted about their culture.

The forum concluded with Indigenous leaders identifying the main problems and barriers facing them in asserting their rights as Costa Rican Indigenous Peoples.¹¹

Insecurity for Indigenous defenders of the territory

In August 2025, an urgent report was submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and alerts were sent out to individuals, organizations and media outlets in solidarity, documenting the serious and imminent risk facing the Brörán elder, Pablo Sibar, of the Térraba Territory.¹² The life of the long-standing Indigenous rights defender was in grave danger, resulting in extreme concern and the fear of reliving another tragic chapter in the struggle for Indigenous rights in Costa Rica. Sibar, a beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the IACHR, has experienced several acts of violence in recent years:

Due to his role as a traditional authority and defender of the collective rights of his people, he has been the target of repeated threats, direct attacks against his physical integrity by non-state actors, plus a systematic environment of discrimination, both from the ADI of Térraba and various state authorities.¹³

In April 2015, the IACHR granted precautionary measures¹⁴ in favour of the Bribri people of Salitre and the Brörán people of Térraba. In that resolution, the IACHR recognized the risk faced by the beneficiaries due to their work of defending the territory and human rights. The precautionary measures remain in force to date but have not yet been implemented, despite the fact that two people involved in the struggle for land reform and recovery, Indigenous leaders from Salitre and Térraba, were murdered in 2019 and 2020.¹⁵

Pablo Sibar has owned a recovered farm in the Térraba Territory for 13 years, 10 hectares devoted to environmental conservation and community water management. On 7 August 2025, the ADI of Térraba issued a fraudulent certification to legitimize the occupation of his farm by two non-indigenous people who are not listed in the Brörán Database maintained by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. On Sunday 10 August, two non-indigenous individuals invaded Sibar's farm, claiming to have the support of the ADI. Called to the site, the police refused to evict the usurpers. On 11 August, Pablo Sibar went to the Buenos Aires Public Prosecutor's Office to report the ADI for issuing the illegal certi-

cation and for trespass but his complaint was not admitted, and he was advised to go through the ordinary agrarian process. “He went to the Agrarian Court to file a lawsuit, where he was informed that the usurper had already filed a lawsuit against him and that there were no public defenders available in Buenos Aires.”¹⁶ Amidst the refusal of the police, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Agrarian Court to uphold the rights of the Brörán Indigenous people, a spontaneous movement of human rights activists, people from state universities and journalists sprang up, sending out warning messages and publishing articles denouncing the serious and imminent risk.

For several years now, Mr. Sibar's opposition to the ADI in Térraba “has been accompanied by public denunciations and active monitoring of acts of corruption, administrative irregularities and decisions contrary to the collective rights of the Brörán people. This legitimate exercise of defence has provoked increasingly serious reprisals, violating both his individual rights and the Indigenous institutions protected by international law.”¹⁷ Indigenous leaders and people involved in land recovery continue to be threatened. In this regard, the Ombudsman's Office noted that “the State has not yet guaranteed an effective response and has warned of escalating violence in territories such as China Kichá and Cabagra, where the lives of defenders continue to be at risk”.¹⁸ One paragraph of the FRENAPI press release clearly analyses the Indigenous movement's lack of access to justice and inability to live in peace:¹⁹

Five years after the murder of Jehry Rivera (24 February 2020), a Brörán from Térraba, and six years after the murder of Uniwak Sergio Rojas (18 March 2019), a Bribri from Salitre, both murders remain unpunished. The causes and those responsible for these crimes remain unchanged: land grabbing by non-indigenous aggressors, discrimination, injustice, violence, and abandonment and indifference on the part of the state and government.

In 2025, land usurpers and their hitmen continued to act with impunity, threatening and murdering, without the state taking measures capable of ending this structural problem. As previously written in these pages, no changes have been observed in the structural causes of the sys-

temic exclusion of the Indigenous Peoples of Costa Rica. In particular, “those related to territorial rights and self-determination remain unresolved, and there is still resistance within institutions and the judicial system to addressing them from a rights-based perspective”.²⁰ Unfortunately, no positive change is in sight for 2026, even with the election of a new government at the start of the year.

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13. Informe de alerta de situación de riesgo para el defensor indígena, Pablo Sibar Sibar, beneficiario de la Medida Cautelar MC 321/12 CIDH (11 August 2025)
 14. On 30 April 2015, in response to a request submitted by Mr Pablo Sibar Sibar, Mr Sergio Rojas Ortiz and other Indigenous defenders from the territories of Salitre and Térraba, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued Resolution 16/15 granting Precautionary Measure No. 321/12 in favour of the Bribri peoples of Salitre and Brörán (Teribe) of Térraba.
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Ecuador



According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census, the current population of Ecuador is 17,867,244. There are 14 Indigenous nationalities in the country, totalling 1,301,887 people, who are grouped into a set of local, regional and national organizations representing 7.7% of the total population. The Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities live mainly in the highlands (68.20%), followed by the Amazon (24.06%) while only 7.56% are found on the coast. The following Indigenous nationalities were included in the 2022 Census for self-identification purposes: Tsáchila, Chachi, Epera, Awa, Kichwa, Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Cofán, Siona, Secoya, Zápara, Andoa and Waorani. The Kichwa nationality makes up the highest percentage (85.87%) and includes nearly 800,000 people nationwide. Despite the low percentages of most of the other nationalities, all have equal importance within the context of a Plurinational State.¹ In the highland provinces, –such as Tungurahua, Chimborazo, Cotopaxi or Pichincha–, and in the Amazonian provinces of Napo, Pastaza and Morona Santiago, there is also a significant percentage of Indigenous people living in rural areas, ranging from 50,000 to 80,000 inhabitants. To date, and despite more than 17 years of the Constitution being in force and almost three decades since ILO Convention 169 was ratified by the country, there are still no specific or clear public policies to prevent and neutralize the risk of disappearance of these ancestral peoples.

Ecuador's situation in 2025 was marked by the consolidation of a model of political domination based on militarization and the use of a "state of war" as government strategy. The "internal war", formally justified as a response to criminal violence, actually functioned more as an ideological device for concentrating power than as an effective security policy: the fabrication of an "internal enemy" and the administration of "wartime" politics simply normalized violence and restricted freedoms.²

On the socioeconomic front, the country suffered a 2.3% contraction in GDP in 2024 alongside a poverty rate of 31.9%, job insecurity and

a persistent energy crisis.³ The State's response was to prioritize external debt and welfare policies while deepening the country's dependence on the extractive industry. The attempt to grant the Campo Sacha concession to foreign companies without a tender process –ultimately halted by public outrage– highlighted the neoliberal orientation of Daniel Noboa's government.⁴

On the political front, Noboa's re-election in April 2025 consolidated a leadership based on an "iron fist" narrative and the construction of a punitive State. Militarization was reinforced after the 2024 constitutional referendum, which enabled the Armed Forces to participate in police tasks without the need for a state of emergency. This shift was accompanied by reports of forced disappearances and youth murders, such as the case of the four children from Malvinas de Guayaquil, thus exposing a civilian-military pact for impunity.⁵

Alongside this, Indigenous and environmental movements denounced the State's intimidation, the freezing of accounts and an expansion of surveillance in the context of the consultation to reframe the ecological nature of the 2008 Constitution, interpreted as an attempt to legitimize extractivism under the guise of democracy. Although the referendum was rejected in November, institutional polarization persisted, reflecting a structural contradiction between eco-constitutional discourse and extractive practice, as pointed out by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and Pachakutik.⁶

Protection of the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples and condemnation by the IACHR

In the heart of Yasuní, the Tagaeri and Taromenane Indigenous Peoples represent one of the most radical expressions of the right to self-determination: a collective decision to live in voluntary isolation, outside national society and its extractive economies. Their survival has, however, been marked by an historically tense relationship, often openly violated by the Ecuadorian State.

These peoples, who inhabit the Ecuadorian Amazon and share ancestral territory with the Waorani nationality, face a situation of extreme vulnerability due to oil expansion, internal colonization, illegal logging

and the opening of roads in and around the Tagaeri-Taromenane Intangible Zone (ITZT). Various studies have warned that the risk of forced encounters, lethal violence and disease transmission is not accidental but the structural result of an extractive model that is advancing over territories in which isolation is a strategy for collective survival.⁷

This reality was examined by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (I/A Court HR) which, in September 2024, issued –and formally notified in 2025– a landmark ruling in the case of *The Tagaeri and Taromenane Indigenous Peoples v. Ecuador*⁸ The Court found the State responsible for violating their rights to life, territory, health, cultural identity, self-determination and a healthy environment⁹ by failing to guarantee effective protection from extractive activities and the incursion of third-party invaders, despite being aware of the extreme risks faced by these peoples.¹⁰

The ruling highlights the impact of oil exploitation in blocks 31 and 43, where fiscal financing has taken priority over the principle of territorial integrity. This decision reveals a structural tension between the protection of the Amazon and an extractivist economic model sustained by State and private interests.

The ruling also questions other external initiatives, such as the contact promoted by the evangelical foundation “Come to the Rainforest”, an organization that implements practices prohibited by the Ecuadorian Constitution and international standards as they constitute a risk of ethnocide.¹¹ In response, the Court ordered the State to expand the protection zones, strengthen monitoring, train public officials and adopt a coherent and strict “no contact” policy.

In the Waorani territory, organizations such as Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador (NAWE) have documented the sustained increase in socio-environmental pressures –illegal routes, armed presence and covert extractive activities– affecting the corridors along which isolated peoples move, confirming that the threat is daily and cumulative.¹²

Beyond the legal record, the ruling constitutes a political milestone. It reignites the debate on the real limits of the State in the face of Amazonian extractivism and reinforces a central premise for the Indigenous movement: it is not just a question of environmental impacts but one of the physical and cultural survival of ancestral and culturally-sensitive peoples whose existence depends on the State fulfilling, without delay or shortcuts, its basic obligation to let them live in isolation, in their territory and in peace.

The mining offensive of Noboa's government

Over this period, socio-environmental conflict in Ecuador deepened as a result of a convergence between pro-extractive legal reforms, the expansion of mining and a weakening of Indigenous territorial guarantees. The central government consolidated a discourse of “economic revival” based on large-scale metal mining, projecting exports in excess of USD 4 billion (approx. EUR 3.44 billion), and thus implying an explicit alignment with transnational corporate interests, as stated by the Ministry of Energy and Mines.¹³

In this context, President Daniel Noboa intensified an international agenda aimed at attracting foreign investment, with an emphasis on mining and energy. The President made numerous trips to Canada, South Korea, Europe, Asia and the United Arab Emirates. In Toronto, he met with executives from Lundin Gold and Solaris Resources to promote the expansion of Fruta del Norte and the Warintza project.¹⁴ In Seoul, he signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Korea Mine Rehabilitation and Mineral Resources Corp. for technical cooperation. In addition, Enami signed an agreement with Barrick International Ltd., and the Executive reopened the mining registry after seven years.¹⁵

In contrast, CONAIE warned that 7.5% of the territory is now under concession, including protected areas.¹⁶ Environmental organizations similarly denounced violent consultations, while INREDH and the National Anti-Mining Front demanded the closure of the registry.¹⁷

This process can be interpreted as a phase of intensive “reprimarization” of the country's economic model whereby the State acts as a facilitator of extractive capital, reducing environmental controls and relativizing all collective rights. The reopening of the mining registry in July 2025, after seven years of closure, became a turning point by reactivating concessions in Indigenous territories and strategic ecosystems without adequate processes of Free, Prior and Informed Consultation.

Faced with this scenario, CONAIE denounced the unconstitutionality of the draft Law to Strengthen the Mining and Energy Sectors, pointing out that this reform weakens environmental protection, makes licences more flexible and violates collective rights recognized in the 2008 Constitution.¹⁸ Far from being technical, these reforms operate as political devices of dispossession, reordering the legal framework in favour of extractive accumulation.

In this context, the conflict surrounding the Loma Larga mining project and the Quimsacocha *páramo* became one of the epicentres of socio-environmental resistance in 2025. In September, tens of thousands of people marched in the southern city of Cuenca under the banner “Don’t Touch Quimsacocha”, bringing together peasant communities, Indigenous Peoples, urban student organizations, professionals, labour unions and environmental groups in defence of water as a common asset.¹⁹

These mobilizations expressed not only their rejection of a specific project but also an ontological dispute over the territory: while the State and companies see it as a space for exploitation, the communities understand it as a source of life, identity and social reproduction. The narrative of the “*fifth river of Cuenca*”²⁰ synthesizes this vision by emphasizing the centrality of the *páramo* in the regional water cycle.²¹

At the same time, CONAIE promoted the Allpamanta process, aimed at the titling, monitoring and community control of ancestral lands, strengthening local capacities in the face of extractive encroachment. In the Amazon, particularly in Napo, the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Napo (FOIN) demanded the declaration of environmental emergencies due to mining pollution of rivers, highlighting the cumulative impacts of illegal and legal extractivism.²²

The escalation of socio-environmental conflicts was accompanied by an increase in the criminalization and persecution of water and nature defenders. Human rights reports document the freezing of accounts, arbitrary judicial processes and threats against community leaders, especially in subtropical territories such as Las Naves in the Central Highlands.²³

This pattern reveals structural violence whereby the State combines legal reforms, coercive force and omission in the face of armed actors, creating territories with resources but without effective guarantees of rights. The defence of territory thus becomes a high-risk practice, despite being protected by the constitutional framework and international instruments. In short, the socio-environmental conflict associated with mining in the country in 2025 showed a new cycle of confrontation between an extractive model reinforced by the State and an increasingly coordinated Indigenous and community resistance. Far from being isolated conflicts, these processes express a profound dis-

pute over the meaning of development, democracy and the relationship between society and nature.

Return of oil companies and threats to Amazonian Indigenous territories

The so-called Ronda Sur-Oriente (RSO) is one of the main initiatives of Daniel Noboa's government aimed at deepening the extractivist model and the reprimarization of the country's dependent economy through the promotion of concessions for oil exploration and exploitation in the south-central Ecuadorian Amazon, particularly in the provinces of Pastaza and Morona Santiago. Promoted by the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the initiative seeks to grant concessions for new hydrocarbon blocks (over an area of approximately 2,000,000 hectares) in which seven Indigenous nationalities live.²⁴ The aim of attracting private investment would be to increase oil production and strengthen tax revenues in a context of economic crisis and decline in traditional oil revenues.

From the State's perspective, the RSO would be developed under "environmental responsibility" standards, incorporating prior consultation processes, social compensation and "lower impact" technologies (Ministry of Energy and Mines, 2025).²⁵

These claims have, however, been widely questioned by Indigenous and environmental organizations. Indigenous organizations in Pastaza, coordinated through spaces such as PAKKIRU, together with NAWA, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) and CONAIE, have expressed their categorical rejection.²⁶ They denounce the violation of the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consultation, the disregard for Constitutional Court rulings –especially in the Waorani case– and the direct threat to highly biodiverse territories and peoples in voluntary isolation, such as the Tagaeri and Taromenane.²⁷

In May 2025, more than 120 Waorani delegates travelled to Quito to demand the suspension of the process from the Constitutional Court, pointing to a new extractive imposition without legitimate consent.²⁸ At the same time, organizations such as Amazon Watch and Amazon Frontlines are warning that the RSO threatens millions of hectares of

primary forest, compromises the cultural integrity of at least six Indigenous nationalities, and contradicts the Ecuadorian State's climate commitments.²⁹

Indigenous uprising in Imbabura and October national strike

Ecuador's national strike of September and October 2025 became the most decisive event of the year, both in terms of its scale and duration and the toll it left in deaths, injuries and arrests. Called by the National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations (FENOCIN), CONAIE and other social sectors, the uprising lasted 31 days and crystallized a crisis of representation that had been brewing for some time. The immediate trigger was the elimination of the diesel subsidy, a measure that abruptly increased the cost of transport, agricultural production and the cost of living for the working classes.

However, the demands quickly expanded to include a rejection of militarization, the demand for respect for social protest and opposition to extractive projects such as Loma Larga, perceived as direct threats to the communities' territories and water.

In provinces such as Imbabura, the strike took on a particularly intense hue. Indigenous communities, peasant farmers and urban collectives blocked roads, organized mass marches and held permanent assemblies.³⁰ The protest was sustained by *mingas* [community work parties] and community kitchens, and had a strong community impact in towns such as Otavalo and Cotacachi, with the participation of women, youth and ancestral authorities.

Mariana Yumbay, lawyer and assembly member of the Pachakutik Movement, said: "This strike is not just about fuel; it is about life, dignity and the right to make decisions about our territories without fear."³¹ Leonidas Iza, former president of CONAIE, denounced the fact that the government had chosen to "govern by decree, guns and states of emergency instead of listening to its people".³²

This narrative of the "internal enemy" served to stigmatize Indigenous leaders and protesters, presenting them as enemies of public order, and legitimizing the intensive use of force while depoliticizing the root causes of the conflict.

On the ground, this logic translated into a sustained pattern of repression. There were reports of indiscriminate use of tear gas, including in residential areas and inside homes, as well as the violent dispersal of peaceful gatherings. Families in Otavalo reported being affected by tear gas fired in the early hours of the morning while they were sleeping. Raids without warrants, arbitrary detentions and barriers to the work of medical and observation teams became commonplace.³³ The most tragic event occurred in Cotacachi, where Kichwa community member Efraín Fuérez was killed during a military operation in the context of a community blockade. Witnesses and Indigenous organizations denounced this as an illegitimate use of force. “Efraín was not a criminal, he was a community member defending his right to protest,” said CONAIE, demanding an independent investigation that never came.³⁴

These cases were interpreted as a disciplinary and deterrent message to the mobilized communities. This repression also affected freedom of expression and the right to information. Indigenous and community radio stations in Imbabura, such as TVMICC, reported signal cuts, the seizure of equipment and administrative pressure, while journalists and human rights defenders were attacked. For CONAIE, these actions constituted a direct attack on the ability of communities to communicate from their own territories.³⁵

The gravity of the situation transcended borders and placed the Ecuadorian State under international scrutiny. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) recalled that social protest is a right protected by Inter-American standards and that militarization of public order increases the risk of serious violations. Reports from the IACHR, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch coincided in documenting a pattern of repression that left a tragic toll: at least three dead, dozens injured, hundreds detained and an unknown number of people prosecuted.

Towards the end of October, in view of the extreme exhaustion of the communities and the absence of structural responses from the government, CONAIE announced a lifting of the strike. The result was a deeply polarized and wounded country. The 2025 national strike exposed an authoritarian and militarized State model that has opted for a highly repressive and arbitrary approach and has failed in its responsibility as the guarantor of fundamental human rights.

Referendum, defeat and crisis of Noboa's government

The 2025 Referendum in Ecuador, held on 17 November, marked a milestone in national politics by revealing deep public discontent with the government of Daniel Noboa. With traces of burned barricades still visible on the roads, along with the echo of shots fired by repressive forces and the outcry of the Kichwa communities of the Northern Highlands in Imbabura, more than 70% of registered Ecuadorians resoundingly rejected the proposed reforms, with disapproval percentages ranging from 60% to 70%, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE).³⁶ This result reflects a growing rift between the government and an electorate clamouring for solutions to the social and economic crisis.

The referendum, called by President Noboa as part of a package of constitutional and legal reforms on security, economic and institutional issues, became a plebiscite on his administration. The most rejected proposals were reforms to the judicial system and citizen control over State institutions, reflecting a deep mistrust in the Executive's promises.

Political analyst Javier Rodríguez interpreted the result as “a strategic defeat” that lays bare the disconnect between the government and an electorate demanding more profound changes. For Rodríguez, the consultation was an attempt by Noboa to regain legitimacy but it ended up exacerbating the perception of a weak government that is insensitive to the needs of the people.³⁷

From a critical perspective, *Jacobin Latinoamérica* pointed out that this setback is a reflection of the “crisis of the regime” in Ecuador at a time when civil society and the popular sectors are reconfiguring the balance of power and questioning the governance established after the “*muerte cruzada*” [impeachment process] held during the presidency of conservative Guillermo Lasso in 2023.³⁸ This analysis highlights how the referendum became a symptom of social pressure on the executive branch, which is facing a clamour for more inclusive and democratic reforms and basic respect for constitutional principles.

Indigenous organizations played a key role in this rejection. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and the National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations expressed their opposition to the reforms, arguing that they violated collective rights and

favoured a security-oriented and authoritarian approach, which was reflected in the persecution and prosecution of community leaders.³⁹

In conclusion, the 2025 Referendum not only represented a political defeat for Noboa but also revealed a structural crisis that calls for a new social and political pact. According to Pablo Ospina, lecturer at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, the lack of popular support opens up an uncertain scenario for the government, which faces the urgent need to rebuild its agenda and alliances to avoid further political destabilization.⁴⁰

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French Guiana



French Guiana is a territory located in the eastern Amazon region of South America. It borders Suriname to the west, and Brazil to the east and south. The territory covers an area of 83,846 km². The official population is 292,400 (INSEE, 2025), mainly living in the capital Cayenne. Over 90% of the territory is covered by dense equatorial forest, accounting for 1% of the Amazon rainforest.

The Indigenous Peoples of French Guiana represent around 5% of the Guyanese population, or some 15,000 individuals. France bans ethnic statistics. It is therefore difficult to know the exact number of individuals. There are six recognized peoples: Kali'na Tileuyu, Lokono (Arawak), Wayana, Pahikweneh, Teko and Wayãpi. They live mainly in coastal areas, along major rivers (Maroni, Oyapock) and in the forested interior of the territory.

Socio-economic indicators for Indigenous Peoples remain significantly lower than the French national average: high poverty rates, limited access to healthcare, secondary education and employment, often precarious housing and severe constraints due to geographic isolation. These structural vulnerabilities are compounded by the growing pressure exerted on their territories by illegal gold mining, certain infrastructure projects and the uprooting of young people.

France has approved the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) but has not ratified ILO Convention 169. Indigenous Peoples are not specifically recognized in the French Constitution, and there is no national framework law recognizing their collective, territorial or cultural rights. Some forms of administrative recognition do exist, however (collective rights of use zones – ZDUC), although these are deemed insufficient by Indigenous organizations.

Freedom of association and expression are guaranteed, and several Indigenous representative organizations are active, including the Organization of Indigenous Nations of French Guiana (ONAG), collectives of customary chiefs, and community media and forums. Indigenous issues are receiving increas-

ing coverage in the local press, albeit often focused on crises (gold mining, violence, health) rather than collective rights or structural solutions.

Improving Indigenous visibility and structuring political advocacy

2025 was marked by the increased visibility of French Guiana's Indigenous Peoples in the public arena, both locally and internationally. This dynamic was noted, in particular, through the 15th session of Indigenous Peoples' Days (JPA), organized from 7 to 29 August 2025. While these days retain a central cultural dimension – dances, music, crafts, transmission of knowledge – they have now confirmed their evolution into a structured political space.

The themes addressed at JPA 2025 went far beyond cultural celebrations to include the protection of territories, the right to consultation, Indigenous youth, illegal gold mining and its health and social consequences for communities. This development reflects the determination of Indigenous organizations to transform cultural events into advocacy tools, against a backdrop in which institutional spaces for dialogue remain limited.

Another highlight of 2025 was the rise to prominence of a new generation of Indigenous leaders, often young, and trained in international human rights mechanisms. Several of them have taken part in UN training courses and international events, notably in New York and Geneva, bringing the voice of Guyana's Indigenous Peoples to hitherto inaccessible spaces. These interventions were widely relayed by the organization ONAG on social media, reinforcing the link between local mobilization and international advocacy.

This internationalization of Indigenous discourse helps strengthen the political security of claims: by documenting infringements of collective rights and mobilizing international standards, Indigenous organizations are seeking to protect themselves from institutional marginalization and set their struggles within recognized regulatory frameworks.

Land rights, consultation and tensions surrounding development projects

Land and territorial rights remained at the heart of tensions in French Guiana in 2025. Several infrastructure and development projects, such as energy and mining projects, continued to raise serious concerns among Indigenous communities.

The main issue remains the lack of respect for the right to free, prior and informed consultation (FPIC), which is enshrined in the UNDRIP. In practice, the consultation procedures put in place by the French authorities are widely perceived as insufficient, belated or purely formal. Indigenous representatives criticize upstream decision-making, with no effective consideration of their positions and no real possibility of influencing projects.

In 2025, these concerns were regularly transmitted in the local press and at public forums. Indigenous organizations have also pursued their strategy of referring issues to international mechanisms, recalling the observations already made by UN committees such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) regarding the lack of respect for FPIC in Guiana. This international mobilization aims to compensate for the lack of domestic legal recognition of Indigenous territorial rights.

In a broader context, political debates on the institutional evolution of French Guiana – increased autonomy, transfer of powers, adaptation of standards – have rekindled the hopes (but also the fears) of Indigenous Peoples. While some see this as an opportunity to better integrate customary and territorial rights, others fear that Indigenous issues will remain marginalized in discussions dominated by economic or institutional considerations.

These tensions over land and consultation are not just legal disputes: they directly affect social and territorial peace. The lack of clear recognition of Indigenous rights contributes to a climate of mistrust that is likely to fuel lasting conflicts between communities, public authorities and economic players.

In a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017 with Indigenous organizations, for example, France committed to returning 400,000 hectares of land managed by a public land facility to Indigenous Peo-

ples. To date, no restitution has been made. The French government departments are fuelling divisions between Indigenous Peoples by conducting separate negotiations with each community.

Illegal gold mining, the environment and health: a persistent threat to community safety

Illegal gold mining remains one of the most serious threats to the Indigenous Peoples of French Guiana in 2025. Despite government-led operations, clandestine activities continue at a high level, particularly in the interior of the country and along the Maroni and Oyapock rivers.

The environmental consequences are considerable: deforestation, destruction of waterways, soil erosion and, above all, pollution with mercury, used in the gold extraction process. This pollution has a direct impact on the food and health security of Indigenous communities, whose diet is largely based on fishing and river resources.

In 2025, several alerts were issued by NGOs, local associations and Indigenous representatives concerning persistent mercury levels in certain areas. The health risks – neurological disorders, impaired child development, chronic illnesses – reinforce a sense of abandonment and insecurity among the populations concerned.

Beyond its environmental impact, illegal gold mining is also a source of violence and criminalization of Indigenous territories. The presence of armed, often cross-border, criminal networks creates a climate of fear and permanent tension. Communities find themselves caught between illegal activities, repressive operations and the absence of sustainable solutions that respect their rights.

This situation is an acute illustration of the link between territorial rights, security and peace. The lack of effective recognition of Indigenous territories undermines their ability to protect their lands and exposes their inhabitants to multiple forms of structural violence.

Social problems, youth and resilience initiatives

Social issues, particularly those affecting young people, figured prominently in Indigenous affairs for 2025. A number of media investigations

have highlighted the phenomenon of the uprooting of Indigenous children living in isolated villages. In the absence of locally-adapted educational facilities, many children are forced to leave their communities to pursue their education on the coast.

This uprooting has far-reaching consequences: cultural and linguistic disruption, isolation, psychological difficulties, school drop-outs and, in some cases, violence or discrimination. Indigenous organizations denounce an education system that is ill-suited to the cultural and geographical realities of Indigenous Peoples, and which contributes to a weakening of the transmission of knowledge and languages.

Alongside these worrying findings, 2025 was also marked by positive resilience and empowerment initiatives. Training programmes, cultural projects, festivals and spaces for audiovisual expression have helped enhance the value of Indigenous narratives and boosted young people's self-esteem. Indigenous women have played a central role in these dynamics, particularly in cultural transmission, environmental protection and social support.

These initiatives remain largely dependent on precarious and insufficient funding, however. Their survival is threatened by reduced public support and the absence of structural policies in favour of Indigenous Peoples.

Outlook for 2026-2027

Looking ahead to 2026, the outlook for the Indigenous Peoples of French Guiana is mixed. On the one hand, the structuring of the Indigenous movement, the emergence of young leaders and the growing anchoring in international mechanisms are notable advances. On the other, threats to territory, health, education and security remain acute.

Without clear legal recognition of territorial rights and effective implementation of FPIC, the risks of conflict and marginalization persist. The peace and security of French Guiana's Indigenous Peoples are closely linked to the ability of the French authorities to move from symbolic recognition to real inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the decision-making processes that concern them.

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Guatemala



By the year 2025, the population of Guatemala is projected to be 18.8 million,¹ of which 43.75% are Indigenous, belonging to the Mayan peoples (Achi', Akateco, Awakateco, Chalchiteco, Ch'orti', Chuj, Itza', Ixil, Jacalteco, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mo-pan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteco, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil and Uspanteko), as well as the Garífuna, Xinka and Creole or Afro-descendant peoples.

The Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala recognizes the existence of Indigenous Peoples and defines the country as a multicultural society. Despite having ratified international agreements on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in practice there is a wide social, economic and political gap between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. For example, the state spends USD 0.4 (approx. EUR 0.3) per day on each Indigenous person and USD 0.9 (approx. EUR 0.7) per day on each non-indigenous person.² In turn, poverty affects 75% of Indigenous and 36% of non-indigenous people,³ and chronic malnutrition affects 58% of Indigenous people compared to 38% of non-indigenous people.⁴ In terms of political participation, Indigenous people represent no more than 15% of members of parliament and high-ranking public officials.

Although the country has signed up to international instruments such as ILO Convention 169 (approved with constitutional status in 2010), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the UN FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, their implementation continues to present bureaucratic hurdles and legal barriers that hinder progress in the elimination of colonialism and discriminatory practices against Indigenous Peoples.

Impact of the global context on Indigenous Peoples

The new U.S. government policies introduced in 2025 eliminated development cooperation with Guatemala, estimated at USD 170 million (approx. EUR 144 million) per year.⁵ Their current priorities

are now focused on security, combating drug trafficking, reducing irregular migration, and building strategic infrastructure for international trade.

The main impact of these changes came with the closure of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) operations. This is the U.S.'s main international cooperation agency and resulted in several agencies that were implementing specific projects for Indigenous Peoples having to cease their activities. USAID had established an agenda in support of the exercise of Indigenous Peoples' rights but this has now been abandoned. This represents not only a loss of funding but also a loss of advocacy spaces related to land rights, environmental protection, local economies, the inclusion of women and youth, and climate action.

With the loss of this cooperation, Indigenous Peoples are now more vulnerable and exposed to human trafficking networks, violence from drug cartels, criminalization of human rights defenders, and dispossession of land and natural resources.

Extractive pressures on Indigenous territories

The extractive activities being promoted by transnational companies continued in 2025 with their commercial, political and legal strategies to re-activate operating licences, some of which had been suspended by the national courts due to a failure to comply with consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The Cerro Blanco underground mining project, formerly owned by Bluestone, is located in Asunción Mita, Jutiapa, near Lake Güija on the border with El Salvador. The project was suspended years ago due to opposition from the nearby Indigenous Xinka and mestizo communities but was acquired on 13 January 2025 by the Canadian company, Aura Minera, under the name Era Dorada.⁶ The Indigenous communities have denounced these activities as posing serious environmental and social risks in the cross-border basin.

Extractive companies have filed international arbitration proceedings as a means of pressuring the state to pay damages for the court-ordered suspension of their activities. Claims against Guatemala filed with the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes

amount to USD 843 million (approx. EUR 715 million). This year, Guatemala won the international arbitration case relating to the suspension of the El Tambor (La Puya) project, thus avoiding the payment of the USD 499 million (approx. EUR 423 million) demanded by the plaintiffs.⁷

After several years of peaceful resistance, the Maya Qeqchi, Garífuna and mestizo communities of the Sierra Santa Cruz de Livingston, in the department of Izabal, succeeded this year in getting the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources to officially cancel 10 nickel mining projects that were affecting more than 43,000 hectares due to environmental non-compliance.⁸

Persecution and criminalization of Indigenous leaders

As a result of the active participation of Indigenous Peoples in public demonstrations to defend the democratic processes and the results of the 2023 general elections, which led to the elected authorities being sworn in at the start of 2024 (See Guatemala in *The Indigenous World* 2025), the Public Prosecutor's Office commenced criminal proceedings against various Indigenous leaders in 2025, accusing them of terrorism and obstruction of justice. On 23 April 2025, Luis Pacheco and Héctor Chacán, former members of the Board of Mayors of the Indigenous organization of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán, were arrested with the clear intention of undermining the ancestral Indigenous institutions and their fight against corruption and impunity.⁹ Both leaders were linked to criminal proceedings and charged with unlawful association, sedition, terrorism, obstruction of criminal proceedings and obstruction of justice. Since their arrest, both leaders have been held in preventive detention, their case is to be heard behind closed doors and the trial in which they can prove their innocence or guilt has not begun. Various national and international entities have spoken out calling for their release, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which rejected the continued misuse of criminal proceedings:

The IACHR notes that this case is part of a broader, well-documented pattern of politically motivated misuse of criminal law

in Guatemala, as outlined in numerous IACHR reports and the preliminary observations from its 2024 on-site visit. These patterns include the use of vague and disproportionate charges, secrecy in case proceedings, manipulation of public opinion by announcing legal actions through coordinated online misinformation campaigns using so-called netcenter accounts, and widespread abuse of pretrial detention. These tactics highlight the alarming lack of independence of the Public Prosecutor's Office and its active role in fostering impunity and corruption.¹⁰

The persecution of Indigenous leaders continued with the arrest, on 28 August 2025, of Mr. Esteban Toc, former Indigenous deputy mayor of Sololá,¹¹ who was accused of terrorism, sedition and obstruction of criminal proceedings.

Criminalization of defenders of Indigenous land and territories

Throughout the year, the attacks and criminal persecution of Indigenous leaders who are defending their land, territories and natural resources continued. On 13 August 2025, Indigenous peasant leader and former deputy, Leocadio Juracán was arrested at La Aurora International Airport as he was about to travel to South Africa to participate in a conference on equity for peoples. Juracán is accused of aggravated trespass, forest fires and the commercialization of forest products, although in reality he is nationally and internationally recognized for his struggle for Indigenous and peasant access to land, including the support he has provided to Maya Q'eqchi Indigenous communities that have precautionary measures adopted by the IACHR.¹²

On 19 June 2025, a ruling of the Constitutional Court upheld the eviction of the Plan Grande community from the Sierra Santa Cruz, promoted by private landowners who argued that the community did not have legal title to the land. A court had protected the community since 2019 but the ruling of the Constitutional Court now leaves it unprotected and exposes its members to eviction and criminalization.

In this regard, during his visit to Guatemala from 14-25 July 2025, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, expressed his concern at the violent evictions of Indigenous communities and reiterated the need to provide greater legal certainty to the ancestral land rights of Indigenous Peoples, rather than simply overvaluing the private property rights of a few. In his final declaration, he stated: “Currently what prevails is a complete lack of understanding and recognition of ancestral forms of land ownership, nor has there ever been any reckoning with past violations that left Indigenous Peoples dispossessed and impoverished.”¹³

In June, a civil court granted an injunction in favour of the Maya Poqomam Indigenous community of Santa Cruz Chinautla, Guatemala department, against the municipality of Chinautla, due to the lack of solid waste treatment, and obliged it to improve its management in order to reduce pollution, close illegal dumps and restore natural ecosystems.¹⁴

Spaces for Indigenous Peoples’ participation in the government agenda

This year, the National Assembly for Dialogue with Indigenous and Ancestral Authorities of Indigenous Peoples continued its work with the President of the Republic on strengthening democracy, fighting corruption and community development. Through this forum, work was done to achieve the legal reform of Article 30 bis of the Organic Budget Law, which now means that Indigenous communities are no longer obliged to transfer ownership of their lands to the state for the construction of public works such as schools and health centres. The Communal Lands Roundtable has been formed to address the problem of legal uncertainty and the cessation of arbitrary evictions. An institutional reform of the Guatemalan Indigenous Development Fund (FODIGUA), which had ceased to fulfil its functions due to the politicization of previous governments, has been proposed. Through agreements with cooperatives, the To’banik financing mechanism has been established to support productive processes.¹⁵ However, despite these achievements, there is still a disconnect from government institutions, as well as manifestations of racism, discrimination and colonialist thinking.

Indigenous women and youth

Indigenous women continue to face problems of discrimination and a lack of social, political and economic inclusion both within their communities and in society in general, as well as persistent gaps in employment, access to education and political representation. In 2025, 57,000 births were registered to mothers between 10 and 19 years of age, with a high percentage in Indigenous areas.¹⁶ On 25 November 2025, the Congress of the Republic approved Decree 20-2025, Law on the Day of Dignity for Indigenous Women, which recognizes the individual and collective rights of Mayan, Garifuna and Xinca women.¹⁷

Outlook for 2026-2027

For the next two years, Indigenous Peoples will face uncertain prospects: the U.S. is expected to scale up the deportation of Guatemalan migrants, many of whom are Indigenous and whose remittances support their families back home; secondary-level elections will be held (Constitutional Court, Public Prosecutor's Office and Supreme Electoral Tribunal) in which Indigenous Peoples will make their proposals but will also be exposed to criminalization by the so-called corrupt pact; and, in 2027, general elections will be held, which means opportunities for greater political representation but also tensions and conflicts arising from the political powers. The second half of the current government's term could consolidate the rights of Indigenous Peoples but institutional slowness and bureaucracy could also result in disenchantment due to a failure to fulfil government promises.

Despite the still prevailing colonialism, it is hoped that Indigenous Peoples will continue to contribute to the construction of a more inclusive democracy through their own forms of organization and the representation of their ancestral authorities. This is a legitimate form of community power that acts as a counterweight to the elitist and exclusionary republican democracy.

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Guyana



Indigenous Peoples – or Amerindians as they are identified both collectively and in legislation – number some 78,500 in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, or approximately 10.5% of the total population of 746,955 (2012 census). They are the fourth largest ethnic group, East Indians being the largest (40%), followed by African Guyanese (29%) and self-identified “Mixed” (20%). The Chinese, Portuguese and Whites constitute tiny minorities. Amerindians refer to these non-Indigenous people as “coastlanders” since most of them are settled on the coast.

The Amerindians belong to nine Indigenous Nations, based on language. The Warao, Lokono Arawak and Carib (Kariña) live on or near the coast. The Akawaio, Arekuna, Patamona, Makushi, Wapichan and Wai Wai live in villages scattered throughout the interior.

Amerindians form the majority of the population of the interior, in some regions constituting as much as 86% of the population. The forest resources/timber on government-titled Indigenous lands (Amerindian Village Lands) are fully under the managerial authority of the Amerindian title holders according to law, while minerals in the same lands ultimately remain under national government authority. In practice, the political administrations and technical agencies are negligent when enforcing the law. Two Amerindian Village Councils – Isseneru and Chinese Landing – have successfully appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for precautionary measures against diminished human rights through continued illegal gold mining and environmental damage, albeit still with no effective government response. The poorly regulated and government-subsidised exploitation of these resources by multinationals, illegal miners and loggers is one of the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples. Their primary concern is therefore to achieve full recognition and implementation of Indigenous land rights so that they can defend their ancestral territories from this unwanted exploitation.

The Independence Agreement from the United Kingdom (1965) included a land titling process. Recommendations regarding this process from the Amerindian Lands Commission (1967-1969) have never been fully taken up by successive governments. Requests made for collective district titles have been dismissed, resulting in the fragmentation of traditional territories into small areas under individual village titles. The Preamble to the Constitution of Guyana recognises “the special place in our nation of the indigenous peoples” and recognises “their right as citizens to land and security and to their promulgation of policies for their communities”. Guyana endorsed the UNDRIP in 2007 and, through its membership of the Organisation of American States (OAS), the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2016.

Inconsistent and defective implementation of legislation affecting Amerindians

2025 was a year with no changes but a renewed promise by the re-elected Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP) to thoroughly revise the defective *Amerindian Act* (cap. 29:01, 2006).¹ A greater problem is the inconsistent combined application of the Amerindian and Mining legislation in relation to long-delayed titling of Amerindian Village Lands (AVLs). A few land titles or extensions to titled areas were issued during 2025² but it is unclear in the government reports if these were for the interim or final stages of a complicated process. Press accounts documenting the unchecked power wielded by the government vis-à-vis Amerindian institutions are ignored.³

There were also persistent arguments about the legality of various gold-mining operations on AVLs legally controlled by the Amerindian communities.⁴ The locally-elected Amerindian Village Council (AVC) of Jawalla continued to assert that the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) was using maps with the wrong boundaries and thus incorrectly issuing/renewing mining permits over AVLs to miners without the prior agreement of the AVC.⁵ The AVC for Kanapang asserted that,

in 2016, the Minister for Amerindian Affairs had agreed, with the GGMC and AVC, to allow mining by Brazilian nationals who were blood-relatives of families in Kanapang.⁶ However, in 2025, without presenting any legal document such as a search or arrest warrant, a combined force of GGMC staff and the Guyana Defence Force arrested 30 such miners⁷ following a similar warrantless raid at Chiung Mouth a month earlier.⁸

A halt to all gold mining in the AVL of Chinese Landing was ordered by the government on 31 July 2023,⁹ with no legal backing, as reported in previous Indigenous World editions (2024, 2025). The closure continued in 2025 with no attempt by the government either to justify the stoppage or to lift the ban. The deliberate block by government on the main livelihoods of this village has forced most of the men to look for jobs outside the village.¹⁰ A new lawyer contracted by the AVC found that papers were missing from the records in the High Court of the long-running legal dispute over improperly-issued and -renewed mining concessions held by a non-Indigenous gold miner in 1998.¹¹

Revival of training and early business support for Amerindians

In the usual way in Guyana, the incoming political administration closed all social development programmes of the previous government in 2020, including the popular and successful Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS; see *The Indigenous World 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022*). However, the PPP/C administration then re-launched what is, in effect, the same training and business incentive programme under a new name, the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP) for people 17-35 years old.¹² Some 500 Amerindians have participated, including 120 for small engine repairs and 110 trained to drive agricultural tractors.¹³

A contract was awarded by the representative National Toshihos Council (NTC) for a new document to explain Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) guidelines,¹⁴ even though FPIC has been a central feature of the Amerindian Land Titling project and included in the main project guidelines since April 2017.¹⁵

Whole-country access to Internet and large investment in village infrastructure

Most Amerindian communities, some 253 in 2025, had Internet access in 2025 using solar-powered receivers of satellite signals from Low Earth Orbit WiFiGY.¹⁶ This substantial effort should enable country-wide access to the lessons provided by the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL programme).¹⁷ The government claims that 135,000 hinterland people now have Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access. One persistent problem is the slow or very slow payment from central government funds for the village labour that is contributed to construct the village ICT hubs.

Before and during the annual meeting of the NTC (a government-run event for elected village leaders) in May 2025, there were the usual government claims about money being spent on the communities: for health posts, 400 residential houses,¹⁸ roads, schools (nearly 90% of Amerindians have access to secondary education),¹⁹ water tanks and 80 wells.²⁰ It is difficult to ascertain what, if anything, has actually been initiated or completed, as the process of auditing is selective and takes many years. This often leads to frustration for communities.

It is also a worry that the programme for building schools does not seem to have learned any lessons from the fatal dormitory fire at the Mahdia secondary school in 2023.²¹ Instead, the government has charged a teenage Amerindian girl with 20 counts of murder, ascribing blame for the Mahdia fire solely to her.²² The government dissuaded the Private Sector Commission from distributing EUR 123,000 to the dead children's families.²³ Attempts by the families of the 20 dead to sue the government for negligence (warnings of unsafe construction noted during Fire Service inspections were not acted upon) have stalled in the High Court,²⁴ as is usual with Amerindian court cases against the government.

While most infrastructural work is carried out by non-Indigenous coastlander contractors, the 21 Wapichan communities united under the South Rupununi Development Council have formed their own enterprise to bid for such contracts to build schools, roads and bridges. The government has agreed to support this venture by supplying machinery.²⁵ This support appears to come from the EUR 4.1 million for hinterland roads that are to be built with community labour, announced by President Mohamed Irfaan Ali.²⁶

Continued government-directed spending derived from income from forest-based carbon credits

In preparation for the next tranche of forest-based carbon credits, the Winrock International ART/TREES programme sent AENOR, a new auditor, to check that the rural consultation requirements were being fulfilled. However, the only question asked of the interviewed sample of Amerindian communities in 2025 was: “Has there been a government consultation on the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030?”, a question irrelevant to the ART/TREES programme (pers. comm. Toshao Nikita Miller). The Amerindian Peoples Association noted the lack of FPIC in Guyana in its submissions to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.²⁷ It is not clear from government announcements how much of the budgeted spend in Amerindian communities (EUR 19.9 million) is derived from the sale of the forest-based carbon credits and how much from the Consolidated Fund.²⁸

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) conducted at least one follow-up mission to Guyana on the precautionary measures it has issued for some Amerindian communities affected by illegal gold mining on AVLs and associated degradation of human rights [pers. comm. IACHR]. No formal government response has been published.

2025 was a year of national elections. In Guyana it is customary for the incumbent administration to spend government funds on party-political electioneering. The distribution of funds as “gifts” rather than as government items means that the communities have even less influence over how the money is spent.

2026 is not an election year, and government attention towards Amerindian communities is likely to reduce. However, the continued strong performance of the new political party (WIN, We Invest in Nationhood) in challenging the incumbent Peoples’ Progressive Party is stimulating interest in hinterland villages not closely linked to the PPP as WIN have made an effort to visit these communities and genuinely listen to villagers’ needs. This is in contrast to the incumbent party, which tells villagers what the government has chosen to do for them. This interest is also a risk, however, because the government discriminates against those villages that are not visibly aligned with the PPP. This dis-

crimination has become more visible following the national elections in September 2025 and demonstrates a notably more authoritarian style of government.

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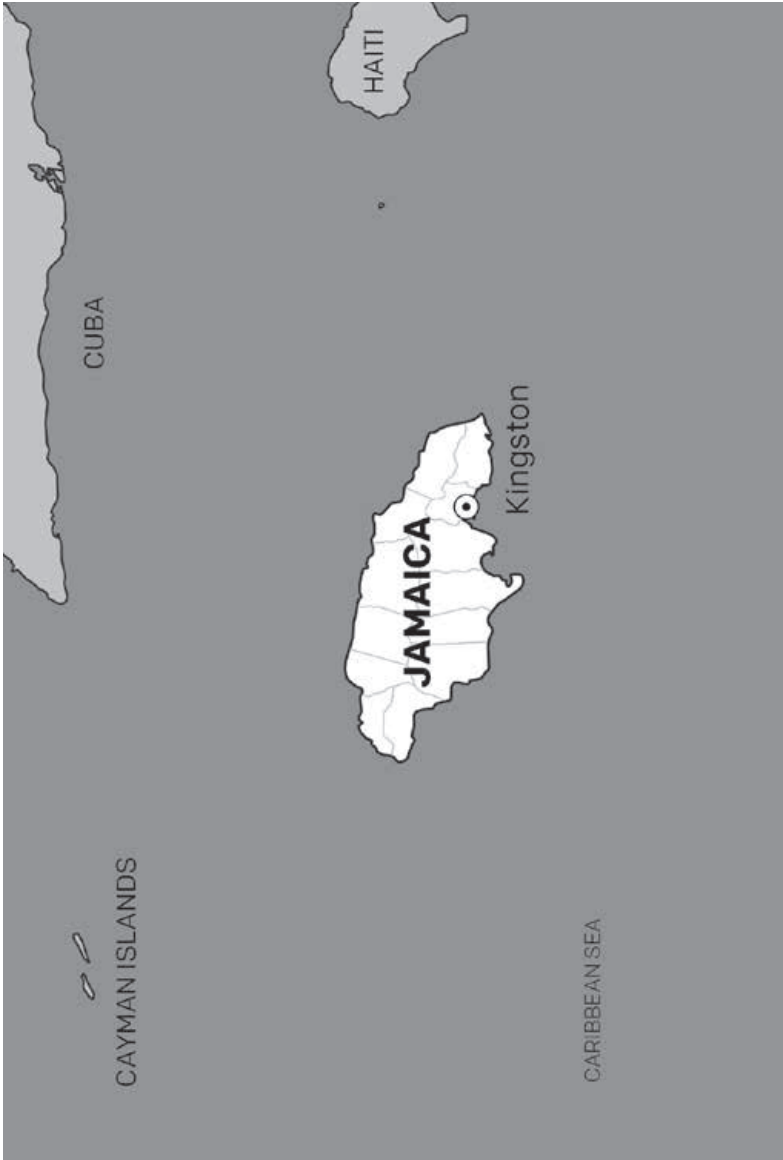
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Jamaica



The Indigenous population of Jamaica is primarily represented by the Yamaye Guani (Jamaican Hummingbird Taino) and the Maroon communities of Accompong, Charlestown, Moore Town, and Scott's Hall. With an estimated Taino population of approximately 3,000 individuals, the Taino and Maroon communities find a unified political voice through the Yamaye Council of Indigenous Leaders (YCOIL). Despite this active presence, the Jamaican state currently provides no formal national constitutional recognition for Indigenous Peoples, historically maintaining a narrative of Taino extinction. Consequently, 2025 was defined by urgent advocacy for the ratification of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to address critical issues regarding constitutional reform, climate resilience, and the protection of Indigenous women.

National update on Indigenous rights and Constitutional reform (2025-2026)

Legal advocacy and the road to the Republic

The year 2025 marked a transformative period for Indigenous advocacy in Jamaica as the island moved closer to transitioning into a Republic. This political shift provided a critical leverage point for the Yamaye Guani (Jamaican Hummingbird Taino) and Maroon communities (including Accompong, Charlestown, Moore Town, and Scott's Hall) to challenge the historical narrative of extinction. Through the Yamaye Council of Indigenous Leaders (YCOIL), the community transitioned from a focus on cultural resurgence toward assertive legal and political engagement with the state.¹

A primary focus of this advocacy was the Constitutional Reform Commission. In early 2025, the Yamaye Guani Council made formal submissions to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament regarding "The Constitution Amendment Republic Act 2024". The Council's central demand is the inclusion of the Yamaye Taino and Maroons in the Preamble to the Constitution in order to formally correct the "paper genocide" that has historically labelled these populations as extinct.

Indigenous leaders have also emphasized the need for ratification of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to provide a legal shield against colonial-era laws, such as the Obeah Act, which continue to threaten Indigenous spiritual practices.²

Environmental stewardship and climate resilience

The impact of extractive industries and climate change remains a significant threat to Indigenous territories and sacred sites in Jamaica. Throughout 2025, the leadership continued to monitor mining operations, specifically those conducted by the Rinker Mining Company in the Canoe Valley, which endanger both archaeological sites and local biodiversity. In response to these threats, the community has positioned Indigenous traditional knowledge as a vital component of national environmental survival.³

Following the impact of Hurricane Melissa in November 2025, the community demonstrated its internal governance capacity by conducting a rapid Post-Disaster Assessment in collaboration with UNESCO. This effort was specifically aimed at securing the integrity of sacred sites such as Woodside and protecting the physical safety of community members. Furthermore, members of the Yamaye Guani Council contributed to scholarly analysis on these issues, co-authoring chapters that link Taino ancestral warnings to modern climate and health dynamics.⁴

Institutional recognition and social security

The movement towards institutionalization saw tangible gains in 2025 regarding social security and data sovereignty. Indigenous elders and families from YCOIL communities, including Scott's Hall and Charles-town, successfully accessed health cards through the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports (MCGES), marking a significant improvement in social welfare.⁵

Looking forward to 2026, a major milestone is anticipated with the national census. Following consultations with the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, it is expected that "Taino" or "Arawak" will be included as recognized options, finally providing the disaggregated data necessary for informed policymaking regarding Indigenous populations. This progress, combined with the ongoing revitalization of the Wahiyaní (Island

Arawakan) language, reflects a community that is successfully integrating its ancestral heritage into the formal structures of the Jamaican state.⁶

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*The **Yamaye Guani Council** is the primary representative body for the Indigenous Taino community in Jamaica, dedicated to disputing the historical narrative of their extinction through cultural revitalization and advocacy.*



Mexico



According to data from the Population and Housing Census of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography 2020 (INEGI), there are 126,014,024 citizens in Mexico, of whom 23,200,000 aged three years and over identify as Indigenous.¹ Of this population segment, 7,345,645 respondents aged three years and over reported speaking an Indigenous language (87.2% speak Spanish plus one Indigenous language and 11.8% speak just one Indigenous language). The country has 68 native languages, of which Nahuatl is the most widely spoken (22.4%), followed by Mayan (10.5%) and Tseltal (8.0%). The languages with the lowest percentages of speakers are: Totonac, with 3.5%; Ch'ol, with 3.5%; and Mazatec, with 3.2%. It should be noted that 19.1% of the Indigenous population aged 15 and over are illiterate, while the equivalent percentage of non-indigenous population in the same age group being 2.8%. Furthermore, the states with the highest percentages of Indigenous population are: Oaxaca (26.3%), Yucatan (24.3%), Chiapas (22.4%), Guerrero (13.5%) and Quintana Roo (12.9%). Mexico will have new information on its Indigenous population in 2026, as the Intercensal Survey 2025 has updated the geospatial and sociodemographic data. Mexico voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, has signed ILO Convention 169 and, at the national level, Article Two of the Federal Constitution recognizes and guarantees the right of Indigenous Peoples and communities to self-determination and autonomy.² In March 2025, the General Law of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples and Communities was presented to the Congress of the Union, and is currently in the process of being approved.

Peace and security, an historic demand of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Mexico

The Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of Mexico continued their struggle throughout 2025 to transform the regulatory framework that governs their rights and peacebuilding. Legal ad-

vances in this area, however, coexisted alongside persistent violence, territorial dispossession and major official limitations to incorporating the legal and political knowledge of the peoples themselves. The tensions between formal recognition and territorial reality are seriously restricting the possibilities of building an effective and lasting peace in Indigenous territories.

Legal recognition and institutional reality: the light and shade of reform

The Reform to Article Two of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States³ –published at the end of 2024– opened a new era of recognition of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples as subjects of public law, strengthening their legal visibility. This change created significant expectations regarding autonomy and the direct exercise of collective rights. However, the first year of its implementation clearly exposed the gap between regulatory recognition and its practical application, as well as the institutional inertia that continues to hinder its effective implementation.

Among the main outstanding issues are the lack of the right to territory in a broad sense –replaced by notions of biocultural heritage or habitat–, which weakens the defence against extractivist projects; the lack of recognition of community security in contexts marked by violence and organized crime; and the risk that prior consultation will be reduced to a bureaucratic procedure with no binding effects. Added to this is the need for a regulatory law that clearly defines the levels of self-government, as well as pending advances in intercultural gender perspectives, Indigenous self-identification, and political representation beyond party-political logic, all key elements for ensuring that the reform does not remain merely declarative.

Now, in an unprecedented move, the Mexican population has directly elected the nine members of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. Hugo Aguilar Ortiz, a lawyer of Mixtec origin, was elected Chief Justice of the country's highest constitutional court, a position last held by an Indigenous representation during the second half of the 19th century. With extensive experience of defending Indigenous Peoples and

their collective rights to territory and resources, and with a background in public service, Aguilar Ortiz's arrival as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court has generated high expectations among the Indigenous and social movements, in a context in which the Mexican State is seeking to reshape the legal framework for Indigenous Peoples on the basis of recent constitutional reforms.

Defending the territory in the name of peace: a persistent contradiction

During 2024 and 2025, the differing contexts of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico were marked by a human rights crisis in which extractivism, institutional violence and the expansion of illicit economies converged. The lack of full recognition of territory in the Constitutional Reform has left communities highly vulnerable to megaprojects, extractive economies and the advance of organized crime, deepening processes of dispossession that were already structural, as demonstrated by recent assessments and data compiled in the PUIC-UNAM MEZINAL 1 *Atlas*.⁴ This violence is not only armed, it is also territorial and economic, and is reproduced in contexts where militarization is presented as a security strategy, without resulting in the real conditions for peace.

In this scenario, the defence of territory and community autonomy are often met with criminalization, harassment and militarization, demonstrating that State security does not always protect Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples but often merely increases their exposure to violence. In Mexico, murders of territorial defenders increased by 25% during 2024,⁵ and almost half of the lethal attacks (43 cases) affected Indigenous people or people from agrarian communities, many of whom were community authorities or local leaders opposed to megaprojects or collusion between political and business actors and organized crime. This violence has differing impacts: Indigenous women face dual victimization due to their leadership and gender; children and youth suffer from the fragmentation of the community fabric; and community leaders continue to be the main target of lethal attacks, thus weakening self-government structures and deepening insecurity and dispossession.

Between governance and community justice: the limits of State peace

Regional Justice and Development Plans⁶ were announced in 2025 as the Mexican State's main instrument for addressing the historical demands of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples. To date, 18 plans are being implemented and six are under development, in operation across 13 states and serving 27 Indigenous Peoples made up of 1,373 communities. These include the Yaqui, Seri Comcaac, Guarijío Makurawe, Yoreme Mayo, Wixárika, O'dam and Au'dam; Náayeri and Mexikan; Chichimec and Otomí; Chinantec and Mazatec; Ralámuli, Oichkama (Pima), Warijío, Yumanos-Cochimí, Xhidza, Xhon and Zapotec, among others. These Plans revolve around a State concept of peace that ranges from the resolution of specific grievances –especially as regards territories and water– to the social dissent which, for years, affected State governance. This introduces tensions with the restorative justice approaches of internal normative systems and with the Indigenous forms of conflict resolution.

Although these actions are a step forward, one of the main challenges for the Mexican State continues to be transforming the way it conceives of law, justice and peacebuilding. Institutional frameworks persist that render invisible the normative systems, community justice practices and Indigenous forms of mediation, sanction and reparation that have historically enabled conflict resolution and the reproduction of collective life. This tension is expressed in spaces where traditional authorities participate in a consultative capacity, with a voice but without real decision-making power, reproducing a notion of peace centred on conflict control and the maintenance of order rather than on processes of reparation and social transformation. Recognizing this knowledge and these rights today is key to building a more legitimate, sustainable and inclusive peace capable of confronting the structural violence that affects Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples: peace and security

Against this backdrop, Mexico's Indigenous Peoples are currently struggling to ensure that peace and security prevail in their territories by

overcoming the historical structural barriers that limit their development; achieving their integration into today's society based on respect for their specific cultural differences, their identity and their collective rights as peoples with independence and freedom; and ensuring that it is their own perspectives that define their development projects, as full political subjects. This is essential given that their living conditions continue to be characterized by exclusion, poverty, low social development, and high to very high marginalization, as confirmed by official studies published by INEGI⁷ and other analyses that reveal the profound conditions of social inequality in which Indigenous Peoples still find themselves.⁸

In addition, Indigenous territories are affected by the presence of organized crime, drug trafficking, climate change, and the implementation of megaprojects, among other things that generate violence in their communities and violate their rights. These issues have even led to forced displacements and high levels of internal and international migration as a strategy for survival, all of which affects the peace and security of the country's Indigenous Peoples and communities and violates their rights to a just, sustainable and lasting peace, as noted by UNESCO.⁹ Added to this is the persistence of racist and discriminatory practices that affect them in different areas of social life, and which denote a lack of respect for their cultures and identities, as well as a lack of knowledge about them in society, as they are considered a guarantor of peace.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the above, there has been progress in the State's response to the situation of Mexico's Indigenous Peoples. Among these are the actions promoted by the Federal Government in 2025, within the framework of the Constitutional Reform that, in 2024, recognized Indigenous Peoples and communities as subjects of public law; in this regard, the promotion of the aforementioned Justice Plans is noteworthy. According to information from the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples (INPI),¹¹ these plans will enable action to be taken to address the Indigenous population's issues regarding their living conditions, among other things. In addition, they will have monitoring mechanisms by means of indicators that will make it possible to assess their impact in Indigenous areas. The same source reports that the traditional authorities collaborated in their development through their own governance and decision-making mechanisms, thereby expanding opportunities

for social participation aimed at strengthening the dialogue with Indigenous Peoples and communities when defining policies and action programmes that involve them.

However, the Indigenous Peoples and communities continue to demand full participation in these procedures as part of the peace-building process in their territories. In this regard, in 2025, forums were organized in the Purépecha region of Michoacán¹² to work on the preparation of the Justice Plan. These included people from four Indigenous regions of the state (Meseta, Cañada, Ciénega and del Lago) who, together with the federal and state governments, defined actions to be developed based on 11 themes, including peace and security in the face of situations of extreme violence. Peacebuilding for the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico is likewise related to processes of resistance that can be described as *peaceful*,¹³ and which are expressed in parallel to the emergency through their own forms of social organization, such as self-defence groups. Undoubtedly, the building of peace and security in Mexico's Indigenous regions will need to be reflected in the resolution of the problems that have historically affected them, both those derived from social development and those arising from the modern world.

Institutional Development Plan

The Federal Government presented the Institutional Development Plan 2025-2030 in 2025 and, according to INPI data, this is the result of work carried out with the participation of people belonging to Mexico's 68 Indigenous Peoples. It should be noted that, among its proposals, it states that "the policies, programmes and actions of the Mexican State must incorporate a collective rights approach, under the principles of self-determination, autonomy, interculturality, effective participation, substantive equality and social justice", aspects that are among the main demands of the Indigenous Peoples and communities. Compliance with these principles could contribute to building peace and security in their territories. This year was also declared the Year of Indigenous Women, which is why INPI, together with other institutions, promoted actions to recognize the role of women in the struggle for emancipation and the defence of human rights in their communities.

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Nicaragua



Nicaragua has seven Indigenous and Native Peoples. In the Pacific Coast, centre and north are the Chorotega (221,000), the Cacaopera or Matagalpa (97,500), the Ocanxiu or Sutiaba (49,000) and the Nahoia or Nahuatl (20,000). In addition, the Caribbean (or Atlantic) Coast is inhabited by the Miskitu (150,000), the Sumu or Mayangna (27,000) and the Rama (2,000). Other peoples who also enjoy collective rights, according to the Political Constitution of Nicaragua (1987), are the Afro-descendants, known as the Creole or Kriol (43,000) and Garifuna (2,500).

In 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) took power in Nicaragua and were later opposed by the U.S.-funded armed front of peasant and Indigenous resistance known as “The Contra”. In 1987, as a result of the friendly settlement of the conflict through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and with the aim of ending Indigenous resistance, the FSLN created the Autonomous Regions of the Northern Caribbean Coast (RACCN) and Southern Caribbean Coast (RACCS), based on an Autonomy Statute (Law No. 28). As a result of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights’ (IACHR’s) judgement in the case of the Mayangna (Sumo) Community of Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua in 2001, the Communal Property Regime Law (Law No. 445) was issued. This law recognizes the communities’ right to self-government and creates a procedure for the titling of their traditional territories. In 2005, the state began the titling process for the 23 Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories in the RACCN and RACCS, culminating in the issuing of property titles.

In 2007, Nicaragua voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and in 2010 ratified ILO Convention 169. In 2015, the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants of Nicaragua (APIAN) was formed. In 2020, Nicaragua ratified the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental

Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement).

In January 2025, constitutional reforms (Law No. 1,234) subordinated the regional and municipal bodies to central government and limited communal property rights. That same year, the Law on Environmental Conservation Areas and Sustainable Development (Law No. 1248) removed the requirement to consult communities and authorized mining activities within legally protected areas. In turn, the Border Territories Law (Law No. 1258) now provides for the confiscation of lands located within a radius of 15 kilometres of the border, in violation of the previously recognized inalienability of communal property.

Nicaragua is currently going through a profound human rights crisis, marked by the establishment of a regime of economic and political concentration of power. For Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities, this situation has resulted in the usurpation of their lands and territories,¹ leading to a lack of natural resources essential for their subsistence.² More specifically, it is reflected in patterns of violence, invasion, usurpation, extractive activities, criminalization of leadership³ and regressive legal reforms, which together represent the implementation of a policy of forced assimilation and internal colonization.

This situation has been documented by the Group of Experts on Human Rights in Nicaragua,⁴ which has pointed out that these peoples are subject to structural and systematic violence because the government considers them an obstacle to consolidating its interests and has therefore has made them a target of repression.⁵ The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) titled its 2025 report “*Violence against Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of the Caribbean Coast in Nicaragua*”,⁶ while the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OCHCR) emphasized that the implementation of a policy of assimilation and internal colonization not only undermines the peace and security of these peoples but threatens their very existence.⁷

Multilateral isolation and submission to China

During 2025, the Nicaraguan regime increased its isolation and disregard for its human rights obligations by rejecting accountability mechanisms in international forums: it was absent from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Nicaragua⁸ and from all activities related to the UN Human Rights Council,⁹ the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),¹⁰ the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).¹¹

Alongside this isolation, the regime has been seeking to consolidate its geopolitical alliance with China by offering Special Economic Zones (SEZ).¹² In 2025 alone, the regime granted mining concessions to 12 Chinese companies, comprising 6.3% of the national territory.¹³ This is in addition to the 25% of the national territory already under concession.¹⁴ All this without considering the environmental, social and cultural cost of gold mining for local communities throughout the country or for the Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast (RACC).¹⁵

Regressive legal reforms

To facilitate the concentration of political and economic power, and in violation of international human rights law, as well as to the detriment of the peace and security of these peoples, the regime failed to consult on constitutional reforms (Law No. 1234)¹⁶ that subordinate municipal and RACC bodies to central government. At the same time, it reduced previously recognized communal property rights.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the so-called Law on Environmental Conservation Areas and Sustainable Development (Law No. 1248)¹⁸ eliminated the obligation to consult communities and authorized mining activities within legally protected areas, prioritizing corporate interests over health,¹⁹ food security and Indigenous self-determination. In addition, the Border Territories Law (Law No. 1258)²⁰ confiscated almost 19,000 km² within a radius of 15 km of the border, in violation of the inalienability of communal property established in Laws No. 28²¹ and No. 445.²²

No consultation and, therefore, no Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Mining concessions are granted hastily and confer exclusive rights on companies for 25 years, renewable for a further 25.²³ They are granted without technical studies²⁴ and without consultation processes and do not therefore obtain the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the affected communities, despite the fact that ministerial agreements mandate negotiations with the landowners.²⁵ From a legal point of view, it could thus be argued that they are null and void.²⁶

In addition, the regime has developed several patterns to avoid properly consulting the communities:

First, it co-opts some members of the Indigenous or Afro-descendant Territorial and/or Communal Governments –mainly the presidents– obtaining their signatures through flattery or threats and thus bypassing the participation of the community assemblies that form the highest territorial and communal authority.²⁷

Second, the Autonomous Regional Councils of the Caribbean Coast (CRACC) refuse to certify the authorities legitimately elected by the communities according to their customs, traditions and/or internal statutes,²⁸ and instead arbitrarily certify, in full or in part, Territorial and/or Communal Governments made up of public officials and/or members and operators of the central government party, in order to facilitate the usurpation of natural resources in Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories.

Third, the regime has repeatedly and illegally used the approval of the CRACC (state institutions which, according to Article 181 paragraph 3 of the Political Constitution, must also approve concessions) as a replacement for the FPIC of the affected communities; this was expressly rejected by the Inter-American Court in *the Case of the Rama and Kriol Peoples and the CNCIB vs. Nicaragua*.²⁹

Artisanal mining as a spearhead

The drive for internal migration of non-indigenous people, settlers known as “colonos”, into Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories has played a decisive role in the invasions, usurpations, environmental depredation and extractivism. These dynamics destroy soils, forests, water quality and cause a loss of biodiversity in Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories, as well as in areas that were previously legally protected.³⁰ Under the protection of the companies and the regime,³¹ armed settlers plus artisanal miners or *güriseros* invade Indigenous communities with total impunity,³² subject women and girls to sexual abuse, and usurp the gold deposits (as was the case of the Kiwakumbaih massacre),³³ which leads to forced displacement.³⁴

Conclusion

Concessions granted without consultation –and therefore without FPIC– and without technical studies, together with armed violence from settlers and *güriseros*, form the backbone of the policy of forced assimilation and internal colonization of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities. Such actions nullify the self-determination of these peoples, resulting in a loss of control over their traditional territories. This affects their right to life and dignity, threatening their peace and security and, consequently, their existence as peoples.

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Panama



According to the 2023 census, eight Indigenous Peoples live in Panama: the Ngäbe, Buglé, Gunadule, Emberá, Wounaan, Naso Tjër Di, Bribri, and Bokota. In total, there are 698,114 Indigenous inhabitants, representing 17.2% of the country's total population.^{1, 2, 3} This demonstrates the multicultural and multilingual nature of Panama. According to the 2023 census,⁴ there are 352,292 Indigenous women, representing 50.5% of the total Indigenous population and 345,822 men, equivalent to 49.5% of the total Indigenous population.

These Indigenous Peoples are represented by the National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples of Panama, founded on 21 January 1991 with the aim of fighting for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, defending their territories and political advocacy.

In addition, there are national laws that promote the rights and governance of Indigenous Peoples. Among the main ones are the current National Constitution, which establishes several articles relating to the identity and governance of Indigenous Peoples; Law No. 41 of 1998, known as the General Environmental Law; the laws that gave rise to the Comarcas; Law No. 17 of 2016, establishing the protection of traditional medicinal knowledge; Law No. 37 of 2016, governing the right to consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Prior Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples; and Law No. 301 of 2022, establishing measures for the integral development of Indigenous Peoples. However, these laws are not enforced when addressing the problems of Indigenous Peoples.

Panama has not yet ratified ILO Convention 169 but did adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.⁵ It also signed the Declaration on the Decade of Indigenous Languages aimed at strengthening mother tongues, with little effect on Indigenous territories.

2025 saw a period of social tension due to the neoliberal policies of the Panamanian government, particularly following the enactment of Law No. 462, which introduced reforms to the Organic Law of the Social Security Fund (CSS) in March 2025. The approval of these measures generated a wave of protests led by unions, teachers' and health care associations, students and Indigenous communities. The protesters were denouncing not only the fact that the changes dismantled principles of solidarity and social justice in the pension system but also the lack of a democratic consultation process before approving the law.

Due to this increased social unrest, on 5 May 2025, the National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples of Panama (COONAPIP) called together the authorities of the country's 12 Indigenous territories, together with leaders and professionals, to establish a national commission led by the comarcal authorities. Its objective was to analyse the situation and propose actions to address the scale of the conflict occurring in Panama, especially on Indigenous territories.

Infringement of the social and environmental rights of Indigenous Peoples

Several social sectors –including teachers' unions, medical staff, construction workers and the University of Panama– expressed their discontent at the violations of economic rights resulting from the approval of Law No. 462; of environmental rights, linked to the opening of the mines; and of national sovereignty, due to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in contravention of the canal's neutrality treaties. These factors were the main triggers of social unrest in Panama.

According to the national government, Law No. 462, dated 18 March 2025, on the Social Security Fund, states that the retirement age remains at 62 for men and 57 for women, and that a technical commission will evaluate possible adjustments within six years, a decision that will require legislative endorsement.⁶

On the possible re-opening of the Cobre Panama mine, which has been closed since December 2023,⁷ the government is exploring the possibility of recommencing operations in June 2026⁸ but this is condi-

tional upon the results of an environmental audit and the suspension of ongoing legal proceedings.

As for the violation of the sovereignty of the Republic of Panama, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Security of Panama and the Department of Defence of the United States, on 9 April 2025,⁹ has been criticized by legal experts who argue that it contravenes the Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal. They have also pointed out formal irregularities, such as the absence of a date on the original document, which was subsequently written in by hand.

Repression of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples, especially the Ngäbe-Buglé, Emberá and Guna in Arimae and Changuinola, denounced the disproportionate use of force by the National Police and security forces during social protests against the legal reforms and extractive projects.¹⁰

There were thus police incursions into Indigenous areas, arbitrary detentions, and the use of tear gas and weapons, including inside homes and community spaces. These actions left people injured and families displaced¹¹ in the communities of Arimae, located in the Darién Tierras Collectivas of the Emberá people.

Workers in a banana union in Bocas del Toro –comprising mostly Ngäbe, Buglé and Guna people– were likewise repressed and their leaders taken to jail for defending their rights.¹²

Actions of the UN Special Rapporteur in Panama

As a result of the government's repression of the protests of the Indigenous Peoples, one of the first injured was the young university student, Caleb Bejerano, from the University Annex of Sitio Prado, in the Ngäbe-Buglé region, who remained in a critical situation as a result of the use of force by the police, while defending his rights as a citizen and that of national sovereignty.

The traditional authorities and Indigenous organizations therefore called on the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) to re-

quest the presence of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. On 19 June, the University of Panama was honoured to welcome Dr. Albert Barume,¹³ whose visit formed part of an agenda of key activities in the country. The meeting was organized by the Kuna Youth Movement, COONAPIP, the Guna General Congress, the Office of Indigenous Peoples of the University of Panama and the International Indian Treaty Council.¹⁴ During his visit, the Rapporteur visited the sites where acts of repression against the Indigenous populations had been recorded.¹⁵

Criminalization of Indigenous leaders, structural inequalities and the impact of megaprojects on their territories

In recent years, community leaders and human rights defenders have been criminalized and detained, thus intensifying the perception that peaceful protests and demonstrations, including those of Indigenous Peoples, are being treated as internal threats.¹⁶

One recent example can be found in Criminal Case 202500036802, which documents the criminalization and repression exercised in the town of Arimae, belonging to the General Congress of the Emberá Wounaan Tierras Colectivas, in Darién province.¹⁷

These actions only reinforce the communities' concerns regarding the disproportionate use of force and the lack of guarantees in the exercise of their collective rights. Indigenous communities continue to face profound social and economic inequalities, with gaps in education, health, access to basic services and development opportunities.¹⁸

In June 2025, the Guna General Congress (Gunayala) suspended relations with the Panamanian government in protest at the lack of dialogue with the authorities on reforms affecting their communities, territories and forms of self-government. This decision was evidence of the growing tension between the state authorities and the representative bodies of the Indigenous Peoples.

At the same time, the Guna community of *Uggubba* is still not receiving adequate state support to relocate after the heavy floods that affected it. The absence of public policies guaranteeing a dignified relo-

cation that respects these people's right to land and culture highlights the vulnerability of Indigenous communities to climate change.¹⁹

In addition, several Indigenous organizations submitted reports to international mechanisms, such as the UN Universal Periodic Review, denouncing persistent violations, especially related to megaprojects such as the CHAN 75 hydroelectric dam and the lack of respect for their ancestral territories.²⁰ Also of concern is the threat posed by the power interconnection project between Colombia and Panama, which would cross the territory of the Gunayala region, where the Panamanian government proposes its route, as it could affect Mother Earth due to the lack of an adequate environmental impact study. Consultations on FPIC have not yet taken place.

Conclusion

Although there are legal and institutional efforts in Panama to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, protect ancestral knowledge and promote development with identity, concrete violations of human and collective rights continued to occur on multiple fronts in 2025. These are especially evident in contexts of social protests, criminalization of leaders, police violence, lack of state support for emergency situations (such as climate displacement) and tensions related to megaprojects.

The state response has been considered disproportionate by Indigenous and human rights organizations, indicating that the effective protection of Indigenous rights still faces serious challenges.

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1996. It has a population of 5,993, being 2,942 men and 3,051 women. The Guna Comarca of Wargandi, located in the province of Darien, was recognized in 2000. It has a population of 2,336 people, of which 1,145 are men and 1,191 are women. The ancestral land of Dagargunyala, has only two communities living there: Bugguro (Púcuro) and Bai (Paya), located within the Darién National Park, in the province of Darién, bordering Colombia. Currently, some 80,996 Gunadule from Gunayala live outside the *comarca*, mainly in the capital and other cities in the country. The Embera-Wounaan nations share the same cultural characteristics, i.e., they both share the same culture, clothing and ancestral customs; they only differ in their languages. Today, most of the Embera live in the eastern part of the country, mainly in the Embera-Wounaan Comarca, created in 1983, and in scattered communities known as Tierras Colectivas (Collective Lands) in the province of Darién. There are 12,038 people living in the comarca and on the Tierras Colectivas, of whom 6,336 are men and 5,702 are women. The rest of the Embera population, approximately 39,619 people, live in other parts of the country. The Wounaan people reside mainly in the Emberá-Wounaan Comarca, located in the province of Darién and Panama. There are currently 2,069 people living in the Embera-Wounaan Comarca, being 990 women and 1,079 men. In addition, 8,565 Wounaan people live elsewhere in Panama. The majority of the Ngäbe population resides within the Ngäbe-Bugle Comarca, established in 1997. In turn, there are 207,540 people living in the region, of which 100,057 are men and 107,483 are women. A total of 237,338 Ngäbe people live elsewhere in Panama. The Bugle people also reside in the Ngäbe-Bugle Comarca, with a population of 12,027 people, 5,990 men and 6,037 women. In addition, 11,871 Bugle people live in other parts of Panama. The Naso Tjër Di Comarca, officially created on 4 December 2020, is located in the west of the country, bordering the province of Bocas del Toro, on the Costa Rican border. There are 5,568 Naso people living in Panama. The Bribri people are one of the minority groups found within the province of Bocas del Toro, on the border with Costa Rica. Its territory has not yet been recognized by the Panamanian government. There are currently 766 Bribri living in Panama.

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Paraguay



According to the results of the 2022 National Census of Indigenous Peoples, there are approximately 140,206 Indigenous individuals in Paraguay, representing 2.29% of the country's total population. These people identify as one of the 19 recognized Indigenous Peoples, broken down into five linguistic families: Guaraní (including the Aché, Avá Guaraní, Mbya, Pai Tavytera, Guaraní Ñandeva and Western Guaraní), Maskoy (with peoples such as Toba Maskoy, Enlhet Norte, Enxet Sur, Sanapaná, Angaité and Guaná), Mataco Mataguayo (Nivaclé, Maká, Manjui), Zamuco (Ayoreo, Ybytosó, Tomaráho) and Guaicurú (Qom).

Chapter V of the 1992 National Constitution recognizes Indigenous Peoples as cultural groups that pre-existed the formation of the Paraguayan State, guaranteeing them fundamental rights such as ethnic identity, community ownership of their lands, political participation and an education that respects their specific cultural features.

In addition, Paraguay has a solid legal framework that supports Indigenous rights, having ratified the main international human rights instruments, both in the universal and Inter-American systems.

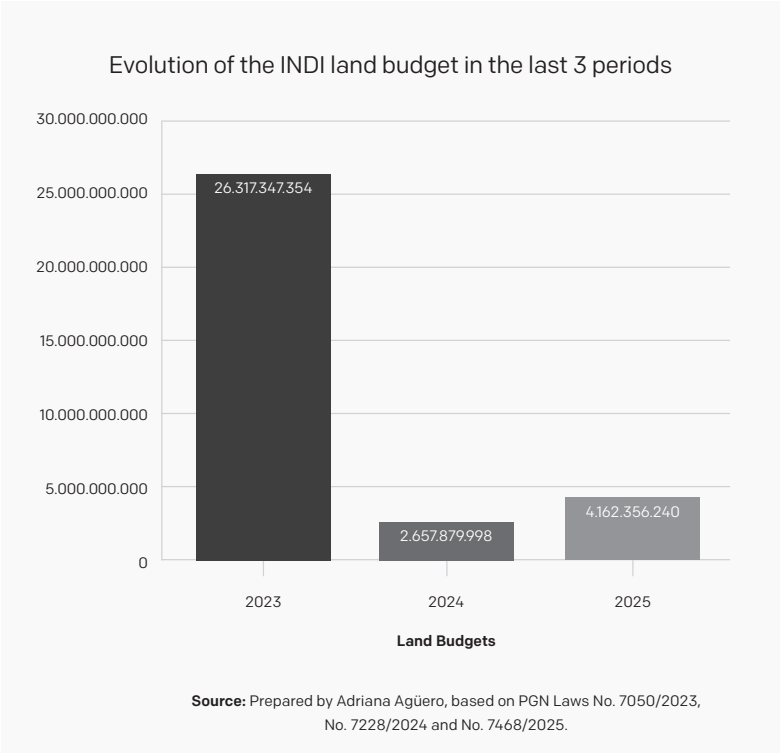
Administrative mutilation to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples

On 16 July 2025, the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute (INDI) announced on social media that its headquarters in Asunción were to close, transferring care of Indigenous Peoples to three regional offices that are, for many people, difficult to reach. The decision was made without consulting the 19 Indigenous Peoples, despite ILO Convention 169 having been ratified by Paraguay, and despite the provisions of the National Constitution and current laws. Particularly serious was the violation of Article 29 of Law No. 904/81, the Statute on Indigenous Communities, which establishes that INDI must have its legal domicile in Asunción, thus ensuring equitable and centralized access to its administrative and representative functions.

The leaders of the Indigenous communities have historically gone to Asunción to make representations to INDI and, on the same trip, visited other nearby public institutions. The unilateral decision to close the headquarters ignores this practice and generates a disproportionate barrier that restricts not only access to INDI but also to all state institutions.

Decreased public budget for ancestral land purchases

Against this backdrop, the gradual and ominous decrease in state budget for institutions in charge of recovering the lands and territories of traditional Indigenous habitat was reflected, in 2025, in the purchases of truly insignificant plots of land for return to the ancestral domain.



It should be noted at this point that there was some resistance: the PYG 26,000,000,000 (approx. EUR 3.4 million) for 2023 was effectively obtained due to pressure from Indigenous organizations,¹ compared to the approx. PYG 3,000,000,000 (approx. EUR 400,000) which, since 2020, has barely enabled them to scrape by in terms of land purchases.

Nonetheless, in addition to the negative perception of institutional performance and budget cuts, land acquisitions in traditional Indigenous habitats are now minimal: in the last three tax years, up to May 2025, INDI acquired a negligible area of just 107 hectares in total for restitution to Indigenous communities.

Interests under the National Green Finance Strategy

Indigenous Peoples need the forest to live but the government is focused on making the forests disappear, spreading a discourse that backwardness is necessarily linked to the persistence of common natural resources. The Minister of the Interior publicly wondered if the Indigenous lands were “productive”,² without distancing himself from the interests of the business community. This constitutes a disregard for the specific legal nature of the collective property of Indigenous Peoples and a blindness to their important role in preserving biodiversity.

Environmental licences for silvopastoral exploitation or charcoal production projects are granted without the knowledge or consent of Indigenous communities. At the macro level, the design and participation processes in the Green Economy have not been inclusive of the 19 Indigenous Peoples either.

Furthermore, these policies insist on adopting false solutions, which aggravates the situation: deforestation has not been halted and the poisoning of the soil and watercourses has not been decisively addressed. It is in this context that the government's discourse relies mainly on “low tax pressure” and “competitiveness”, centred on a presumed sustainability that does not exist,³ as well as on the intention that foreign business capital should be the driving force behind the country's economy. This is without mentioning the existence of lands and territories that are traditional Indigenous habitats or the necessary guidelines for their protection and preservation.

Territorial conflicts in the absence of climate justice: cases during 2025

Conflicts over a lack of climate justice are escalating for Indigenous people, who are being forced to abandon their ancestral livelihoods and face problems such as indiscriminate logging of native forests, soil degradation on their own lands, fences, intimidation, criminalization, pesticide spraying, loss of biodiversity and the drying up of waterways. The following are cases that occurred during 2025:

- **Possible unauthorized purchase and sale of environmental services and dispossession of the El Estribo community of the Enxet people:** Apparent financial loss of more than PYG 1,400,000,000 (approx. EUR 185,000), which the El Estribo community did not receive for the sale of environmental service certificates. The criminal investigation is ongoing.⁴
- **Possible unauthorized purchase and sale of environmental services and dispossession of the Novoctas community of the Nivaclé people:** Apparent financial loss of more than PYG 1,300,000,000 (approx. EUR 172,000), which the Novoctas community did not receive from the sale of environmental service certificates. The criminal investigation is ongoing.⁵
- **Mining in Paso Jovái, communities of the Mbya Guaraní people:** Loss of biodiversity, unlicensed handling of contaminating substances (cyanide/mercury) and health impacts on Mbya communities.⁶
- **Dispossession of ancestral lands in judicial litigation, Mbya Guaraní people:** The Hugua Po'i community was once again dispossessed due to the lifting of a precautionary measure obtained by the Tres Palmas company.⁷ Crops are at risk of being destroyed or illegally appropriated if evicted.
- **Dispossession of ancestral lands through the use of violence, Ava Guaraní people:** The Karapã community has denounced an escalation of attacks, which includes a forced eviction in January; fires in May; animal theft; shootings; road blockades and the use of drones to harass them. This violence was allegedly the responsibility of thugs from the Principado S.A. company, which appears to have appropriated their ancestral territory.⁸

Other elements of climate justice that directly affect Indigenous Peoples:

- The lack of a Zero Deforestation Law for the Western Region.
- Non-ratification of the Escazú Agreement.⁹
- The rejection of EU Regulation No 1115 on traceability of raw materials. There is resistance from the business community to traceability requirements for soybeans and other export products. The business association is continuing to negotiate for flexibility in the application of the regulations.¹⁰

Unmet basic needs in Indigenous households and violation of the right to education¹¹

According to the 2022 National Indigenous Census, 38% of Indigenous people are under the age of 14, while 28.6% are between 15 and 30 years of age, accounting for 67.1% of the total Indigenous population.¹²

Furthermore, CDIA's Statistical Bulletin entitled *Niñez y Adolescencia en el Chaco Paraguayo*¹³ [Childhood and Adolescence in the Paraguayan Chaco] reports that seven in every 10 homes in the Chaco has at least one unmet basic need (UBN). Households in the Chaco departments account for the highest number of UBN nationally, in a region where there are 25 times more Indigenous people than in the rest of the country.

This deprivation of basic rights (access to drinking water, electricity, food, health and a healthy environment) demonstrates that this group of children is excluded from the full exercise of their right to education. One in three Indigenous communities has no school, and their dropout rate is among the highest in the country: six in 10 students who start school in the Chaco fail to graduate.¹⁴

In terms of the availability of teachers, there are some 106 Indigenous communities in the Chaco that do not have teachers, representing 33.33% of the total.

Infant mortality and maternal mortality

The Bulletin also indicates that the departments of Alto Paraguay, Boquerón and Presidente Hayes have the highest infant mortality rates in

the country, with one range covering 0 to 1 year of age and the other 0 to 5 years of age.

With regard to maternal mortality, Presidente Hayes is home to 2.02% of the country's population, and is predominantly Indigenous; however, it accounts for 9.6% of maternal deaths, a percentage almost five times higher than other departments. Furthermore, four of the seven maternal deaths in 2023 in this department were girls and adolescents aged 10 to 19.

National Indigenous protest in response to the presence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Paraguay

During a hearing to monitor compliance with the rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (I/A Court H.R) on two international cases brought by Indigenous communities against the Paraguayan State,¹⁵ on 22 September 2025, a demonstration organized by Indigenous organizations reached the Palace of Justice, in Sajonia, with the aim of raising awareness of their demands regarding the closure of INDI's central office in the capital, the allocation of a larger budget for land purchases, the cessation of evictions against the communities and the implementation of an inter-institutional roundtable to analyse the proposals.

After two weeks of coordinated Indigenous protests that spread throughout the country, on 03 October 2025,¹⁶ Gen. (SR) Juan Ramón Benegas (former military man) was finally persuaded to resign and the Executive Power appointed Mr. Hugo Ramón Samaniego Hermosilla as the new president of the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute. The pending meetings with Indigenous organizations were held immediately with the aim of advancing the dialogues.

In conclusion: racial exclusion persists in Paraguay in all its forms

Throughout 2025, racial exclusion occurred in the form of administrative actions, judicial decisions and statements in the media by public

actors whose handling of such issues should guarantee priority compliance with the rights of one of the most vulnerable sectors: Indigenous Peoples.

In turn, given the context, the discussion on adopting a law against all forms of discrimination is becoming increasingly necessary given the racism that can also be seen in the actions of Paraguay's citizens, their expressions of intolerant and misinformed opinions on social media, and hate speech towards poverty.

Containing, mitigating or defending Indigenous people from the consequences of climate change on their lands and territories also remains a fundamental task that the Paraguayan State must include in its plans, for priority implementation through concrete actions.

It is furthermore urgent that the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute, rather than closing its doors to comprehensive care, undergoes intelligent reengineering that will allow it to cease being the target of discrimination as the governing body of policies for Indigenous Peoples within the administrative and budgetary design by the public sector.

Faced with the dismantling of public policies, the unmet basic needs in Indigenous households and poor management on the part of those responsible for the comprehensive protection of Indigenous Peoples in Paraguay, the mass mobilization of Indigenous Peoples demonstrated that they continue to exert collective strength with which to curb the perverse regression in human rights.

In 2025, the Indigenous protest thus clearly demonstrated this collective determination and steely dignity, expressing their unity as pre-existing peoples, despite their material difficulties, a still racist Paraguayan society, and the failure to fulfil their fundamental rights.

This is an excerpt adapted from a longer article by the same author, published in CODEHUPY's Annual Human Rights Report, 2025: *Resistencia Indígena frente a un modelo productivo de profunda exclusión*, CODEHUPY, Asunción, 2025. Available at: <https://www.codehupy.org.py/informe-anual/2025/>

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Peru



The Peruvian State officially recognizes 47 Indigenous languages, spoken by 55 different peoples. In the 2017 National Population Census, almost six million people (5,972,603) self-identified as belonging to an Indigenous or Native People, representing just over a quarter of the total population. Of these, 5,176,809 claimed to be Quechua and 548,292 Aymara. The Amazonian census population that self-identifies as Asháninka, Awajún, Shipibo and other peoples amounted to 197,667. Some 50,000 claim to belong to other Indigenous or Native Peoples. It is known that census under-registration in the Amazon region continues to be a problem.

Some 16% of the national territory is covered by mining concessions, which overlap with 35% of the territory of the peasant and native communities. In the Peruvian Amazon, hydrocarbon concessions cover more than 70% of the region, affecting villages and natural protected areas. The overlapping of these concessions with communal territories, the enormous pressure from extractive industries and their polluting effects, the absence of land-use planning and the lack of effective prior consultation all exacerbate the territorial and socio-environmental conflicts in the country. Peru has signed and ratified ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples and voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.

To understand the peace and security situation of Peru's Indigenous Peoples, it is essential to understand the general political context, marked by a prolonged crisis that is eroding institutions and the democratic rule of law. One expression of this can be seen in the fact that, in the last 25 years –since 2000– Peru has had 11 Presidents of the Republic for various reasons, including removal from office for moral incapacity.

Currently, four former presidents are in prison (Alejandro Toledo, Pedro Castillo, Martín Vizcarra and Ollanta Humala), one died in prison (Alberto Fujimori), and another committed suicide when he was about

to be arrested (Alan García). Dina Boluarte was removed from office by Congress in December 2025 on the grounds of “permanent moral incapacity”, and the Attorney General's Office is investigating her for various reasons, including deaths that occurred during social protests against her government. The current acting president, José Jerí, faces a critical political situation due to his lack of transparency. There are calls for his resignation, motions of censure, and growing doubts as to whether he will be able to remain in office until July 2026. His continuity depends on parliamentary negotiations and on the progress of the tax investigation against him.

This situation of institutional instability can be explained by the fragile democratic system, the increase in corruption and the penetration of political activity and the functioning of the state by economic interests. Analysts agree: the legacy of the dictator, Alberto Fujimori, embodied in his daughter, Keiko Fujimori, has been favoured by a mafia-like criminal power that bends and controls public institutions from within the Congress of the Republic.

In alliance with some right-wing and far right-wing organizations, this political coalition has managed to tie the hands of governments and even impose itself on the executive branch. To this end, it has coluded with the *Peru Libre* Party led by Vladimir Cerrón, an organization that claims to be Marxist-Leninist but which has formed an alliance with Fujimorism (“*fujicerronismo*”) to co-govern in favour of criminality and create legislative and institutional shields to protect itself from accusations.

Fujimorism began with its gradually increasing control of the Constitutional Court, the Ombudsman's Office, the National Board of Justice and the Attorney General's Office, and is now fully engaged in co-opting the judiciary by means of threats and dismissals. The pro-Fujimori Fernando Rospigliosi, acting president of Congress, is attempting to force judges to apply the Amnesty Law, which seeks to benefit military and police personnel accused of serious human rights violations in emblematic cases such as Accomarca, Cayara, Chuschi, and others involving members of the Army and Navy. Honest judges are, however, refusing to apply this law because it contravenes human rights law and crimes against humanity, as recommended by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

The eagerness of Fujimorism and its allies to take complete control of these institutions is causing concern regarding their likely control and manipulation of the electoral bodies in order to influence the results of the general elections of April 2026. Keiko Fujimori is running for a fourth consecutive time, obsessed with political power and trying to evade investigations into alleged money laundering linked to the irregular financing of her 2011 and 2016 presidential campaigns, as well as an accusation that she formed a criminal organization within her *Fuerza Popular* party.

Organizations that are analysing the deterioration of democracy in Peru have gone from describing it as a “flawed democracy” to a “hybrid regime”, i.e., a democracy with authoritarian features. This is according to the *Democracy Index 2024* published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the business unit of *The Economist Group*.¹

Some analysts such as Jaime Antezana –who investigates drug trafficking, terrorism and social conflict– claim that the Peruvian State has been captured by illegal economies that represent a narco-power or narco-state. This would explain the package of pro-crime laws which, in addition to shielding political corruption, favour criminal groups linked to illegal economies. In the 2016 elections, Antezana identified 45 narco-candidates campaigning. Of these, 21 were elected through eight political groups. Fourteen were from *Fuerza Popular*, followed by *Alianza Para el Progreso* (APP), *Podemos Perú* and *Renovación Popular*.

According to Antezana, the Juliaca massacre, which took place between 15 December 2022 and 9 January 2023, marked the beginning of the end of democracy and the start of Peru's conversion to a narco-criminal parliamentary dictatorship. Since then, democracy has no longer existed in Peru and there is a narco-power or narco-dictatorship. The final blow was the assault and control of the Public Prosecutor's Office through the appointment of Tomás Aladino Gálvez, organized as a member of the “White Collar” mafia. This situation of misgovernment and erosion of democracy is being reproduced in different regions of the country and operates most strongly through crimes such as extortion, contract killings, kidnapping, human trafficking, arms trafficking and illegal mining.

Criminal mafias and illegal economies

According to the Peruvian Institute of Economics (IPE), illegal economies together generate more than USD 12,645,000 (approx. EUR 10.7 million). Illegal gold mining is the main illicit economic activity, and likely generates some USD 6,840,000 (approx. EUR 5.8 million) annually, resulting in an estimated loss of 2.5% of Peru's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) each year. "Beyond the economic figures, the human cost is considerable, with communities being displaced, rights being violated and growing insecurity in the regions affected".²

In terms of economic power, illegal mining, especially gold mining, has grown to become the country's main illicit activity, surpassing even drug trafficking in terms of economic and social impact. "This phenomenon not only involves the uncontrolled exploitation of resources but also feeds a wider network of organized crime, profoundly impacting both governance and the social fabric," notes the Observatory of the National Centre for Strategic Planning (CEPLAN).³

The power of illegal mining operators is such that they have achieved the fifth consecutive extension of the Integral Mining Formalization Registry (REINFO). The decision adopted on 26 December 2025 extends the controversial REINFO until December 2026 or until the Small-Scale and Artisanal Mining Law (MAPE) comes into force, whichever is the earlier.

According to a report by Amazon Conservation (ACCA), illegal gold mining is present in nine of Peru's Amazonian regions: Puno, Cusco, Huanuco, Loreto, Amazonas, Ucayali, Cajamarca, Madre de Dios and Pasco. In the regions of Loreto and Amazonas alone, there are 14 rivers invaded by illegal mining, and dredgers or other mining machinery have been reported in more than 200 rivers and streams.

Mercury is one of the most toxic substances for health, and much of the mercury found in the rivers and ecosystems of the Peruvian Amazon comes from gold mining. Claudia Vega, coordinator of the Mercury programme at the Amazonian Scientific Innovation Centre (CINCIA), explains that "when [mercury] reaches bodies of water, it transforms into methylmercury, which is one of its most toxic forms, and enters the food chain". In other words, it affects the fish, the animals that feed on them and the people who consume them.⁴

Drug trafficking is another activity that thrives and is linked to deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, posing a threat to those who oppose this illegal activity. According to the official report of the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (Devida) on *Coca Crop Monitoring in 2025*, more than 89,000 hectares of illegal coca were recorded in Peru in 2024. The report also notes the spread of this crop into 15 protected areas and more than 200 Indigenous communities.

Road construction is another threat to Amazonian forests and Indigenous communities. A study by the Foundation for Conservation and Sustainable Development (FCDS) of five road projects promoted by the Peruvian government in the Amazon revealed that these roads represent a security risk to the country as they could strengthen the logistics chains of drug trafficking and illegal mining. Other illegal activities, such as deforestation, logging and wildlife trafficking, also operate in ways that undermine the peace and security of communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Disturbance of Indigenous peace and security

The strategic response of Amazonian peoples and communities has been to strengthen the formation of autonomous territorial governments in an effort to better coordinate beyond the native communities and better respond to threats from outside actors and criminal activities.

Another response to the context of violence and criminality has been the activation of Indigenous guards who, in November 2025, held an inter-learning meeting with the participation of delegations from three countries.

The IV International Congress of the Regional Organization of the Indigenous Guard of the Shipibo Konibo Nation, held in the city of Pucallpa, was the ideal forum for signing the Declaration of Bakish Mai in which they reaffirmed their role in providing protection from organized crime and state inaction. They also called for official recognition of their work in the interests of peace, security, Indigenous justice and self-determination.

APCI Law and threat to civic space

On Sunday 14 September, the government published two Supreme Decrees redefining the role of the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation (APCI) and its sanctioning powers. These were Supreme Decree Nos. 032 and 033 of the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, approving the Regulations off the Law on the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation and its Regulations on Infractions and Sanctions (RIS).

Among the substantial regulatory changes is the mandatory registration of Non-Governmental Development Organizations (NGDOs) and Foreign Entities and Institutions for International Technical Cooperation (ENIEX). The RIS classifies infractions as minor, serious or very serious, with fines of up to 500 tax units and cancellation of registration.

Several civil organizations have expressed their concern at the punitive nature of the regulation, especially the sanctions against NGOs that provide legal advice to victims of the state. Peru is one of the few countries in the region that explicitly penalizes the use of cooperation funds to defend victims of the state in national or international courts. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has described the regulation as “retaliation” against those who report human rights violations, noting that it violates the right to legal defence.

In addition, there are fears that the regulation could be used to limit activism or citizen oversight, especially in contexts of social conflict or repression. The APCI has to approve NGO plans in advance, which may limit their ability to respond quickly to emergencies or rights violations. In turn, the APCI can define which activities “affect public order” without clear criteria, opening the door to political interpretation.

Criminalization of human rights defenders and journalists

According to the database of attacks on defenders compiled by the National Human Rights Coordinating Committee (CNDDHH), five Indigenous and environmental defenders were killed in 2025. For its part, the National Association of Journalists recorded 458 attacks on journalists in its 2025 annual report, with nuances in gender-based vio-

lence. Among the attacks, the murders of four journalists were reported: Gastón Medina, Ramiro Celís, Fernando Núñez and Mitzar Castillejos, crimes attributed to hired killers.

Census with limitations

The 2025 Census, which is supposed to provide an up-to-date snapshot of the country and guide public policy, ended up causing concern among Indigenous Peoples due to flaws that put their visibility at risk. An analysis by the Indigenous Peoples Working Group of the National Human Rights Coordinating Committee highlighted the importance of the censuses in understanding people's living conditions but revealed several flaws in the process and implementation that are detrimental to Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous organizations are demanding total transparency, the publication of rural registers and disclosure of census programming given their distrust of the results of the 2025 Census, generated by the multiple deficiencies. The CNDDHH report concludes that the 2025 Census showed that, without participation and an intercultural approach, the state runs the risk of continuing to render those who should be a central part of the construction of a more just and plural country invisible.⁵

It should be noted that, in 2025, the Harakbut people developed a community self-census, a strategy aimed at strengthening the process of self-government and reflecting the spiritual connection of the people with the territory. This was emphasized by Jaime Corisepa, opo of the Harakbut Nation, during the event to present the results of this pioneering process of population, territorial and socio-cultural information management. The activity was attended by a large Indigenous delegation, representatives of international organizations, the state and civil society, who recognized this tool as a contribution to intercultural dialogue.

Outlook for 2026

2026 will be marked in Peru by the general elections to be held on Sunday 12 April to elect the President of the Republic, the Vice-Presidents

and representatives to Congress and the Andean Parliament for the period 2026-2031. These are the “most complex elections in history”, since a single ballot will feature 39 political groups authorized by the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), a record number in Peruvian history and which could lead to a fragmentation of the public vote. Regional and municipal elections are scheduled for 4 October 2026.

Raphael Hoetmer, director of Amazon Watch's Western Amazon Programme, estimates that a complex electoral process is coming, with the risk of more violence than on previous occasions. “I think the presence of representatives of local economic interests linked to illegal mining, drug trafficking and other illegal activities will increase. This is going to put us in very complicated local scenarios,” Hoetmer said.

For his part, Jaime Antezana has observed a change in the strategy of narco-power and Fujimorism ahead of the April elections. In this new period, the use of criminal violence through political assassinations will increase, and actions intended to provoke memories and the fear of Shining Path will multiply. The political ploy is to resurrect terrorist actions because Fujimorism boasts of having effectively combated terrorism, which is absolutely false; however, there are uninformed people who may believe it. A criminal Shining Path is being fabricated, led by organized crime, which today has an army of hitmen throughout the country and is willing to do anything on demand, explains Antezana.

One example of a political hitman attack would be the assassination of Andrea Vidal, a lawyer and former congressional employee, in January 2025 while she was travelling in a taxi. The crime uncovered allegations of an alleged prostitution ring linked to Parliament. The investigation has been questioned due to serious irregularities and possible cover-ups within the National Police.

Hoetmer believes: “The only way to tackle insecurity in the country is by creating economic and inclusive alternatives for people, and this involves reinforcing and strengthening community territorial governance, particularly Indigenous, and contributing to the protection of people who face these situations.”

“While the number of murders in 2025 has been lower than in previous years, the threat level remains very high and constant. On the other hand, the level of government action against them also remains very low,” adds Hoetmer. One issue that needs to be discussed for the future

of the country is “what security means for the future of Peru and how issues of violence are intertwined with the way in which an economic model is implemented, how the level of inequality is maintained and how the Amazon is exploited.” “I think that would be one of the challenges,” he concludes.

Concerns over the democratic deterioration and regression of human rights prompted the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), together with other partners, to undertake the *Tejiendo Ciudadanía* [Weaving Citizenship] initiative,⁶ which has developed 37 proposals grouped into five priority areas: greater security, less corruption, better basic services, greater economic growth with inclusion, and protection of human rights. These proposals should serve as a road map for a new social pact and it is hoped the electoral candidates will take them on board.

Similarly, the National Human Rights Coordinating Committee and more than 150 social organizations launched the document *Consensus for Human Rights*, a roadmap for the 2026 elections. The document is divided into seven thematic areas: Institutional and Political Reforms; Justice, Security and Memory; Defence and Expansion of Civic Space and Rights of Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian Peoples. It also covers Environmental Justice and the Right to Water; Real Equality and a Life Free from Violence; and Real Care and Support for Vulnerable Populations.

It is against this dark and uncertain backdrop that the general elections in April and the regional elections in October 2026 will take place. While, on the one hand, criminal forces conspire to continue exploiting power, on the other, citizens are making efforts to reverse the situation under the most difficult conditions.

Notes and references

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Rapa Nui (Easter Island)



Rapa Nui is an island located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, more than 3,700 kilometres off the coast of continental Chile, with an area of 16,628 hectares. It is inhabited by the Rapa Nui people, descendants of an age-old culture recognized for the creation of large megalithic structures known as Moai and for having developed a unique civilization. Rapa Nui is currently a territory annexed to the State of Chile, by virtue of a treaty signed by both nations on 09 September 1888 and known as the Agreement of Wills. This document establishes respect for the investiture of the Rapa Nui chiefs and reserves ownership of the land for the Rapa Nui people. However, the Chilean State is systematically failing to comply with this agreement, usurping the ownership of the land and committing major violations of the rights of its original inhabitants.

Self-determination vs State imposition

2025 will go down in the political memory of the Rapa Nui people as a turning point. Not because of a conquest recognized by the State but because of the collective response to an attempt perceived as an historical regression: the State of Chile's attempt to impose a Special Statute of Government and Administration on Rapa Nui, designed and implemented from a logic of centralism and without fully respecting the collective rights of the Indigenous people to their territory, governance and self-determination.

This was neither a technical disagreement nor an administrative dispute. What was at dispute was fundamental: who makes decisions about Rapa Nui and which institutions exercise this decision-making power.

Historical and political context

The relationship between the Rapa Nui people and the Chilean State has been marked by a long history of dispossession, colonialism, territorial confinement and external tutelage. Since the 1888 Agreement of Wills, signed on an understanding of mutual respect and the preser-

vation of the people's own authorities, and for most of the 20th century, when the Rapa Nui population was confined to the Hanga Roa sector while the rest of the island was administered by private companies and, later, by the Navy, the collective experience has been one of an increasingly eroded sovereignty.

The struggle for the recovery of land, for the recognition of their own institutions and for the effective exercise of self-determination has been constant.

Formal start of the consultation process in 2025

The conflict that marked the 2025 political cycle had a precise administrative starting point. By means of Exempt Resolution No. 2,467, dated 25 June 2025, of the Ministry of the Interior, Undersecretary of the Interior, published on Friday, 04 July 2025 in the Official Gazette, the State ordered a consultation process with Indigenous Peoples, instructed the start of administrative proceedings and called for a consultation process on the Special Statute of Government and Administration for the Special Territory of Easter Island.

This act gave rise to an Indigenous consultation process that took place during the second half of 2025, its foundations being established at the central level of the State and its implementation being entrusted to the Provincial Presidential Delegation of Easter Island and to administrative bodies defined by this authority itself.

From its earliest stages, the process was perceived by broad sectors of the Rapa Nui people as an initiative designed without effective prior dialogue with the people's own institutions. The methodologies, stages, deadlines and partners were defined without an initial agreement with the cultural and territorial authorities, generating early distrust as to the legitimacy of the process.

Evolution of the process and questions of legitimacy

Over the next few months, planning and information meetings were held, organized and moderated by officials from the Ministry of the In-

terior. This process was characterized by extremely low levels of effective participation from the Rapa Nui people, as well as constant complaints regarding flaws in its design, implementation and methodology, particularly with regard to lack of representativeness, good faith and cultural appropriateness. This was compounded by a lack of adequate, complete and culturally relevant information, as well as the hierarchical dependence of the process facilitators on the State body that was promoting the proposed Statute, which only embedded the perception of a lack of impartiality.

In this context, the Ma'u Henua Indigenous community, in its capacity as autonomous administrator of the Rapa Nui National Park, issued a high-impact public statement at the end of August 2025 expressing its deep concern at a proposal that did not reflect the true will of the Rapa Nui people nor adequately protect the territorial, cultural and governance rights associated with their ancestral territory. This statement had a catalytic effect and was followed by public demonstrations and critical positions from other Rapa Nui authorities and organizations, including Koro Nui o te Vaikava (Council of the Sea), the NGO Vahine Matato'a and the Tehigaro Indigenous community.

Finally, these latter two organizations and authorities resorted to the justice system to resolve the conflict, filing an appeal for protection before the national courts and denouncing the illegality and arbitrariness of the Indigenous consultation process. The action was registered under Case No. 7.861-2025 before the Valparaíso Court of Appeals, thus consolidating a scenario of formal legal challenge to a process perceived as lacking in legitimacy.

The response of the Rapa Nui people

Faced with this situation, the Rapa Nui people responded with organized and well-founded actions. During September and October, as part of a series of peaceful marches and demonstrations, a Request for Invalidation and Definitive Termination of the Indigenous Consultation Process was filed, denouncing serious flaws in legality, representativeness, impartiality and good faith.

Subsequently, on 17 November 2025, during the internal deliberation stage of the process, an assembly of the Rapa Nui people adopt-

ed a collective and unanimous decision: to terminate the consultation process, formally recording their rejection and backing up this decision with more than 1,000 signatures.

Despite this, the State decided to continue with the process, maintaining subsequent invitations and activities. This was interpreted as a direct denial of the Rapa Nui's right to self-determination and to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

The vote on 01 February 2026: an unequivocal statement

The cycle that had begun in 2025 came to a political head on 01 February 2026 when a vote was held in the territory of Rapa Nui to decide on the Special Statute proposal tabled by the Government, which had been drafted in conjunction with the Commission for the Development of Easter Island (CODEIPA).

The day saw historic participation on the part of the Rapa Nui people. The result was categorical: an overwhelming majority voted *Ina* (No), with approximately 87% rejecting the proposal that was put to the vote.

This result was an unmistakable political signal. The Rapa Nui people who participated in this process did not give their consent to the proposed Special Statute under the terms in which it was presented, as it thus failed to meet the minimum standard for FPIC required by International Human Rights Law for administrative or legislative measures that directly affect Indigenous Peoples.

Hōnui's statement

Once the results had been made known, the Hōnui ancestral authority, as the assembly of family clans of the Rapa Nui people, issued a public statement reaffirming the political significance of the result.

In that statement, Hōnui pointed out that the majority rejection did not constitute an abandonment of the historic demands of the people nor a rejection of autonomy or self-government. On the contrary, it expressed a political objection to the way in which the State had conducted the process, the insufficient guarantees, the lack of broad consen-

sus and the absence of a truly decolonizing approach when building an institutional framework for Rapa Nui.

The statement reaffirmed that the right to self-determination implies that the Rapa Nui people freely define their political status and development model, without impositions or institutional designs that are alien to their collective will. They also recalled that the relationship between Rapa Nui and the State of Chile had its origin in the Treaty of 1888, a political agreement between two nations the spirit of which demands a relationship based on respect, good faith and recognition of collective rights to territory, lands and cultural heritage.

Finally, Hōnui called on the Rapa Nui people to remain united, informed and in a constant state of political alert, reaffirming that self-determination cannot be delegated or replaced by administrative mechanisms but must be exercised collectively from within the territory and with full historical awareness.

Evaluation and outlook

2025 cannot be understood solely as an administrative or legal conflict. It was a political reaffirmation of the Rapa Nui people in the face of attempts to redefine their governance without their consent.

The lesson is clear: it is not possible to build a legitimate Special Statute for Rapa Nui without the express consent of the people who inhabit it and give meaning to that territory. Any future process must start from the Rapa Nui people's own institutions, with a genuinely decolonizing approach and in accordance with international human rights standards.

Rather than closing down a discussion, the outcome of this cycle has opened up a pending task: that of rebuilding the political relationship between the State of Chile and the Rapa Nui people on the basis of respect, balanced dialogue and effective recognition of the right to decide their own destiny.

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Suriname



The Indigenous Peoples of Suriname number approximately 20,344 people, or 3.8% of the total population of 541,638¹ (census 2012). The four most numerous Indigenous Peoples are the Kaliña (Carib), Lokono (Arawak), Trio (Tirio, Tareno) and Wayana. In addition, there are small settlements of other Amazonian Indigenous Peoples, mostly in the south of Suriname, including the Akoerio, Warao, Apalai, Wai-Wai, Okomoyana, Mawayana, Katuena, Tunayana, Pireuyana, Sikiiyana, Alamayana, Maraso, Awayakule, Sirewu, Upuruy, Sarayana, Kasjoeyana, Murumuruyo, Kukuyana, Piyanakoto and Sakëta. The Kaliña and Lokono live mainly in the northern part of the country and are sometimes referred to as “lowland” Indigenous Peoples, whereas the Trio, Wayana and other Amazonian peoples live in the south and are referred to as “highland” peoples.

The legislative system of Suriname, based on colonial legislation, does not recognize Indigenous or tribal peoples, and Suriname has no legislation governing Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ land or other rights, in spite of various judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights calling for the country to develop and implement such legislation. This forms a major threat to the survival and well-being of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, particularly given the strong focus that is being placed on Suriname’s many natural resources (including oil, bauxite, gold, water, forests and biodiversity). Suriname is one of the few countries in South America that has not ratified ILO Convention 169. It did vote in favor of adopting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.

Legislative developments

In line with the fear expressed by Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Suriname that the draft framework law² of June 2021 on the Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Peoples in Suriname would be watered down, after many comments during its discussion in the National Assembly (unicameral parliament) of Suriname, a government

team headed by then Vice-President Ronnie Brunswijk did indeed submit a renewed version to Parliament in February 2025. The new draft was widely criticized as it did not provide any substantial legal security nor land rights for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, including by the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS),³ Vereniging van Saamaka Gemeenschappen (VSG),⁴ the association “Fiti Mankandra”,⁵ which includes various paramount chiefs of the Tribal Maroon peoples, the paramount chief of the Okanisi⁶ and the organization “A Marron KOMPAS”.⁷ Parliament did not reach a quorum on the day the revised draft law on collective rights was to be discussed (25 February 2025) and, in light of the intense protests, it was decided to postpone⁸ further debate on the draft law to an undefined date.

General elections were held in Suriname in May 2025 in which the *Nationale Democratische Partij* (NDP) obtained one seat more than the sitting *Verenigde Hervormingspartij* (VHP) and swiftly formed a coalition with five other political parties to obtain a two-thirds majority of seats in Parliament. In the Surinamese electoral system, the President and Vice-President are not elected directly by popular vote but by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly, thus forcing the formation of coalitions often consisting of four or more political parties. For the first time in Suriname's history, a female president was elected, namely Jennifer Simons (married name Geerlings), who was the Chair of the National Assembly for two terms (2010-2015 and 2015-2020) while her party leader, the late Desiré Bouterse, was President.

The six coalition parties quickly agreed on a joint “declaration of government”⁹ in June 2025, which outlines their political intentions for the next five years, and which includes, among other things, that “the land rights issue will be resolved”, noting in the same line, however, that a controversial law of 2017 would be legally enacted. That law, the “Law on the Protection of Indigenous and Tribal Residential and Living Areas”¹⁰ had been approved in Parliament but not signed into force by the then president Desiré Bouterse after protests from Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ organizations. The law had not been effectively consulted before adoption and, while intended to “protect” Indigenous and Tribal territories from the issuing of extractive concessions and/or land titles, had various shortcomings, particularly the size of the exemption, which was only a radius of five kilometers (which would have the effect of turning the villages into small reserves outside of which any title could be

given). Another article of the law explicitly forbids any other future land titles, which could also hinder the issuing of a collective land title.

VIDS, the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname, held a national “mini-conference” to discuss this and other urgent issues, and presented the resulting resolutions¹¹ to President Simons who said she will respect¹² the position of VIDS in opposing the enactment of the law. The Indigenous village leaders also impressed on the government and Parliament the need to follow principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), among others, in relation to another proposed law on protected areas,¹³ which may hinder rather than protect the collective land rights that have still not been recognized them under Surinamese legislation, in spite of repeated judgments¹⁴ from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights obliging Suriname to do so. The existing law on protected areas dates back to 1954,¹⁵ and conservation actors have long been pushing for revision, most recently in relation to a 20-million-dollar commitment of a consortium of conservation NGOs. A new draft law¹⁶ has been developed but not yet discussed. It is common knowledge that the tensions between forest and nature conservation, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ rights and Suriname’s dependence on its natural resources, particularly gold and in the near future also oil and gas, are potentially conflicting areas for which an easy solution has not yet been found. President Jennifer Simons acknowledged this tension and the need to make “difficult choices”¹⁷ in her speech to the 80th UN General Assembly on September 2025.

In the resolutions from the mini-conference, the village leaders also called (for the umpteenth time) for transparency in land titles and/or concessions in Indigenous territories, particularly ones that had allegedly been issued shortly before the elections of May 2025. Documents were published showing that the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management (GBB) had issued titles in the heart of several villages,¹⁸ as well as thousands of hectares as agricultural land destined, apparently, for Mennonite settlers,¹⁹ in spite of strong protests from Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and many civil society and environmental organizations as well. The new Minister of GBB, Stanley Soeropawiro, promised to investigate the alleged land titles; however, further information had not been provided at the time of writing this article.

Another noteworthy legislative proposal²⁰ in 2025 was that of including the acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples as the first inhab-

itants of Suriname in the preamble to the Constitution of Suriname. Although welcoming this as a first step, VIDS cautioned²¹ against rhetoric and called for explicit recognition of Indigenous Peoples' collective rights in the Constitution and national legislation.

National Indigenous FPIC Protocol

VIDS finalized the National FPIC Protocol for all Indigenous Peoples and Communities and presented²² this formally to the President of Suriname, Jennifer Simons, the Chair of the National Assembly, Ashwin Adhin, and Minister Stanley Soeropawiro of the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management. Keynote speaker during this event, which was held in the ballroom of the National Assembly, was Jennifer Corpuz, member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The National FPIC Protocol is the result of regional consultations held by VIDS over a period of three years in all its geocultural regions and adopted by all regions in November 2024 as an overarching national protocol outlining the rules and processes required to obtain (or not) their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The government and Parliament received the protocol with appreciation, stating²³ that it will serve as a basis for future legislation.

Chinalco

After intense protests from VIDS²⁴ and the Indigenous communities of West Suriname,²⁵ supported by a broad coalition of civil society organizations, including the Association of Economists of Suriname (VES)²⁶ and the Trade and Industry Association of Suriname (VSB),²⁷ a draft law endorsing a draft large-scale mining agreement with the Chinese mining company Chinalco was "parked"²⁸ by the National Assembly and the (previous) government in February 2025. However, in an announcement by Vice-President Gregory Rusland in November 2025, the new government made known that there would be renewed negotiations²⁹ with Chinalco on mining in West Suriname.

Notes and references

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Venezuela



Venezuela is a multi-ethnic and multicultural state that is home to more than 40 Indigenous Peoples, including the Wayúu, Pemón, Kariña, Yanomami, Warao, Yukpa, Yek'wana and Sáne-ma. These peoples have their own languages, worldviews and systems of social, political and cultural organization, closely linked to their ancestral territories. The Indigenous population is concentrated mainly in the states of Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro, as well as in Zulia, Apure, Monagas, Sucre and Lara, regions known for their high ecological and cultural diversity.

On 03 January 2026, Venezuela experienced an exceptional event: the incursion of U.S. troops onto its territory, which culminated in the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, and left more than 100 people dead. This act represents a serious threat to the self-determination of peoples, a fundamental right of Indigenous Peoples recognized by Article 6 of ILO Convention 169. Paradoxically, however, the Venezuelan government has managed to initiate political and economic negotiations that have avoided a major military escalation. In a context of increased international attention, while critical, this situation could offer an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to strengthen their participation in decision-making on resources, environmental policies and collective rights, despite the backdrop of the threat of war, pressure on subsoil resources and high uncertainty.

Venezuela has ratified ILO Convention 169, incorporating its principles into the 1999 Constitution and into laws such as the Organic Law on Indigenous Peoples and Communities (LOPCI) and the Law on the Demarcation of Indigenous Habitats and Lands. These regulations recognize territorial rights, political participation, cultural identity and the pluricultural nature of the State. Significant gaps nevertheless persist between legal recognition and effective implementation.

Rights to lands, territories and natural resources

Indigenous Peoples' right to their lands, territories and natural resources constitutes one of the pillars of international Indigenous law. Articles 13 and 14 of ILO Convention 169 recognize the special relationship that Indigenous Peoples have with the lands they traditionally occupy, as well as their right to ownership and possession thereof.¹

In 2025, this right continued to face significant limitations in Venezuela, particularly in the Amazon region. Various Indigenous and human rights organizations have documented the persistence of external pressures on Indigenous territories, associated with extractive activities and the lack of substantive progress in territorial demarcation processes. These situations have particularly affected peoples such as the Yanomami, Yek'wana, Sánema and Uwottüja, who are defending their territories from armed groups engaged in illegal gold mining.

Although the territories occupied by these peoples exceed 10,000,000 hectares and still lack formal titling instruments, they do have legal protections that limit external intervention. For example, the state of Amazonas, with 12,000,000 hectares, is maintaining the ban on extractive activities established in a 1989 presidential decree thanks to the resistance of local Indigenous organizations such as ORPIA, OIPUS and Kuyunu.

Indigenous territories function as essential ecological and social corridors for the Amazon, connecting forests, rivers and strategic ecosystems. According to the Amazon Network of Geo-referenced Socio-environmental Information,² Indigenous forests connect protected areas and facilitate the flow of species and nutrients, while Wataniba³ has documented social interconnection through traditional exchange routes, hunting, fishing and cultural ceremonies. The fragmentation of these territories as a result of mining and deforestation affects community cohesion, limits free transit and puts the lives and health of local populations at risk. Wataniba's participation in the North Amazonian Alliance, in coordination with ORPIA, as well as in the 2025 COPs, has strengthened international advocacy for the protection of these territories and recognition of their collective rights.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Intercultural health

In 2025, international economic sanctions against Venezuela continued to severely affect the public health system, disproportionately affecting Indigenous Peoples due to their dependence on state services, their remote location and the lack of private alternatives. Imports of essential drugs, vaccines, medical supplies and equipment suffered significant delays due to financial restrictions and over-compliance on the part of international banks and suppliers.

Gaps in care can be seen in relation to high rates of malaria, chronic malnutrition and respiratory diseases in states such as Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro.^{4, 5} The lack of infrastructure, roving medical personnel and adequate transport limits the cover of intercultural health programmes. Focused strategies, such as the active search for trachoma cases in Maroa and Rio Negro, demonstrate the need for specialist intervention.

Comparisons with Yanomami territories in Brazil show how effective access to primary health care can reduce malaria mortality (42%) and severe malnutrition (20%), reinforcing the urgency of intercultural programmes in Venezuela.

Mining and extractive pressure

Between 2020 and 2025, illegal mining in Amazonian Indigenous territories increased significantly. This expansion has resulted in ecological fragmentation, river contamination and community conflicts, affecting fundamental rights such as life, health and freedom of movement. Extractive activities also impact on a local economy based on agriculture, fishing and forest product collection, thus weakening food sovereignty.

The most revealing fact is that mining increased 31-fold between 2000 and 2024, an increase of 3,021%. This means that the current rate of expansion is equivalent to destroying approximately 10 football pitches of Amazon forest every hour, according to Wataniba.⁶

In the last five years, mining in the state of Amazonas has remained in a phase of expansion, consolidating historical highs. The affected area increased from 1,785 hectares in 2016 to 4,053 hectares in 2023, with a slight reduction to 3,933 hectares in 2024. Mining pressure

is thus still much higher than at the turn of the century, when the area was only 126 hectares in 2000.⁷

The tensions that mining generates between communities affect social cohesion and increase vulnerability to violence, displacement and internal conflict. The active participation of Indigenous and Wataniba organizations in socio-environmental monitoring is building community capacity to manage resources and protect territorial integrity, in line with Article 15 of ILO Convention 169.

Political participation and self-government

In 2025, Indigenous elections were held for representatives to the National Assembly and local councils. For the first time, Indigenous Peoples elected their own councillors to different federal bodies, implying progress in terms of participatory democracy.

However, challenges related to the availability of culturally-relevant information, a level playing field and adequacy of procedures were identified. According to ORPIA,⁸ internal mediation guaranteed the legitimacy of the results, reinforcing self-determination and effective political participation in accordance with Article 6 of Convention 169.

Spaces for Indigenous deliberation, such as the National Plenary for the Indigenous Constituent Process, have consolidated bodies for Indigenous decision-making, reflecting the exercise of the right to self-government and the preservation of their own customs and institutions (Article 8 of Convention 169).

Environment and climate change

Indigenous territories are crucial for biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. In 2025, Venezuelan Indigenous Peoples participated in national, regional and international spaces, including the Indigenous PreCOP and COP 30.

Wataniba (2025) emphasizes that the protection of these territories is linked to the right to a healthy environment and Indigenous participation in environmental management, in line with Article 15 of Convention 169.

Although no Indigenous land or habitat titles were formalized in 2025, the representative organizations of the Uwottüja del Sipapo and Ye'kwana del Alto Ventuari Peoples (OIPUS and Kuyunu, respectively), together with ORPIA, did commence the drafting of life plans as contributions to the management plans for the natural protected areas that overlap with their ancestral territories. This initiative seeks to open up the possibility of government approval for the exercise of co-management. It should be noted that more than 60% of these territories are covered by some form of environmental protection.

Conclusion

The situation of Venezuela's Indigenous Peoples in 2025-2026 reflected a complex scenario of challenges and opportunities:

- The U.S. military intervention and the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores represents a serious threat to the self-determination and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples.
- However, political and economic negotiations with international actors could open up spaces for Indigenous participation and institutional strengthening.
- Structural challenges still persist in territorial rights, health, education, environmental protection and access to resources.
- Illegal mining and extractive pressures continue to fragment territories and affect ecological and social connectivity.
- Indigenous and civil society organizations, such as ORPIA, Kuyunu, OIPUS and Wataniba, continue to be fundamental for the monitoring of rights, international advocacy and the coordination of territorial and environmental protection policies.

In summary, the current political situation, despite its severity, paradoxically offers strategic possibilities for strengthening participation, territorial defence and Indigenous self-determination, provided that the international standards enshrined in ILO Convention 169 and other human rights instruments are respected.

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Wataniba - Amazonian Socio-environmental Working Group is an organization dedicated to the protection of the Amazon and the promotion and defence of the rights of the Amazonian Indigenous Peoples.





The Arctic

Inuit Nunangat

Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland, includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, the territory of Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec and Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador. The majority of the 70,545 Inuit (69%) in Canada live in 51 mostly coastal communities spread over an area of over 3.3 million square kilometres.

Economic and social disparities continue to exist between Inuit and other Canadians. This includes much lower mean annual incomes, more people living in crowded homes, lower rates of education, food insecurity, higher unemployment, less access to medical services, lower life expectancy and an infant mortality rate three times the national average.¹

Comprehensive Inuit-Crown land claims agreements shape the political contours of each of the four Inuit regions. Through these constitutionally protected agreements, Inuit representative organizations and governments co-manage, with the federal government, 40% of Canada's land area and 72% of its coastline. Inuit are represented at the national level by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and internationally by the Inuit Circumpolar Council-Canada. ITK's board of directors includes the leaders of the four regional Inuit representational organizations and governments: Inuvialuit Regional Corp., Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Makivvik and the Nunatsiavut government. In addition to voting members, the presidents of the Inuit Circumpolar Council-Canada, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, and the National Inuit Youth Council sit on the board as non-voting permanent participant representatives.

As the year began, Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples, along with other Canadians, were anticipating an election that would bring the Conservative Party to power after 10 years of Liberal government. The Prime Minister at the time, Justin Trudeau, had announced

his resignation and a leadership race was on. For Indigenous Peoples, the prospect of a Conservative government led by populist Pierre Poilievre brought memories of the last time that party was in power, when the challenges they faced received very little attention.

It turned out there was a major shift in Canadian politics, albeit not the one that was expected. The Liberals chose former central banker, Mark Carney, as their new leader and went on to win an election against all expectations. With US President Donald Trump's threats to make Canada the "51st state" and the imposition of economic tariffs, Carney rode a rising wave of nationalism and anger as the Liberals pulled off a stunning electoral victory – their fourth in a row – and continued in power with a minority government a few seats shy of a majority. The victory of the Carney government came as the party moved to the right and at the same time captured voters on the left who abandoned their traditional voting habits to stave off a Conservative victory.

All of this signalled that the new government would not conduct business as usual and the implications for Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples were still being weighed as the year closed.

Canada/Inuit relations

Major policy changes included the passage in late spring of Bill C-5, the *Building Canada Act*, designed to fast-track mega-developments, such as oil pipelines and mines, seen to be "in the national interest". Inuit, First Nations, and Metis leaders criticized the act for appearing to ignore the rights of Indigenous Peoples, enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and contained in modern treaty settlements, including the four land claims agreements in Inuit Nunangat.

"It has been Canada's weakness that it pats itself on the back for being a great champion of Indigenous Peoples and an upholder of the rule of law and respect for Indigenous Peoples' rights, while at the same time acting very differently through its legislation and through its practice," said Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK).² The government expended considerable capital assuring Indigenous Peoples that the act respects their rights.

This message was reiterated in a July meeting of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee (ICPC), co-chaired by Prime Minister Carney

and Natan Obed.³ At the July meeting, “The leaders discussed the *Building Canada Act* and how to implement it effectively and consistently with Inuit Modern Treaties and in partnership with Inuit.”⁴ They also talked about other issues affecting the people of Inuit Nunangat, including infrastructure needs, housing, Arctic security and Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy. The Prime Minister used the occasion to announce the appointment of Virginia Mearns, an Inuk who has had numerous leadership roles in Nunavut, as Canada’s new Arctic Ambassador.

The Carney government’s first budget was received with “cautious optimism” by ITK.⁵ The budget included support for the proposed Inuit Nunangat University, and CAD \$1Billion (approx. EUR 615 million) over four years for a new Arctic Infrastructure Fund. Prior to the budget announcement, the new Prime Minister ordered all government departments to cut 15% from their spending. In the budget, however, that cut was reduced to 2% for departments directly related to Indigenous Peoples.

Despite the government’s previous public commitment, the budget did not include renewed funding to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) in Inuit Nunangat by 2030. Rates of TB in Inuit communities are 300 times higher than among non-indigenous Canadians and TB cases in Nunavik, in the Arctic region of Quebec, hit record numbers in 2025. ITK also expressed concern over an emphasis on increasing Arctic security that failed to mention the Inuit.

In concluding a news release on the budget, ITK wrote: “Federal budgets since 2015 have been progressive in respecting Inuit rights holders as essential components of Canadian fiscal construction. This budget is a notable departure from this shared path.”

Geopolitical threats

Inuit have long argued that Canadian Arctic sovereignty rests on their millennia-long occupation and use of the region,^{6, 7} a reality acknowledged by Canadian governments for 40 years. The question of “who owns the Arctic” was front and centre in 2025 thanks to statements by US President Donald Trump about his country’s interest in “owning” Greenland. That a member of the Arctic Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would even suggest annexing part of the Kingdom of Denmark caused the Canadian government to scramble in order to

deal with the threat. Prior to the April election, Carney and several cabinet ministers met Inuit leaders in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. The government announced plans to spend more than CAD \$6 Billion (approx. EUR 3.7 billion) on a new “over-the-horizon” radar system. At the same time, it committed CAD \$420 million (approx. EUR 258 million) to upgrade power plants in several communities, build and repair new housing, and partner with an Inuit-owned company to create a renewable energy facility. For Inuit, improved infrastructure, better health outcomes, and adequate housing have long formed part of the sovereignty and security equation.

In June, ITK released a report entitled *An Inuit Vision for Arctic Sovereignty, Security and Defence* that reinforced the importance of Inuit occupation and their role in security. It pointed out that the US does not recognize Canadian sovereignty over the Northwest Passage, arguing that, as shipping becomes more frequent, the potential for tension with the US over its regulation will increase. The document also refers to increased shipping activity on the part of Russia and China, among other things. Its recommendations include dealing with regional inequities, supporting the Inuit Nunangat economy, ensuring defence expenditure benefits Inuit, and prioritizing partnerships with Inuit organizations.

Direct federal investments in Inuit Treaty Organizations, coupled with new legislative and policy approaches supporting greater Inuit self-determination over areas such as education, healthcare, food security and housing, is the most efficient and effective means for improving prosperity in the region at a time of increased vulnerability.⁸

The Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. released a joint Nunavut Arctic Sovereignty and Security Strategy in August. The first line of the strategy makes its intent clear, especially in light of increasing foreign interest in the Arctic: “The Arctic is not a frontier to be claimed – it is a homeland.”⁹ It also sends a message to the rest of Canada that “there can be no Arctic sovereignty without Inuit security and Nunavut Inuit and Nunavummiut must lead on the policies and decisions that affect our Arctic region.”¹⁰

While the geopolitical discussion swirled, the Department of National Defence (DND) revealed it would be replacing the rifles of the Canadian Rangers, an army reserve comprising mostly Indigenous volunteers in Canada's three territories. In Inuit Nunangat, the Rangers have been held up as frontline defenders of the country's Arctic sovereignty. Unfortunately, it was discovered that their rifles, issued in 2017, need replacing because they do not function properly in the Arctic cold.¹¹

Climate threats

The Arctic continues to warm at more than twice the rate of the rest of the planet, a reality that poses an existential threat to Inuit lives and culture. Nevertheless, 2025 saw efforts to deal with these rapid changes fall behind internationally and, in Canada, nationally. There was nevertheless some positive news in Inuit Nunangat. In March, the Nunatsiavut government released *Sungiutisannik Nunatsiavummi (Adapt Nunatsiavut): An Inuit Approach to Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation in Nunatsiavut*, its first climate plan.¹² Nunatsiavut is the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Settlement Area on the eastern coast of Canada and it comprises small, isolated coastal communities with a total population of 2,000. Warming in the region is leading to thawing permafrost, altered precipitation, plus sea ice and sea level changes, and it is having an impact on fishing, hunting and traditional Inuit ways of life. The strategy enhances Inuit self-determination, decolonization and climate justice. The Nunatsiavut government is the third Inuit representative organization to release a regional climate change strategy after the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and Makivvik.

Artifacts returning

Following three years of negotiations, last year saw an important and emotional return of 62 Indigenous artifacts from Vatican vaults and museums to Canada. A century ago, the church asked missionaries in Canada to send artifacts to Rome for the Vatican's collections. On a trip to the Arctic in 2022, the late Pope Francis promised to return them.

Fourteen of the artifacts are of Inuit origin, including an Inuvialuit sealskin kayak. “It’s a part of our history, our culture and what it means to the Inuvialuit,” said Duane Smith, chair and chief executive officer of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation. Smith led repatriation efforts on behalf of the Inuvialuit.

The artifacts are at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec, where they will be studied and some eventually displayed. At the moment, there are no plans to repatriate the kayak or other objects to Inuit Nunangat since there are no proper facilities to house them.

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Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)



Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) has been a self-governing country since 1979 within the Kingdom of Denmark (or Danish Realm), which consists of Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Kalaallit Nunaat. The country is a 2 million km² island in the Arctic whose population is 88.9% Greenlandic Inuit out of a total of 56,740 inhabitants (February 2026¹). The majority of Greenlandic Inuit refer to themselves as Kalaallit (Kalaaleq in singular). Approximately 17,000 Kalaallit live in Denmark.

Ethnographically, the Kalaallit consist of three major groups: the Kalaallit of West Greenland, who speak Kalaallisut (west Greenlandic); the Inuit of Kangia (East Greenland), who speak Iviq or Iviq (east Greenlandic) and the Inughuit/Avanersuarmit near Thule who speak Inuktitut (north Greenlandic). Kalaallisut is the official language, which the majority of people speak, while the second official language of the country is Danish. The economy includes subsistence hunting, commercial fisheries, tourism, and emerging efforts to develop the mining industry as well as energy. Greenland has a per capita GDP of approximately USD 52,500 (approx. EUR 44,800) (approximately 50% of the national budget is financed by Denmark through a block grant).

The Act on Self-Government was inaugurated in 2009, giving the country further self-determination within the Kingdom of Denmark. Together with the Danish Constitution, the Self-Government Act articulates Greenland's constitutional position in the Kingdom of Denmark. The Self-Government Act recognizes the Greenlandic people as a people under international law with the right to self-determination.

Greenland's self-government consists of the Inatsisartut (Parliament), an elected legislature of 31 elected members, and the Naalakkersuisut (Government), which is responsible for overall public administration. The Government of Denmark, on behalf of the Kingdom, including Kalaallit Nunaat, voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 and subsequent Danish governments have committed to its implementation. Greenland and Denmark jointly

prepare reports regarding good practice on the implementation of Indigenous Peoples' rights, as described in the UNDRIP and other international human rights instruments. The Government of Greenland had a decisive influence over the Kingdom of Denmark's ratification of ILO Convention 169 in 1996, as Greenland has prioritized actions to establish Indigenous Peoples' collective rights to land and resources in their territories.

The situation of Kalaallit Nunaat has now changed drastically and 2025 was an exceptional year. Kalaallit Nunaat is geographically placed in a geopolitical hotspot with superpower interests at play and the threat from U.S. President Trump epitomized this with his "suggestion" to buy Kalaallit Nunaat, which commenced in December 2024. Coinciding with this, in 2024, and some months before the threats started, the first ever Greenlandic foreign, security and defense policy strategy was published, which first of all stated the values that Kalaallit Nunaat are committed to: the principles of democracy, human rights, respect for international law and the right of people to self-determination. The strategy also strives to keep the Arctic a low-tension region.² It became clear during 2025 that the latter was no longer realistic due to the U.S. threats toward the integrity of the Kingdom of Denmark and, essentially, the erosion of international law and politics as it has been known since the end of WWII.

Furthermore, Kalaallit Nunaat has been gaining tremendous amounts of international attention due to the continuing statements from the U.S. president on taking over the country, which is viewed as an extremely disrespectful approach by the Kingdom of Denmark and many allies (within the Nordics, Europe, and Canada) and in complete opposition to the Greenlandic wish for self-determination. However, this attention has put a spotlight on Kalaallit Nunaat and, with that, an opportunity has been opened up to establish a more permanent and robust position in international politics while continuing to stand firm on the right to self-determination and the rights of the Kalaallit Inuit as an Indigenous people.

U.S. threat to the right to self-determination

There was a general election in Kalaallit Nunaat in March 2025 with a new Inatsisartut (parliament) forming a new Naalakkersuisut (government) given that the liberal Demokraatit party, to everyone's surprise (themselves included), won the election with around 29.9% of the vote.³ Along with the Inuit Ataqatigiit, Siumut and Atassut parties, Demokraatit built a coalition of 23 members of parliament, leaving Naleraq as the only opposition party, with eight members. This marked the first time that neither Siumut nor Inuit Ataqatigiit had won the election.

The newly-installed parliament hit the ground running as U.S. President Trump continued to threaten to either buy or take over Kalaallit Nunaat, while refusing to take the possibility of economic or military force off the table.⁴ The threats from the U.S. President have been a disruption to the usual way for Kalaallit since he first raised the issue in 2019.

Only since 2024, however, have the threats been taken seriously by both Kalaallit Nunaat and the global society. The threats from Trump have taken a serious toll on Kalaallit –the people of Kalaallit Nunaat– and caused unease, anger and frustration among the population.

This was especially following the aggressive pressure from the U.S. during the year, starting with Donald Trump Jr. visiting the Kalaallit Nunaat capital Nuuk in January.⁵ The official reason for the visit was allegedly leisure but, during the visit, Trump Jr. and the now deceased right-wing influencer Charlie Kirk posted videos saying that the Danes were racist towards Kalaallit. The visit resulted in massive international media attention, much of it pushed by the American delegation to make it seem as if Kalaallit Nunaat had an interest in becoming a part of the United States. Greenlandic government officials and the public have repeatedly stated that this is not the case. Shortly after, the American Vice-President JD Vance and his wife Usha announced a visit to Kalaallit Nunaat, allegedly to experience the culture. Their plans were nonetheless deterred due to resistance and protests from the Greenlandic population. They ended up visiting only the American Pituffik Space Base.⁶

The world's attention inevitably follows the attention of the U.S. President, and views on the U.S. changed drastically. The larger cities of

Kalaallit Nunaat, especially Nuuk, were (and still are) overrun by international journalists, and there was a sense of uncertainty as to the future of Kalaallit Nunaat and the population. Kalaallit and Naalakkersuisut nevertheless stood firm on their right to determine the future of Kalaallit Nunaat, repeating that Kalaallit Nunaat belongs to Kalaallit.

International support for Kalaallit Nunaat

Following the American threats, Kalaallit Nunaat received support from a number of countries, including France, as French President Emmanuel Macron visited Nuuk in May as a sign of European unity and solidarity,⁷ and German junior defense minister Nils Schmid showcasing an increased focus on security in the Arctic when he visited Nuuk in August.⁸

Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen spoke at the European Parliament, as the first ever Greenlandic Prime Minister to do so. He recognized the EU as a reliable partner for Kalaallit Nunaat and how the cooperation had expanded in various areas such as education, minerals and climate change. He spoke of the importance of strengthened partnership between Kalaallit Nunaat and the EU.⁹ Nielsen received a standing ovation following his speech.¹⁰

Military and the Arctic

The Danish Defense Intelligence Agency assessed the U.S. as a possible threat, signaling a pivot in international systems and the decades-long cooperation between Europe, Kalaallit Nunaat and the U.S.¹¹ Prior to this, it was revealed that the U.S. had increased intelligence gathering on Kalaallit Nunaat, further intensifying the situation.¹²

On several occasions, American officials, including the president and the vice-president, have claimed that Denmark has underinvested in security in the Arctic.¹³ And yet capacity has increased in Kalaallit Nunaat. During 2025, two partial agreements totaling more than DKK 42 billion (approx. EUR 5.62 billion) were concluded in an agreement between Kalaallit Nunaat, Faroe Islands and Denmark on security in the Arctic and North Atlantic. The agreements include increased pres-

ence and capacity such as ships, satellites and drones,¹⁴ as well as an expansion of admissions to the Arctic basic training program based in Kangerlussuaq.¹⁵

Countering the narrative of under-prioritized Arctic security, several military exercises have been conducted in Kalaallit Nunaat, including the “Arctic Light 2025” military exercise and the “Arctic Endurance” exercise, during which NATO allies, including France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Netherlands, Iceland and Belgium, joined Danish forces in training under Arctic conditions.^{16, 17}

A Kalaaleq as Arctic Ambassador in the Arctic Council

The Kingdom of Denmark (Kalaallit Nunaat, Faroe Islands and Denmark) assumed the chairship of the Arctic Council in 2025, taking over from the Norwegians. The Greenlandic diplomat Kenneth Høegh was appointed Arctic Ambassador for the Kingdom of Denmark as the first ever Inuk person. This marked an historic change in dynamics as Naalakkersuisut had long fought for the right to take the lead on Arctic issues within the Kingdom of Denmark, as the only country in the kingdom situated in the Arctic and as the only country with an Indigenous population – an issue that is high on the Arctic Council priorities.

The Kingdom of Denmark, now with Kalaallit Nunaat in the lead, identified Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the Arctic; Sustainable Economic Development and Energy Transition Solutions; Oceans; Climate Change in the Arctic; and Biodiversity as the topics of priority until the end of the Kingdom of Denmark’s chairship in 2027¹⁸ (see also The Indigenous World 2026 Arctic Council).

Iivi Oraasia in the Danish Parliament

For the first time in history, Iivi oraasia (East Greenlandic) was spoken in the Danish Parliament (Folketinget). The East Greenlandic speech was delivered at the opening debate of the Folketing on 9 October 2025 by Elvira Kûitse from Tasiilaq, representing the Naleraq party (with si-

multaneous interpretation into Danish). Elvira Kûitse substituted for MP Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam for two months while Høegh-Dam was focusing on her work as an MP in the Greenlandic parliament Inatsisartut,¹⁹ (Read also *The Indigenous World 2025: Kalaallit Nunaat* for more information of the Greenlandic MPs in Denmark and Kalaallisut spoken in the Folketing).²⁰

A path towards reconciliation?

An official apology for the contraception case

The women and families affected by the forced contraception campaign (the so-called IUD-scandal), where Greenlandic Inuit women and girls were fitted with IUDs or other forms of contraception, in many cases without their consent and in some cases even without their knowledge,²¹ received an official apology at a ceremony in Nuuk in September 2025. The Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen apologized on behalf of the Danish State to the women who were affected from the 1960s up until 1991 and the Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen apologized on behalf of Naalakkersuisut (Government of Greenland) to the women who were affected after 1991, where Greenland took over responsibility for the healthcare system in Greenland. The apology signaled an acknowledgement of the pain and suffering the campaign had caused for both the individuals who were affected and for Greenlandic society as a whole. Following the official apology, the women were still fighting for the right to compensation for the mental and physical strain they suffered, referring to the fact that they still have to live with the consequences today. They are now able to seek help with mental health professionals.

The apology came shortly after a report on the contraception campaign was published. The report included stories of women's horrifying experiences.²²

The Inuit women affected by the campaign after 1991 have, since October 2025, had the opportunity to apply for individual compensation of DKK 300,000 (approx. EUR 40,155) from the Government of Greenland. The Inuit women affected by the campaign before 1992 will, from

April 2026, be able to apply for the same amount of individual compensation through a reconciliation fund.²³

In 2023, Naalakkersuisut decided to initiate an official investigation into the human rights aspect of the contraception campaign as well as whether or not the campaign could be defined as genocide. The report was finalized and submitted to Naalakkersuisut in January 2026 but has not yet been made available to the public.²⁴

The Danish government presents new initiatives for equal treatment of Greenlandic Inuit in Denmark

The Danish government has acknowledged racism and discrimination towards Greenlandic Inuit as a serious issue in Denmark and presented a strategy with 12 initiatives to combat this. Part of the solution is to establish ongoing efforts. To do so, the Danish government has allocated DKK 35 million (approx. EUR 468,000) to cover this issue up to 2028.²⁵

Forced removals of Greenlandic children in Denmark

Inuit children are still five to seven times more likely to be placed outside the home than Danish children. This has, amongst other things, been linked to the use of psychological testing of parents that does not take cultural differences into account.²⁶ The tests were heavily criticized by policymakers and led to demonstrations in both Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark. In the end, Naalakkersuisut and the Danish government reached an agreement to stop using the tests in cases concerning Greenlandic Inuit families. Instead, a special unit with expertise in Greenlandic linguistic and culture will assess the cases.

Some of the cases of forced removals based on this test will be reopened by the special unit.²⁷ However, it is still up to the Danish municipalities to assess which cases will be forwarded to the special unit, leaving a risk of incorrect assessments of the linguistic and cultural needs of the families in question.

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Sápmi



Sápmi¹ is the Sámi people's own name for their traditional territory. The Sámi people are the Indigenous people of the northern part of Finland, Norway, Sweden and large parts of the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Despite being separated by the borders of four states, the Sámi remain one people, bound by shared history, cultural and linguistic ties and a strong common identity.

There is no reliable information on the population of the Sámi people, as ethnicity is not registered in Finland, Norway, or Sweden. They are, however, estimated to number around 100,000 in total. Some 20,000 live in Sweden, out of a total population of approximately 10.5 million. Some 50,000–65,000 live in Norway, which has a total population of approximately 5.5 million. Around 8,000 live in Finland, which also has a total population of around 5.5 million. And some 2,000 live in Russia, which is a very small proportion of the total population of Russia.

The Sámi languages are classified as endangered by UNESCO² but significant efforts are being made to preserve and revitalize them. There are 11 identified Sámi languages; one is extinct, while others are facing possible extinction or are on the verge of it.

Traditionally, livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, gathering, small-scale farming, and handicrafts are central to Sámi culture.

The Sámi people are acknowledged as either a people or an Indigenous people, or both, in the constitutions of Finland, Norway, and Sweden,³ while the Sámi in Russia are considered one of the "Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples" in the Russian Constitution.⁴

Finland, Norway, and Sweden voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in September 2007, while the Russian Federation abstained. However, in 2014, the Russian Federation voted in favour of the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which is considered an acknowledgement of the declaration. Norway ratified ILO Convention No. 169 in 1990, and there have been discussions in Sweden and Finland, without these resulting in ratification of the Convention.

Politically, the Sámi people are represented by three Sámi parliaments, one in Sweden, one in Norway and one in Finland, while on the Russian side they are only organized into non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In 2000, the three Sámi parliaments established a joint council of representatives called the Sámi Parliamentary Council. The Sámi Parliamentary Council is not to be confused with the Saami Council, which is a central Sámi NGO representing nine large national Sámi associations in all four countries.

There are also other important Sámi institutions, both national, regional and local, *inter alia*, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, which is a research and higher education institution dedicated to the Sámi society's needs and where the Sámi language is mainly used throughout the academic system. Sámi youth are central to the vitality of their society, connecting across borders through independent organizations such as *Suoma Sámi Nuorat* in Finland, *Noereh* in Norway, and *Sáminuorra* in Sweden.⁵

Complementing these political structures is a robust Sámi media landscape. National public broadcasters in Norway (*NRK Sápmi*), Finland (*Yle Sápmi*), and Sweden (*SVT Sápmi* and *Samradion*) maintain dedicated divisions that provide news, cultural programming, entertainment, and children's content in various Sámi languages. Furthermore, independent print and digital media include the North Sámi newspaper *Ávvir*, the Norwegian-language Sámi newspaper *Ságat*, and the Swedish Sámi magazine *Samefolket*.

Peace and security: geopolitics and infrastructure in Sápmi

The shifting geopolitical landscape has brought increased global attention to the Arctic, deeply impacting Sápmi. With Finland, Norway, and Sweden unified within the NATO alliance since 2024, standing in opposition to Russia, Sápmi finds itself effectively partitioned by a hardened security frontier. This geopolitical reality has

driven an expansion of national defence infrastructures and an intensification of military training exercises, occurring alongside a heightening of conflict rhetoric that places Sápmi at the centre of northern strategic planning.

Central to the new circumstances is the development of dual-use infrastructure that serves both military logistics and industrial extraction. While state authorities frame such projects as essential for security and operational mobility, these developments may represent threats to Sámi livelihoods.⁶ This dynamic illustrates a security dilemma whereby measures taken to enhance state security, such as new roads, railways, and military training zones, simultaneously generate existential insecurity for Indigenous Peoples by eroding the material basis of their culture.⁷

The transition toward a “Total Defence” model has further highlighted a structural invisibility of the Sámi parliaments within national and international security discourse. Although Sámi communities maintain high levels of self-preparedness and possess critical knowledge regarding Arctic terrain and climate resilience, they remain largely excluded from formal decision-making processes. In June 2025, the Sámi Parliament in Norway addressed these developments in its plenary session, asserting that Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives must be integrated into emergency preparedness planning. The Parliament noted that, while reindeer husbandry has historically contributed to national food security and regional stability, these contributions are conspicuously absent from recent government reports on total preparedness.⁸ In a historic move to counter this exclusion, the Sámi Parliament in Norway formally designated security and defence policy as a specific area of responsibility for both a subject committee and a member of the Governing Council.

“Strategic” mineral extraction

The 2025 implementation of the European Union’s Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) introduced a transformative regulatory framework that has intensified land-use conflicts, particularly on the Swedish side of Sápmi.⁹ By designating several specific mineral developments on the Swedish side, and one on the Norwegian side, as “Strategic Projects”, the European Commission has provided industrial actors with accel-

erated permitting timelines and a legal status of “overriding public interest”.¹⁰ This shift represents a significant reordering of legal priorities whereby the pursuit of European mineral sovereignty is positioned above the procedural and substantive rights of Sámi communities to exercise Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. This streamlining of industrial expansion facilitates the expropriation of traditional territories by diminishing the legal weight of Sámi land use in the face of continental supply-chain demands.

Examples of this industrial intensification include the Talga Resources graphite project at Nunasvaara South and LKAB’s Per Geijer deposit in Giron/Kiruna. Both developments are situated within critical pasturelands and migration corridors of the Talma, Gabna, and Laevas Sámi Reindeer Husbandry Communities. These communities have documented how the cumulative impact of these “strategic” expansions creates an industrial encirclement that threatens the long-term viability of reindeer husbandry. From a Sámi perspective, this framework exemplifies “green colonialism”, a process in which climate mitigation strategies and the transition to a low-carbon economy are achieved through the further marginalization of Sámi cultural and land rights.

The legitimization of these projects is increasingly tied to a discourse of securitization. By framing mineral-rich regions as “strategic assets” essential for European security and defence, the state creates a scenario in which industrial encroachment is viewed through a lens of national and regional necessity. This securitization often marginalizes established human rights mechanisms and environmental protections, as the security of supply becomes a paramount objective that supersedes the state’s obligations to the Sámi people under international law. Consequently, the convergence of green energy goals and military-security logic in 2025 has placed Sápmi at the forefront of a systemic conflict between state-led strategic planning and the material basis of Sámi culture.¹¹

Amendment of the Sámi Parliament Act in Finland

The long-awaited reform of the Sámi Parliament Act in Finland reached its definitive conclusion in 2025 after facing continued delays and le-

gal complexities for many years.¹² Despite being a stated priority of the Government of Finland, the reform process was historically stalled by deep-seated disagreements regarding the Sámi people's right to self-determination. The primary objective of the reform was to rectify the Act's long-standing violations of international human rights conventions, particularly concerning the definition of who is eligible to vote in Sámi Parliament elections. This issue has been a focal point of criticism from the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Human Rights Committee, and Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, all of whom have urged Finland to respect the Sámi people's right to determine their own community membership.¹³

In December 2023, the Finnish government submitted a formal proposal to the Parliament of Finland aiming to ensure the electoral roll would be determined by the Sámi people themselves rather than through external judicial definitions. However, the legislative process was temporarily halted in the spring of 2024 following a series of controversial rulings by the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland. The Court issued decisions ordering that 65 individuals be retroactively added to the 2023 electoral roll and mandated a repeat election of the Sámi Parliament. This intervention led the Finnish Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee to suspend its review of the amended Act until the conclusion of the repeat elections. The Sámi Parliament expressed deep disappointment at this delay, arguing that the legislative proposal under review was specifically designed to resolve the very legal ambiguities the Court had cited. The repeat elections were subsequently carried out later in 2024.

The political impasse was finally resolved in June 2025 when the Finnish Parliament approved the reform. The amended Act, which entered into force on 1 August 2025, removed the contentious "Lapp criterion" and established an independent Board of Appeals to handle electoral disputes, thereby reducing state interference in Sámi internal affairs. In addition, the amended Act improves self-governance regarding Sámi language and culture, and enhances the operating conditions of the Sámi Parliament. The reform of the obligation to cooperate and negotiate holds particular significance for the future as it brings greater predictability and streamlines negotiation processes with government authorities.¹⁴

Developments in Nordic Sámi truth and reconciliation processes

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi people in Finland reached a historic milestone on 4 December 2025 when it officially submitted its final report to the Finnish government. Established in 2021, the commission was mandated to investigate the historical and ongoing injustices committed by the Finnish state against the Sámi people and the Skolt Sámi. The final report is the result of years of work, including the collection of over 300 individual and collective testimonies that document the deep scars left by forced assimilation, particularly through the boarding school system and the suppression of Sámi languages.¹⁵

In its final report, the commission presented 68 specific recommendations aimed at fostering genuine reconciliation. These measures cover a wide range of issues, from the legal protection of Sámi livelihoods and land rights to the strengthening of psychosocial support and Sámi-language services. One key proposal is the establishment of a permanent body to monitor the implementation of these recommendations, ensuring that the report leads to concrete political action rather than remaining a symbolic document. The commission's work highlights that reconciliation is not a single event but a continuous process that requires the Finnish state to take full responsibility for past policies that have marginalized the Sámi community.

During the handover ceremony, representatives of the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Sámi Village Council emphasized that the 68 measures must be viewed as a minimum requirement for moving forward.

While 2025 in Norway was characterized by the parliamentary follow-up to the 2023 report, the Swedish Truth and Reconciliation Commission continues its work toward a final reporting phase, expected in October 2026. Further background on the Nordic Sámi truth and reconciliation processes can be found in the IWGIA Yearbooks: *The Indigenous World 2022* and *The Indigenous World 2023*.¹⁶

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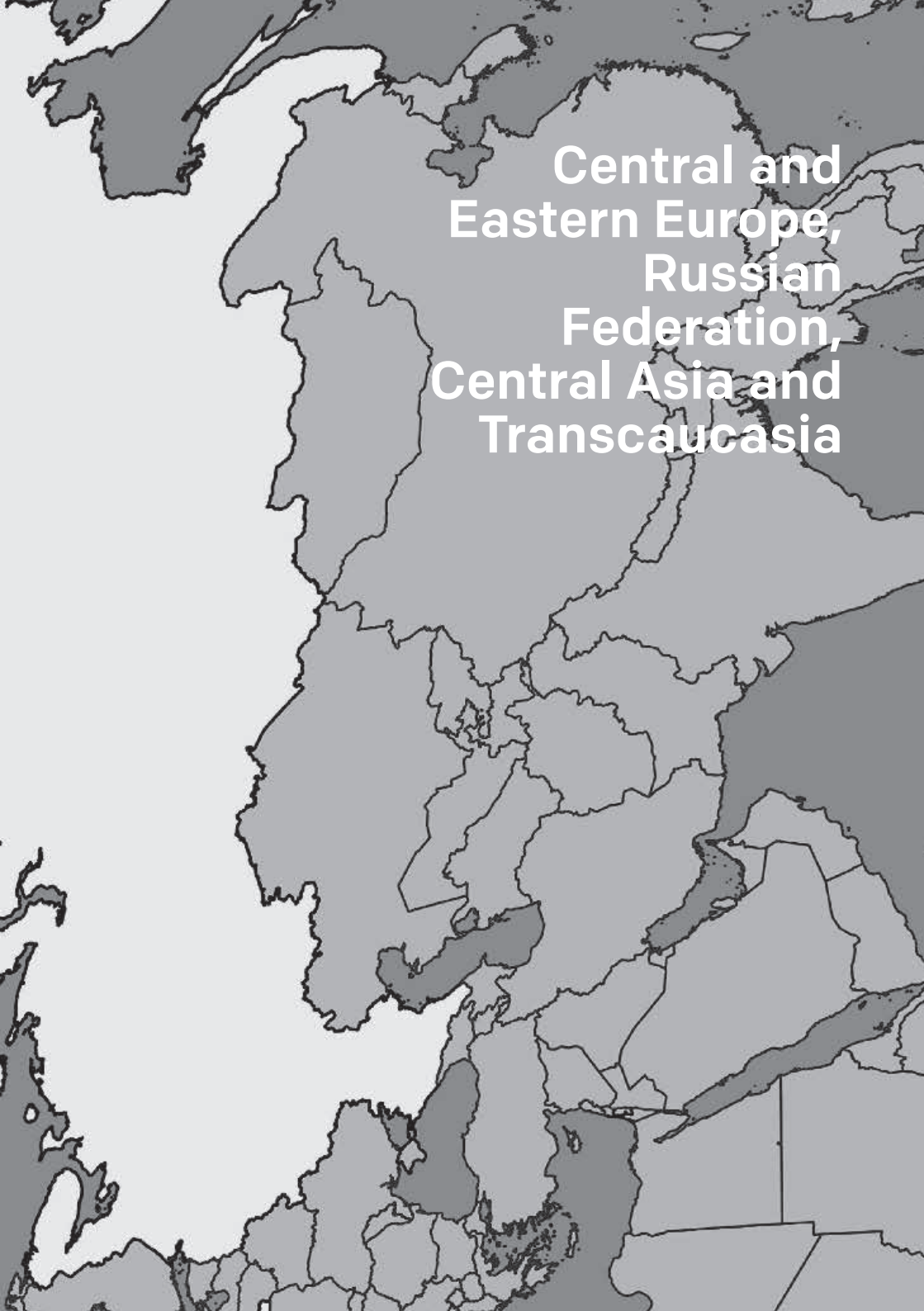
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A grayscale map of the region covering Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia. The map shows the outlines of various countries and major bodies of water. The text is overlaid on the map, centered in the upper right portion of the image.

Central and
Eastern Europe,
Russian
Federation,
Central Asia and
Transcaucasia

Russia



Indigenous Peoples are not recognized by Russian legislation as such; however, Article 67 of the current constitution does guarantee the rights of “Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples”. The 1999 Federal Act “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation” specifies that Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples are groups of less than 50,000 members, perpetuating some aspects of their traditional ways of life. According to this and two other framework laws that were enacted during the late 1990s, Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples have rights to consultation and participation in specific cases. There is, however, no such concept as “Free, Prior and Informed Consent” enshrined in legislation. The last two decades have seen a steady erosion of this legal framework and a heavy re-centralization of Russia, including the abolition of several Indigenous autonomous territories.

Of the more than 160 peoples inhabiting the territory of contemporary Russia, 47 are officially recognized as Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples, including 40 that are recognized as Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. One more group, the Izhma Komi or Izvatas, is pursuing recognition, which continues to be denied. Together, Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples number over 315,000, including some 265,000 that belong to Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, or around 0.2% of Russia’s total population of over 147,000,000 (of which ethnic Russians account for approximately 72%).¹ Many other peoples, whose numbers exceed 50,000, such as the Sakha (Yakut) and Buryat of the Russian Far East, the Volga Tatars, Bashkirs and many groups populating the North Caucasus are not officially considered Indigenous Peoples, and their self-identification varies.

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, several ethnic groups who self-identify as Indigenous have come under Russia’s effective control, even though Russia has not recognized this self-identification: the Crimean Tatars, the Krymchaks and the Karaim. In 2021, Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s

parliament, adopted the Law on Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine recognizing the three groups as Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine.²

Two-thirds of Indigenous Peoples are rural and depend on traditional subsistence strategies such as fishing, hunting and reindeer herding, although Russia on the whole is a highly urbanized country.

Civil society is affected by continually shrinking space, as the country's secret police, the Federal Security Service (FSB), has gradually been gaining power. An array of repressive laws seeking to silence critics of the government has led many civil society organizations, including Indigenous Peoples' organizations, and independent media, to close down. Many human rights defenders, including some prominent Indigenous rights activists, have been prosecuted or forced to seek asylum abroad.

Russia's export revenues are largely generated from the sale of natural resources, often extracted from territories traditionally inhabited or used by Indigenous Peoples. The country's development strategy is largely geared towards further increasing the exploitation of the Arctic's natural resources, resulting in negative consequences for the state of Indigenous Peoples' human rights and limiting opportunities for their effective protection.

Russia has neither ratified ILO Convention 169 nor endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The country inherited its membership of the major UN Covenants and Conventions from the Soviet Union: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Russia has ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM); however, in October 2023 President Putin signed a decree stipulating Russia's exit from this.

RAIPON's 10th Congress

The 10th Congress of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (RAIPON)—the largest Indigenous Peoples' organization in Russia—was held on 25 April 2025. The congress program included celebrations marking the organization's 35th anniversary, as well as the election of a new president.³

The election of the new leader proved to be largely procedural, as the name of the future president—RAIPON Vice-President Aleksandr Novyukhov—was known in advance. Formally, Mr. Novyukhov competed against a young leader from Kamchatka, Andrey Metelitsa. No debates were held, however, and the entire process lasted only two and a half hours. Mr. Novyukhov was elected with 199 votes, while Metelitsa received 16.⁴

Mr. Novyukhov, a representative of the Khanty people, replaces Grigorii Ledkov, a Nenets, who had led the organization since 2013. Under Ledkov's leadership, RAIPON—once an independent, vocal, and influential advocate for Indigenous Peoples' rights in Russia—has effectively become a state-controlled entity.⁵

Both Ledkov and Novyukhov are members of the upper chamber of the Russian parliament and belong to the ruling political party, United Russia. As senators, both voted in favour of Russia's invasion of Ukraine—a decision also endorsed by RAIPON. The war's impact on the small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of Russia led the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Russian Federation, Marianna Katzarova, to conclude in her 2024 report that "some small-numbered groups may face extinction from war casualties". RAIPON's continued support for the war was evident at the congress, where the program included a celebration of "Special Military Operation's heroes" from among the small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of Russia.⁶

Two new holidays

In November, President Vladimir Putin signed decrees establishing two new holidays: the Day of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples, to be celebrated on 30 April, and the Day of the Languages of the Peoples

of Russia, to be celebrated on 8 September.⁷ According to the decree, Indigenous Peoples' day is established "in order to preserve the traditional way of life, economic activities, crafts, and distinctive culture of the country's Indigenous small-numbered peoples", while languages day is "for the purpose of preserving and supporting languages of the Russian Federation".

Independent Indigenous leaders and experts largely agree that the introduction of these new dates is intended to divert public attention from the real challenges affecting Indigenous Peoples in Russia.^{8,9} These include the continued judicial harassment of Indigenous leaders and rights activists in the context of the expansion of extractive industries on Indigenous lands, bureaucratic hurdles that impede traditional livelihoods, and the decline of minority languages—partly due to reduced state support and fewer hours allocated for traditional language education.

It is particularly noteworthy that these holidays were introduced less than a year after numerous Indigenous and minority organizations were designated as "terrorist organizations" by Russian security services (see *The Indigenous World 2025*). Additionally, less than two months after the announcement of the new holidays, approximately 20 Indigenous rights defenders in Russia were facing prosecution.

Finally, it is worth noting that the official date chosen by Russia for its Indigenous Peoples' holiday does not coincide with the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, celebrated globally on 9 August.

Impact of Tax Code changes on Indigenous Peoples' rights

On 2 December, the Standing Committee of the State Assembly (Il Tu-men) of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) held a meeting¹⁰ on the urgent issue of ensuring legal protections for the traditional way of life of the small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. The discussion centred on a critical analysis of the consequences arising from changes to the Tax Code that came into force in 2024.

The meeting was attended by Indigenous leaders and representatives of legislative assemblies from various regions of Russia, including

Altai, Khabarovsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Primorsky Territories, as well as the Yamalo-Nenets and Nenets Autonomous Districts. Participants concluded that the changes to the Tax Code had been adopted with procedural violations and had caused significant harm to the interests of Indigenous Peoples.

Under the previous legislation, land plots used by Indigenous Peoples to sustain their traditional way of life were exempt from taxation. However, the new version restricts this exemption to a list of settlements approved by the government. As a result, the exemption no longer applies to lands actually used for reindeer herding, hunting, and other traditional economic activities, which are typically located in inter-settlement territories.

In one case, a community that has practised traditional reindeer herding and hunting on a territory of 224,219.81 hectares since time immemorial received an oral notification requiring them to pay land tax in the amount of 2.7 million rubles (approx. EUR 27,000)—a sum that a small community relying on traditional livelihoods cannot realistically afford. These changes to the tax legislation therefore threaten the very existence of the community and its traditional way of life.

The development of the law did not involve consultations with Indigenous Peoples and appears not to have undergone the mandatory regulatory impact assessment, which is intended to evaluate the potential effects of new legislation. Moreover, the explanatory note to the draft law contained no analysis or justification regarding Indigenous Peoples or the law's impact on their rights.

Participants in the meeting proposed several measures to address the situation and planned to submit their recommendations to RAIPON, the State Duma, and the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs of Russia.

Prosecution of Indigenous leaders and rights activists

On 17 December, in what appeared to be a well planned and coordinated operation, Russian security services raided the homes of more than a dozen Indigenous leaders and Indigenous Peoples' rights activists across several regions of the country. During the raids, police seized doc-

uments and electronic devices. After many hours of interrogation, most activists were released. However, Mrs. Daria Egereva—a Selkup and co-chair of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC)—and another individual whose identity has not been disclosed were detained on charges of belonging to a terrorist organization. If convicted, Daria could face up to 20 years in prison. Several Indigenous Peoples' organizations and networks have issued statements calling for the release of the well known Indigenous rights advocate.^{11, 12, 13, 14}

Among those whose homes were searched on 17 December and who were interrogated by security services was Mrs. Valentina Sovkina, a well known Saami rights defender and member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Since the raid, Valentina has left the country and posted a statement on her social media¹⁵ denouncing the ongoing campaign of repression against Indigenous Peoples in Russia. In her statement, Valentina highlights the cruelty of choosing especially harsh sentences to silence Indigenous Peoples' rights activists who are trying to defend their ancestral environment, livelihoods, and culture.

The 2025 report of the Special Rapporteur

In September, at the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, presented her annual report.¹⁶ Among other issues, the report highlighted state actions aimed at silencing independent media by designating them as “terrorist organizations”, including outlets run by members of national minority groups and Indigenous Peoples.

The report also emphasized the pressure exerted on Indigenous leaders, noting that dozens of Indigenous Peoples' organizations and media outlets had been added to the government's list of terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, the report reiterated concerns expressed in last year's assessment about the continued disproportionate targeting of Indigenous Peoples for military mobilization—often forced—to fight in the war in Ukraine, including in communities at risk of extinction due to war casualties.

The report concludes that, over the past three and a half years, the Russian authorities have continued to pursue a deliberate strategy to eliminate dissent through intensified censorship and politically motivated prosecutions under broad public safety and national security provisions. Among its recommendations, the report calls for rescinding the Supreme Court's decision to designate the non-existent "Anti Russian Separatist Movement" as an extremist organization and for ending the targeting of Indigenous Peoples' and national minorities' organizations and advocates with "extremist" and "terrorist" labels.

The report further urges the Russian Federation to align its national legislation with the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to ratify ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).

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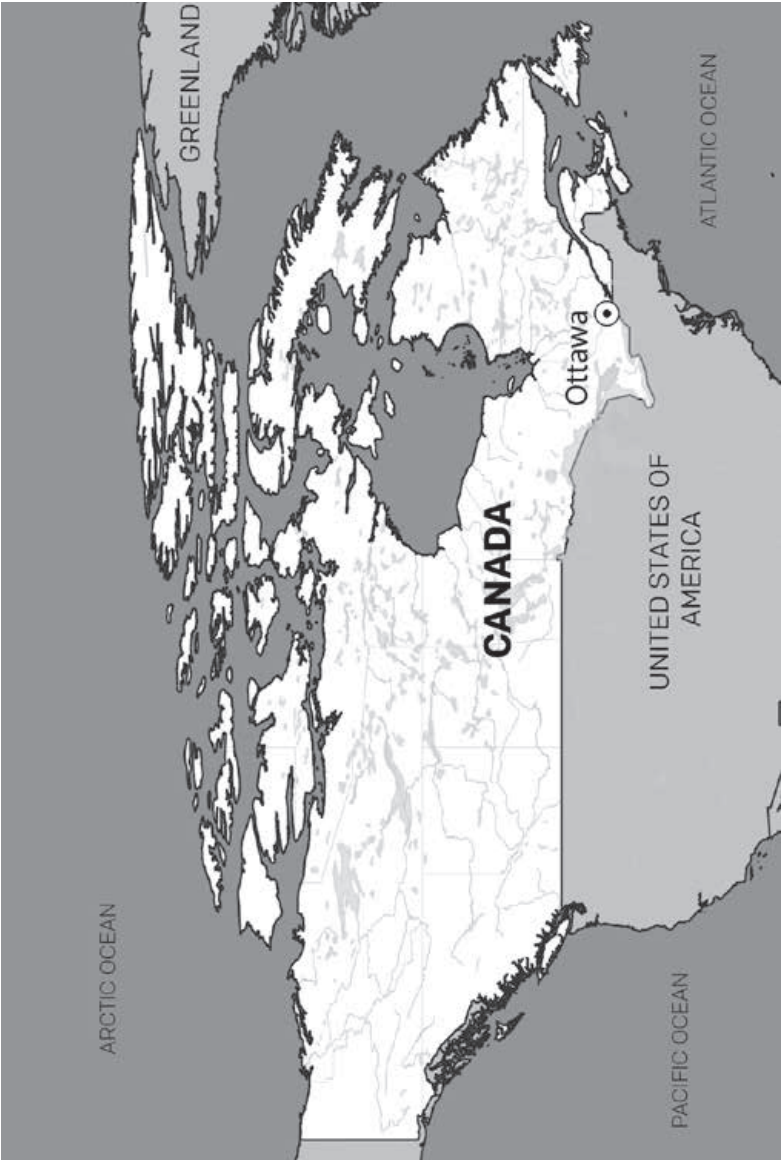
Due to the sensitivity of the issues covered in this article, IWGIA prefers to keep the author(s) anonymous.





**North
America**

Canada



In Canada, the contemporary Indigenous rights and governance framework is diverse. The *Constitution Act* of 1982, as well as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, explicitly recognize Aboriginal and Treaty rights and three groups of Aboriginal Peoples (commonly referred to as Indigenous Peoples): Indians (First Nations), Inuit, and Métis. Each group of Indigenous people is equally diverse: First Nations are governed by the 1876 *Indian Act*, with over 630 “reserves” and more than 60 languages; Inuit live primarily in Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homelands), spread across four regions and land claim agreements: Nunavik (northern Québec), Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador), Nunavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (the Northwest Territories); and Métis, who emerged as a distinct Indigenous people in the historic Northwest and whose homeland now encompasses Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and extends into parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the northern United States. Over half of these populations now reside in urban centers. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis are represented by a number of representative organizations regionally, provincially and nationally, including but not limited to, the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council.

Although the Canadian government originally voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, it has gradually changed its approach, becoming one of the first countries in the world to adopt the UNDRIP into federal law. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* was adopted into law in June 2021, acknowledging, in its preamble, that the UNDRIP provides a framework for reconciliation, justice, and peace, and denouncing the doctrines of discovery and *terra nullius* as “... racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust”. The federal government released its 2023-2028 Action Plan in 2023, which contains a series of measures aimed at ensuring federal laws and policies are consistent with the UNDRIP. A similar Act, two years earlier in 2019, was adopt-

ed in the province of British Columbia, with an Action Plan being released in 2022. Despite relatively strong rights protections, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis citizens, governments and organizations continue to wrestle with the historical and structural legacy of colonization, systemic discrimination, and forced assimilation. The re-election of the Liberal Party of Canada under Mark Carney in April 2025 temporarily quieted concerns that the Government of Canada could drastically reverse progress on key programs, laws, and policies related to Indigenous Peoples. The early introduction and passage of federal legislation to hasten the construction of major projects, however, raised concerns about adverse impacts on Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests.

Introduction

2025 was far from boring for those interested in federal Canadian politics. After careful reflection during the holidays, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced in early January that he would step down from office, closing nearly 10 years of his reign as Prime Minister. The resignation, timed closely with increased threats of economic tariffs and annexation by President Donald Trump, launched a Liberal leadership campaign during a reignition of Canadian nationalism. Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of Canada and Bank of England, tapped into this sentiment to win the leadership campaign, become Prime Minister for a couple weeks (where he ended the consumer carbon price), and call an official election. He carried his "Elbow's Up" momentum into the election, winning a minority government for the Liberals, and launching a new shade of policy positions, much closer to the blue shade of the Progressive Conservatives (more center-right).

The Carney government also signaled a symbolic, and potentially substantive, shift in its relations with Indigenous Peoples by appointing Mandy Gull-Masty (former Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees) as the first Indigenous person to serve as the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada. Rebecca Chartrand (Pine Creek First Nation)

was appointed as Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs and Buckley Belanger (Métis) as Secretary of State for Rural Development. These appointments, however, did not seem to affect the initial policy direction of the Carney government. Early decisions included inviting King Charles to deliver the Speech from the Throne, committing to the fast-tracking of major project development, pursuing new trade partnerships, and re-orienting government towards efficiency and competitiveness (requiring 15% cuts across the public service). First Nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders raised concerns with these accelerated timelines and the shift away from implementation of the UNDRIP.

Measuring progress on the UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

The year also marked the 10-year anniversary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) into Canada's Indian Residential Institutions. The milestone, according to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (the permanent home of the truth of Survivors), "...affirms what Survivors have always known: that Truth and Reconciliation is not a moment in time, but a movement to be carried forward by all who choose to listen, learn, and act."¹ The TRC Final Report introduced 94 Calls to Action and documented the reality that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have known for generations: residential schools as institutions of assimilation and genocide, the systemic discrimination against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and the urgent need for Canada to rebuild nation-to-nation relationships.

Call to Action 43 called on all levels of government to fully adopt and implement the UNDRIP as the "framework for reconciliation". Only two governments—the province of British Columbia (Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act) and the federal government (UN Declaration Act)—have acted on this Call to Action, although others, such as the Government of Northwest Territories, have taken steps in the right direction by formally endorsing the UNDRIP. 2025, unfortunately, tested the sincerity of these commitments as federal and provincial governments introduced new legislation to fast-track major project developments (described further below).

The fourth annual progress report on implementation of the federal UN Declaration Act was released in August 2025, summarizing progress on the 181 measures outlined in the UN Declaration Action Plan. Progress included the incorporation of a non-derogation clause into the federal *Interpretation Act*, the release of the Indigenous Justice Strategy, and the creation of an independent UN Declaration Act Action Plan Advisory Committee (APAC) responsible for advising the Minister on implementation of shared priority measures. Several assessments of this progress were conducted by Indigenous Peoples, such as the Yellowhead Institute² and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN).³ The AFN report, for example, reviewed progress on the 181 measures, concluding that “...while they have made achievements, their progress has at times been slow and uneven.” (p. 4).

Fast-tracking major project development: a new form of Canadian nationalism?

Across the country, Canadian nationalism spurred on the introduction and passing of a series of provincial and federal legislation, broadly aimed at fast-tracking major project developments. The titles capture their objective: Ontario’s Bill 5, *Protecting Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act*, British Columbia’s Bills 14, *Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act*, and Bill 15, *Infrastructure Projects Act*, and the Canada’s C-5, *One Canadian Economy Act* (which includes the Building Canada Act). An unbridled commitment to the accelerated development of natural resources, characterized as a response to the repetitive threats by the Trump Administration, directly threaten the rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis as well as progress on reconciliation and the stated commitments to implement the UNDRIP.

The introduction of the *Building Canada Act* came to the shock of many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and organizations. After a pre-consultation period of just one week, the Bill made its way through the House of Commons and the Senate in less than 20 days, achieving Royal Assent on 27 June 2025. The Act proposed a new framework of accelerated project development by creating a new type of project “Projects of National Interest” managed through a new Major

Projects Office (MPO) which, once designated, would be given pre-emptive approval before proceeding through the assessment planning and regulatory phase. In essence, this shifted the question of *whether* a given major project should proceed to *how* a given major project can be developed. The Prime Minister also committed to the creation of an Indigenous Advisory Committee to the MPO, made up of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders from across the country. Their task was simple: make recommendations to guide the development of major projects in a way that is responsive to the rights, governance, and knowledge systems of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. There were criticisms, however, of the government's approach to appointing the representatives, citing an absence of transparency and regional representations.

To date, there have been 11 projects identified for further consideration by the MPO.⁴ The outcomes of this consideration, as well as their future deliberation, raise important questions about the sincerity of this government's commitment to the UNDRIP.

Bill S-2: an opportunity for justice for First Nations women?

For generations, the *Indian Act* discriminated against First Nations women by removing their Indian status if they married a non-status man. First Nations men, on the other hand, could marry non-status women and pass on status to their descendants. This gender-based discrimination led to significant harm to First Nations women and their descendants, who were denied access to their legal status as well as programs and services. The Government of Canada amended the *Indian Act* in 1985 to remove the automatic loss of Indian status for women but did not fully eliminate gender-based discrimination in the legislation.

In response to litigation and persistent advocacy from First Nations women, the Government of Canada introduced Bill S-2, *An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)*, in the Senate of Canada in May 2025. Bill S-2 would restore Indian status to individuals and their descendants who lost it due to gender-based discrimination. In the fall, a Senate committee introduced amendments to Bill S-2 that

would end what is called the second-generation cut-off in the Indian Act. The cut-off, which was introduced in 1985, prevents parents from passing on Indian status after two consecutive generations of parents who do not have status. The Bill S-2 amendments replace the cut-off with the one-parent rule, allowing anyone with status under the Indian Act to pass their legal identity and rights on to their children.

The path forward for Bill S-2 appears uncertain. Minister Gull-Masty argued that the amendments to Bill S-2 that passed in the Senate required deeper consultation with First Nations. As a result, Bill S-2 will likely face debate and proposed amendments in the House of Commons, further delaying justice for First Nations women and their descendants.

Budget 2025

In November 2025, the Government of Canada narrowly passed Budget 2025, a federal budget delayed due to the election in the spring. Budget 2025 was criticized by many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders and organizations as a missed opportunity to invest in well-known and quantified priorities. The AFN, for instance, quantified the amount to close the infrastructure gap on reserve: a commitment of CAD \$349 billion (approx. EUR 216 billion) over ten years.⁵ This “national building” project would include the housing, clean water, education, and community support that First Nations urgently need. Similar studies have been done by Inuit regional organizations and Métis representative organizations.

The most significant consideration of Budget 2025 was the imposition of significant spending cuts of 15% on all federal departments and agencies. Each department and agency had to conduct a comprehensive expenditure review, with new language for budget reductions and efficiency. Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada were spared the bulk of these reviews, both facing cuts of only 2%. However, even these minor cuts could have severe impacts on Indigenous Peoples who depend on essential programs and services.

Indigenous Peoples expressed strong concerns about the fate of sunset programs. These programs were funded for limited periods of time and will expire unless explicitly renewed. Several important programs are due to sunset at the end of the fiscal year due to their exclusion from Budget 2025, including important supports for Indigenous children, youth, and families. Funding for First Nations to research and develop specific claims is set to decline rapidly due to a sunset program top-up.

Hidden with the Budget 2025 was the new Climate Competitiveness Strategy, the government's new approach to "...retool and reinvest in building Canada strong and sustainable, working closely with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners by focusing on shared economic and climate goals". Climate action and economic development are now seen as intertwined, resulting in new requirements for climate mitigation and adaptation action. The greatest example of this is the new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Canada and the province of Alberta, where, in exchange for a robust industrial carbon price, the federal government is offering Alberta the construction of one or more pipelines to the West Coast, with a combined capacity of 1.4 million barrels/day. Coastal First Nations, with support from the First Nations-in-Assembly of the AFN, quickly denounced this agreement, calling for its immediate withdrawal.⁶

Update on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services Program

Given the federal election, attention to the Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program was subdued after a very charged 2024. In 2024, the First Nations-in-Assembly rejected the initial offer of CAD \$47.8 billion (approx. EUR 29.6 billion) and gave clear instructions to a negotiating team to push for more.⁷ Fast forward to the end of 2025 where the Government of Canada and the First Nations Caring Society (in collaboration with the National Children's Chiefs' Committee and the AFN) made competing submissions to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The Government of Canada's plan commits CAD \$35.5 billion (approx. EUR 22 billion) to long-term reform up to the

end of 2034, as well as an ongoing commitment of CAD \$4.4 billion (approx. EUR 2.7 billion) annually thereafter. The shared report, *The Loving Justice Plan To End Canada's Discrimination*, outlines the minimum national standards for long-term reform that align with the principle of substantive equality, while preserving space for First Nations to negotiate regional variations (such as the Ontario region, which negotiated a CAD \$8.5 billion over nine years plan, or approx. EUR 5.2 billion).⁸ The outcomes of these divergent submissions will be released sometime in 2026.

A review of consequential cases

2025 marked another significant year for Indigenous Peoples in Canada before the courts. Judicial decisions provided important clarification on the Crown's duty to consult, the application of international legal standards, and the doctrine of Aboriginal title. At the same time, several rulings raised unresolved questions, many of which will be shaped by ongoing and anticipated appeals of key decisions.

In February 2025, the Federal Court issued a decision in *Kebaowek First Nation v. Canadian Nuclear Laboratories*⁹ addressing the role of the UNDRIP in assessing whether the Crown has fulfilled its constitutional duty to consult. The Court clarified that the UNDRIP must be considered as part of the analysis of the adequacy of consultation. Importantly, the decision affirmed that consultation must be informed by the perspectives, knowledge systems, and laws of the Indigenous Peoples whose rights are potentially affected.

In another significant decision related to the UNDRIP, in *Gitxaala v British Columbia (Chief Gold Commissioner)*, the British Columbia Court of Appeal determined that the provincial *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* incorporates the UNDRIP into British Columbia's positive law. This means that courts can assess the consistency of provincial legislation with the UNDRIP. The provincial government swiftly condemned the decision, arguing that it elevates courts to the role of decision-makers. The provincial government undertook to take steps to amend the legislation in order to clarify the role of the province and courts in assessing compliance with the UNDRIP.

Several significant decisions in 2025 also addressed the law of Aboriginal title. In August 2025, the Supreme Court of British Columbia released its judgment in *Cowichan Tribes v. Canada*, a case arising from the longest trial in Canadian history, which spanned 513 days. The Cowichan Tribes sought a declaration of Aboriginal title over lands within the City of Richmond, British Columbia. The area claimed includes lands historically occupied as a Cowichan village and which now include fee simple interests held by the Crown, the City of Richmond, and third parties. The Court issued a declaration recognizing that the Cowichan Tribes hold Aboriginal title over a significant portion of the claimed lands, including lands submerged by water. The Court's decision is significant because it affirms that Aboriginal title can be recognized over lands currently held in fee simple. This decision, which has since been appealed, led to a rash of disinformation by politicians seeking to stoke fear about the impact of Aboriginal title on private property.

In December 2025, the New Brunswick Court of Appeal issued a decision in response to the Wolastoqey Nation's claim seeking a declaration of Aboriginal title over a significant portion of the province of New Brunswick. The claim included land held by the Crown as well as land held in fee simple by third parties. The Court determined that the claim could proceed against the Crown but that Aboriginal title could not be declared over land held in fee simple by third parties because it would conflict with private property rights. This decision demonstrates a starkly different approach to Aboriginal title to the approach adopted by the Supreme Court of British Columbia in *Cowichan*. Whether Aboriginal title can be declared over land held in fee simple by third parties and whether the two property regimes can co-exist will continue to be a lingering question for courts and policymakers in the coming years.

Path forward

The path forward for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in Canada will hinge significantly on whether the federal government takes concrete steps to make meaningful progress on reconciliation. While the re-election of the Liberal government in 2025 may have eased immediate concerns of major rollbacks to key laws, programs, and policies, significant con-

cerns have arisen regarding the fast-tracking of major projects across their lands and waters.

The uneven and slow implementation of UNDRIP and the TRC Calls to Action continues to call into question Canada's stated commitment to reconciliation, a concern deepened by Budget 2025, which demonstrated a reluctance to dedicate the sustained funding required for systemic change. Meaningful progress will require Canada to work directly with Indigenous Peoples to adjust its approach to the development of major projects and continue to reform key programs, policies, and laws. Moreover, Canada will need commit the resources required to meet its obligations and commitments.

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United States of America



The number of Indigenous people in the United States of America is estimated at between 3.4 and 9.1 million.¹

Indigenous Peoples from within the United States are categorized as American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) by the US census bureau. Around 20% of the AIAN population live in American Indian areas or Alaska Native villages. The state with the largest Native population is California; the place with the largest Native population is New York City.

With some exceptions, official status as AIAN is conferred on members of federally-recognized tribes. Five hundred and seventy-four (574) tribal entities were recognized as American Indian or Alaska Native tribes by the United States in December 2024,² and most of these have recognized national homelands. Federally-recognized Native nations are inherently sovereign nations but their sovereignty is legally curbed by being unilaterally defined as wards of the federal government. The federal government mandates tribal consultation for many issues but has plenary authority over Indigenous nations. Many Native nations have specific treaty rights and the federal government has assumed responsibility for Native peoples through its guardianship, although those responsibilities are often underfunded. There are also State-recognized and non-recognized American Indian tribes but these are not officially Native nations in the eyes of the federal government.

While socio-economic indicators vary widely across different regions, the poverty rate for AIAN communities is around 25%. In some communities, it can reach 50%.

The United States announced in 2010 that it would support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as moral guidance, after voting against it in 2007. The United States has not ratified ILO Convention No. 169.

All AIAN people born within the territory claimed by the United States are American citizens; they are also citizens of their own nations.

2025 saw the beginning of the second Trump administration. President Donald Trump (R) immediately tried to cut billions of dollars from the budget and began to change policies, especially in relation to immigration and environmental protections, but also affecting relations with Native nations. In January, the highest mountain in North America, Denali in Alaska, was officially renamed by the federal government to Mount McKinley.³ In February, the administration removed a congressionally mandated report on missing and murdered Indigenous women from the Department of Justice's website. The report had provided information and proposed solutions to address the crisis (see *The Indigenous World* 2022). The law mandating the report was passed under the first Trump administration in 2020 but it seems to have been deemed to violate a newly announced ban on any content seen to relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues.⁴ In March, Trump rescinded a 2023 Biden executive order that had given tribes more spending autonomy, among other things on public safety and emergency response projects.⁵ In September, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced that the soldiers who had received the Medal of Honor for their actions in the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, where over 250 mostly unarmed Native men, women, and children were killed, would keep their medals after a review that has not been made public.⁶

Immigration

One of the first policies the Trump administration has tried to eliminate is birthright citizenship. The administration has been arguing against birthright citizenship (guaranteed in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. constitution)⁷, including with an old case affecting Native citizenship from 1884.⁸ While AIAN citizenship has not been questioned, the argumentation has raised fears.

The Trump administration began a ramp-up of immigration enforcement, including mass deportations, in January. Almost immediately, reports of Native people being stopped and sometimes detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents began to spread.⁹ Reports that ICE was either confused or did not want to recognize tribal identity cards as valid documents continued throughout the year.¹⁰ ICE enforcement targeted mostly people suspected of being in

the United States illegally from Latin America; the appearance of some Native people apparently made them suspects. The Supreme Court in September seemed to allow ICE to stop and detain people based on factors such as appearance, language, and location.¹¹ While some Native people have been stopped or even detained in immigration sweeps, many more Indigenous people from outside the United States have been deported, questioned, intimidated, or held by authorities.

Budget cuts

Already underfunded federal programs have been severely impacted by attempts to cut budgets, implemented by forced retirements and firings across federal agencies. In February, Native leaders and Congress called on the administration to protect tribal programs and fulfill trust responsibilities.¹² In March, tribes became extremely concerned about funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS). Long underfunded, the agency was swept up in an effort to terminate the leases for federal buildings by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DoGE), not an official government agency but acting as one. Several programs were faced with the possibility of losing regional headquarters, including the Bemidji Area IHS in Minnesota,¹³ and at least 12 other IHS facilities across the country.¹⁴ The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Western Regional Office in Phoenix, Arizona,¹⁵ and other BIA buildings and offices were also targeted by lease terminations. In February and March, at least USD 350 million in federal grant money for tribal critical infrastructure projects was suspended, often without announcement.¹⁶ In June, the administration released its 2026 budget proposal, which foresaw major budget cuts, for example to public safety and justice programs at the BIA and construction for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools – an agency with an estimated USD 1 billion backlog of deferred maintenance.¹⁷ Tribal colleges and universities would have seen a 90% reduction in federal support under the proposal.¹⁸ Tribes are working to convince Congress not to make those cuts. In February, Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, two BIE-run colleges, saw around a quarter of their staff fired, leaving courses without instructors and infrastructure overwhelmed.¹⁹

Federal budget cuts also impacted Indigenous Peoples around the world. One of the primary targets of DoGE budget cuts was the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It had been supporting causes such as transitions from coca farming to cocoa and coffee, and providing money and protection to organizations documenting human rights abuses and land rights.²⁰ These were not efforts primarily aimed at Indigenous Peoples. However, just like budget cuts to domestic federal agencies, the near elimination of USAID affects Indigenous Peoples perhaps more than others.

Climate crisis

How important infrastructure projects are for the safety of communities was shown in October when a storm hit the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta, causing a 1.8 meter high tidal wave. Communities already under threat of relocation (see *The Indigenous World 2024*) faced catastrophic impacts. Over 1,500 people had to be airlifted to safety.²¹ Also in October, Secretary of Interior Doug Burgum announced that 1.56 million acres in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would be opened for oil and gas leases, undoing a Biden administration decision (see *The Indigenous World 2022*).²² This came on the heels of an announcement in June that the administration was considering opening an additional seven million acres in the National Petroleum Reserve, also on the Alaska North Slope.²³

In May, a report was published that showed that the relocation of Newtok, an Alaskan coastal village, to the new town site of Mertarvik (see *The Indigenous World 2025*) has been fraught with problems. Some houses are already falling apart, and there is no running water in the houses because the BIA forgot to coordinate to have water lines installed under the roads.²⁴

In June, President Trump withdrew the federal government from an agreement to restore salmon populations in the Columbia and Snake rivers. The deal, reached in 2023 (see *The Indigenous World 2025*), had been negotiated over years between the federal government, the states of Oregon and Washington, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Nez Perce Tribe. It was considering the removal of four major dams.²⁵

Resource extraction

In May, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal on the Resolution Copper Mine in Arizona, which would destroy a site sacred to the Apache, Oak Flat (see *The Indigenous World* 2024, 2025). The Court concluded that the destruction of one of the most sacred sites, needed for specific ceremonies, would not impose a substantial burden on the exercise of Apache religion. Justice Gorsuch issued a strongly-worded dissent.²⁶ The Court denied a petition for a rehearing in October. The mine, however, remains blocked until two other lawsuits can be addressed. In December, Arizona Representative Adelita Grijalva (D) re-introduced the Save Oak Flat from Foreign Mining Act to Congress.²⁷ While the administration has called the Native and non-Native resistance “anti-American”, the largest shareholder in the Resolution Copper Mine is the Chinese government, and the copper would be mostly exported to Asia.²⁸

In February, Secretary of Interior Doug Burgum began a process to open all federal lands, including National Monuments, which often hold cultural and historic sites, to resource extraction (see *The Indigenous World* 2024).²⁹ In September, the Center for American Progress calculated that the administration was removing or weakening various protections from over 175 million acres of public lands.³⁰

In October, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gave permission to Enbridge to build a reroute of the Line 5 pipeline that would circumvent the Bad River reservation in northern Wisconsin (see *The Indigenous World* 2024, 2025). The Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians has filed suit against the decision, as it would impact waterways crucial for the tribe and for wild rice.³¹ In March, in Michigan, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Bay Mills Indian Community, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomis, and Notawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi all withdrew as cooperating agencies from an Army Corps of Engineers study to encase Line 5 into a tunnel to cross the Straits of Mackinack, between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. They withdrew after the Corps signaled it might provide an expedited approval.³² The pipeline currently crosses the Straits unprotected in the water.

Land and water

In northern California, the Yurok tribe received the last parts of 73 square miles of land in the Klamath River watershed from Western Rivers Conservancy. The nonprofit, with funds from state agencies and other organizations, had bought the land from timber companies and conveyed the title to the tribe for conservation.³³ The Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota had 680 acres returned from the federal government in March.³⁴ The Prairie Band of Potawatomi in Kansas regained control over Shabbona Lake State Park in Illinois, 1,500 acres of their old homelands.³⁵

In March, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians in Oregon regained their hunting and fishing rights as the state of Oregon repealed a 1980 law that had limited their treaty rights.³⁶ In Alaska, the Trump administration revoked an opinion that gave Native Alaska villages sovereign powers over individual Native allotments (see *The Indigenous World* 2025). Neighbors and the state of Alaska had filed two lawsuits against the opinion after the Native Village of Eklutna began operating a casino on its land.³⁷

As the Colorado River is shrinking, states are negotiating a new water agreement. Tribes are pushing for a seat at the table (see *The Indigenous World* 2024). In November, one nation, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, passed a resolution that declares the river to be a living being and a person under tribal law.³⁸ Rights of Nature are a potential way of extending protections to the environment (see *The Indigenous World* 2024).

Leonard Peltier

On his last day in office, President Joe Biden converted Leonard Peltier's two consecutive life sentences to permanent house arrest. Peltier had been imprisoned since 1977 and had become a global symbol of political imprisonment in the United States. He was accused of killing two FBI agents as a member of the American Indian Movement in 1975 but has always steadfastly maintained his innocence.

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The Pacific



Aotearoa (New Zealand)



Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, represent 17.8% of the 5 million population. The gap between Māori and non-Māori is pervasive: Māori life expectancy is 7 to 8 years less than non-Māori; 28% of Māori leave upper secondary school with no qualifications, over 52% of the prison population is Māori,¹ and 23.9% of Māori children live in households that experience material hardship compared with 13.4% nationally.²

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) was signed between the British Crown and Māori in 1840. There is a Māori-language version (Te Tiriti), which most Māori signatories signed, and an English-language version (the Treaty). Te Tiriti granted a right of governance to the British over their subjects, promised that Māori would retain *tinio rangatiratanga* (full and paramount authority) over their lands, people, resources and other treasures and conferred the rights of British citizens on Māori. Te Tiriti has limited legal status in Aotearoa, however. Accordingly, protection of Māori rights is largely dependent on political will and ad hoc recognition of Te Tiriti.

Aotearoa New Zealand voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) before endorsing it in 2010. Aotearoa New Zealand has not ratified ILO Convention 169.

Māori rights under threat

During 2025, the coalition government comprising the National Party, ACT and New Zealand First continued to pursue an agenda of reversing Māori rights and interests across multiple fronts. These included the removal of the requirement for school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti (Māori-language version of the Treaty of Waitangi), weakening Māori involvement in local government, reductions in funding for Māori housing and education initiatives and legislative amendments to extinguish Māori rights to land and resources.³ Resistance to these actions has been strong and sustained, including through domestic channels and in international fora. *Wāhine* (women) Māori such as Tania Waikato and Lady Tureiti Moxon have been prominent in these

efforts and, in December, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern at what is occurring in Aotearoa New Zealand.⁴

Sanctions for *haka* in Parliament

In April, the justice select committee reported that 90% (of a record nearly 300,000 public submissions) opposed the *Treaty Principles Bill* (*The TP Bill*).⁵ The TP Bill was defeated by 112 votes to 11 at its second reading in Parliament.⁶ This was the end of a divisive Bill that was met with resounding public opposition. In May, three Te Pāti Māori (Māori Party) members of Parliament (MPs) were sanctioned for their *haka* in opposition to the TP Bill.⁷ Co-leaders Rawiri Waititi and Debbie Ngarewa-Packer were suspended for 21 days, and MP Hana-Rawhiti Mai-pi-Clarke received a seven-day suspension. The 21-day suspension is unmatched in its severity. In addition, the ACT party sought advice on whether the MPs could be imprisoned.⁸ Te Pāti Māori MPs requested to be heard collectively and sought to submit expert evidence and legal arguments on *tikanga* (Māori law and custom). These requests were denied.⁹ The unprecedented penalty and the privileges committee process illustrate the disempowerment of *tikanga* Māori within Aotearoa's parliamentary processes.

Land and resource confiscation

In October 2025, the *Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) (Customary Marine Title) Amendment Bill* was passed.¹⁰ The amendments were touted by the coalition as restoring the test for Customary Marine Title (CMT) under the *Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011* (MACA Act) to Parliament's original intent, following judicial interpretation. However, Christopher Finlayson, Attorney-General at the time the MACA Act was passed, stated that the Supreme Court had expressed "very well" what Parliament's intention was in 2010, commenting that "these amendments do not restore the original intention of Parliament. They undermine them. Let there be no doubt about that at all."¹¹

The MACA Act provides for non-ownership of the common marine and coastal area with Māori able to apply for CMT but, significantly, the operation of the non-ownership regime set up under section 11 is deemed as an alienation from the Crown, and minerals in the area are reserved in favour of the Crown.¹² A reduction in successful CMT applications therefore directly increases Crown ownership and control over minerals in the common marine and coastal area. In addition, the amendments change the burden of proof of non-extinguishment from the Crown to Māori. Minister of Justice Paul Goldsmith stated that the amendments should reduce successful CMT applications from potentially 100% of the coastline down to 5%.¹³ The amendments effectively extinguish Māori property rights in the marine and coastal area while leaving other property rights intact.

The *Ngātiwai iwi* (tribe) consider the amendments an attempt at *raupatu* (confiscation). In protest, and to demonstrate their *tino rangatiratanga* (full and paramount authority) over their *rohe* (territory), Ngātiwai made landfall on Poor Knights Island despite state laws restricting access to the islands. Ngātiwai leader Aperahama Kerepeti-Edwards said the landing was a “direct and deliberate” act of protest against the amendments to the MACA Act and that “by doing so we declare that Ngātiwai, not the Crown, holds the rightful authority over these taonga”.¹⁴ The decision to amend the MACA Act has been criticised as being unconstitutional¹⁵ and inconsistent with the separation of powers as it overrides judicial interpretation of the test. It has also been criticised for undermining the rule of law with its retrospective effect.¹⁶

Waitangi Tribunal turns 50

The Waitangi Tribunal, a permanent commission of inquiry established in 1975 to investigate breaches of the Te Tiriti, celebrated 50 years in 2025.¹⁷ Reports published by the Tribunal in 2025 included a report into the Regulatory Standards Bill. The Tribunal found that the Crown had developed the policy without targeted Māori engagement, breaching Treaty principles of partnership and active protection. It also concluded that the Bill would be constitutionally significant if enacted, as it would shape how Parliament makes law and is therefore inherently relevant to

Māori.¹⁸ Despite the Tribunal's findings and recommendations, the Regulatory Standards Act 2025 was passed in November 2025.

In December, the Waitangi Tribunal released a significant report on the Te Paparahi o Te Raki (Far North) inquiry district. The Tribunal found that the Crown had assumed political control over Māori in breach of the guarantee of *tinio rangatiratanga* (full and paramount authority) and recommended that the Crown commence discussions with Te Raki (Far North) Māori to determine appropriate constitutional processes to recognise, respect, and give effect to their Tiriti rights.¹⁹ In addition, the Tribunal recommended that all land owned by the Crown within the inquiry district be returned to Te Raki Māori ownership as redress for the Crown's breaches of Te Tiriti and that further substantial compensation to Te Raki Māori be made in order to restore the economic base of the *hapū* (kinship group, tribe, subtribe),²⁰ and as redress for the extensive economic losses suffered as a result of the Crown's breaches of Te Tiriti.²¹

The Tribunal plays an essential role in scrutinising Crown acts and omissions for consistency with Te Tiriti; however, a review of the Waitangi Tribunal is currently underway, with concern that their statutory mandate could be restricted.²²

Removal of Te Tiriti requirement in schools

In November 2025, the coalition government introduced legislation to remove the requirement for school boards to honour Te Tiriti in their governance and decision-making.²³ In response, 72% of schools across Aotearoa New Zealand sent open letters to the Minister of Education pledging their commitment to honour Te Tiriti.²⁴ The outpouring of support for Te Tiriti from schools across the country began when Te Tiriti advocate Tania Waikato posted a list of schools pushing back against the decision. Tania Waikato stated: "I started posting the list of schools as a way of acknowledging their stand for continuing to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi which, as a mother, was something very important to me. More and more schools kept sending me their letters, so I kept updating the list and we're now at more than 1,800 schools out of a total of just over 2,500."²⁵

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Review

In November, Māori Health Advocate Lady Tureiti Moxon filed a complaint to CERD seeking urgent intervention in Aotearoa. The complaint outlines government actions reversing progress toward fulfilling Aotearoa's obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Lady Moxon stated: "I brought this urgent complaint because, since late 2023, the coalition government has escalated discrimination against Māori, spread misinformation, and overridden constitutional norms. These actions breach Te Tiriti o Waitangi, our founding agreement."²⁶

The CERD considered the combined 23rd and 24th periodic reports of New Zealand²⁷ on 25 and 26 November 2025. In concluding observations adopted on 3 December 2025,²⁸ CERD outlined concerns including:²⁹

- The removal of Māori wards in 24 local councils following the decision to subject Māori political rights to local referendums in 2025, limiting Māori participation in local governance and decision-making processes.³⁰
- Proposals under the Electoral Amendment Bill of 2025 that are likely to have a detrimental impact on the political rights of Māori and Pacific peoples, particularly the abolition of same-day election enrolment and the blanket disqualification of all prisoners from enrolling and voting while serving a term of imprisonment, regardless of sentence length.³¹
- Recent legislative developments that risk significantly curtailing statutory protections of Māori land rights, particularly regarding their right to self-determination over lands, territories, and resources they have historically owned and used, including the amendments under the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) (Customary Marine Title) Amendment Bill (2025).³²
- Significant shortcomings in ensuring meaningful Māori participation and safeguarding the principle of free, prior, and informed consent in legislative and administrative processes, and in other decisions affecting traditional lands and resources, including marine and coastal areas, forests, freshwater, and geothermal resources.³³

- Threats to security through environmental degradation and climate change are identified as disproportionately harming Māori, threatening health, livelihoods, cultural identity, and connections to land.³⁴

The comprehensive report noted a range of concerns at the recent developments in Aotearoa New Zealand. Lady Moxon stated: “CERD is clear: New Zealand is moving backwards on racial equality, and Māori rights are under serious threat. This is the strongest critique of New Zealand CERD has ever issued. Unlike the 2017 review, which acknowledged progress, this report finds virtually no positive steps on Māori rights or racial equity.”³⁵

Additional developments

On a positive note, following a significant private law win for Māori in the High Court,³⁶ an agreement has been reached whereby 3,068 hectares of land will be returned to descendants of the original owners, including the Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve and part of the Abel Tasman Great Walk.³⁷ The agreement also includes a NZ\$420 million (approx. EUR 264.5 million) compensation payment to recognise land that has been sold by the Crown since 1839 and in recognition of the lost earnings and land use. The agreement is outside of the Treaty settlement process. As stated by Attorney-General Judith Collins: “In this case, we are simply returning land to its rightful and legal owners.”³⁸ Nelson Tenth's project lead, Kerensa Johnston, said the decision showed that property rights apply to all New Zealanders: “We are relieved that this right has been borne out today and that property wrongly taken in breach of trust law will finally be returned to its owners.”³⁹

Māori support for Palestine

In terms of international security, Māori have expressed solidarity with Palestine. On 14 May 2025, the New Zealand Māori Council sent an open letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs urging Aotearoa to join with other nations in demanding that humanitarian supplies be released into Gaza. The letter stated: “We believe the way forward for peace and se-

curity for everyone in the region is for all parties to follow international law and United Nations resolutions, going back to UNGA 194 in 1948, so that a lasting peace can be established based on justice and equal rights for everyone.”⁴⁰

Future outlook

In 2025 Māori continued to resist efforts to erode their rights, including through claims to the Waitangi Tribunal, Court applications, advocacy within Parliament, participating in submission processes and appealing to CERD. The passing of legislation to restrict Māori rights despite these attempts reveals their vulnerability within Aotearoa New Zealand’s current constitutional system. The efforts of advocates, including through social media, have shown support for Te Tiriti despite legislative changes. The next elections will take place in late 2026 and it is likely that Māori rights will be prominent in the election campaigns.

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Australia



According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, surpassed 1 million in 2024, with projections placing it at between 1.17 to 1.19 million by 2031.¹ This accounts for roughly 3.8% of the total population, and growing faster than the general population, with significant concentrations in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (QLD), and Western Australia (WA).²

Among Indigenous Australians, 41% (401,700) live in major cities while 15% (150,900) inhabit remote and very remote areas, yet the proportion of Indigenous people increases dramatically with remoteness, from 2.2% in major cities to 30% in remote regions. The age structure remains markedly younger than the non-indigenous population: one-third (33.1%) are under 15 years compared with 17.9% of the non-indigenous population, reflecting both higher birth rates and lower life expectancy. Only 5.4% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population are 65 years and over compared with 17.2% of the non-indigenous population.³

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain vastly over-represented in the criminal justice system, with 2,600 prisoners per 100,000 Indigenous people; 13-14 times greater than for the non-indigenous population.⁴

There are 3,338 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations registered under the federal *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act),⁵ alongside more than 12,500 Indigenous-owned businesses.⁶

There is currently no reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the national Constitution. Australia initially voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 but formally endorsed it in 2009.⁷

2025 marked a pivotal yet paradoxical point in Australia’s relationship with its Indigenous Peoples. While major structural reforms remained stalled following the failed 2023 constitutional recognition and a national Voice to Parliament referendum,⁸ the year nonetheless saw significant developments across cultural heritage protection, water governance, Closing the Gap⁹ implementation, state-based treaty processes, and the rising prominence of Indigenous women and youth leaders on the national and international stages.

This chapter uses *Indigenous* where possible when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. However, within Australia, the terms *Aboriginal*, *Torres Strait Islander*, *First Nations*, and *Indigenous* are used differently across communities, organisations, and contexts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognises the two distinct Indigenous populations of Australia. First Nations emphasises sovereignty and the existence of multiple nations prior to colonisation. Indigenous is used as an inclusive term, capitalised to denote specific peoples.

Fragmented progress on Closing the Gap

The 2025 Productivity Commission (PC) data revealed a sobering reality, that most Closing the Gap (CTG) targets remain off-track, particularly those addressing justice, child protection, incarceration, youth detention, suicide prevention, and overcrowded housing.¹⁰ The four “Priority Reforms” established in 2020: shared decision-making, strengthening the community-controlled sector, transforming government organisations and improved data-sharing, remain central policy commitments. However, the practical implementation remains fragmented and chronically under-resourced.

Despite these persistent challenges, 2025 brought renewed commitment to Indigenous-led governance mechanisms.

The CTG Campaign’s 2025 Annual Report¹¹ emphasised Indigenous leadership as the essential driver of system transformation, demanding clearer accountability mechanisms, greater investment in community-controlled organisations, and rigorous evaluation of government compliance with commitments under the National Agreement commitments.¹²

Truth-telling and treaty: Divergent paths

In the absence of national constitutional change, several states advanced their own treaty, truth-telling, and self-determination agendas, demonstrating what Indigenous governance can achieve at the state level.

The **Australian Capital Territory (ACT)** continued implementing its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028, funding Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations for health, violence programs, and justice and heritage protection.¹³ Key areas include culturally safe services, lifelong learning, and supporting community-led solutions, guided by the national CTG framework. The ACT has led the nation by introducing the first Australian legislation requiring public sector employees to uphold CTG principles in their work, establishing a groundbreaking accountability framework for government commitment to Indigenous self-determination and partnership.¹⁴

Victoria (VIC) enacted the groundbreaking Statewide Treaty Act (2025), creating Australia's first legally recognised framework for negotiating treaties between a state government and Indigenous Peoples.¹⁵

Queensland (QLD) continued implementing its Path to Treaty Act (2023), building capacity within the First Nations Treaty Institute and supporting truth-telling processes.¹⁶

South Australia (SA) further operationalised its First Nations Voice, although ongoing community discussions highlighted the urgent need for stronger resourcing and clearer pathways to influence government decision-making.¹⁷

New South Wales (NSW) implemented Local Decision-Making mechanisms, ensuring Indigenous communities can fully participate in service delivery decisions. The framework supports Aboriginal self-determination and changes the relationship between communities and government.¹⁸ NSW Aboriginal Affairs undertook a Strategic Mapping Exercise to view linkages between policy settings across OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment), CTG, and the implications of the failed Voice referendum, which prioritised four overlays: Local Decision-Making Accords, Principles/Objectives, CTG Priority Reforms, and Socioeconomic Targets.¹⁹

Tasmania's (TAS) journey took a troubling turn. After a 2021 government report recommending both truth-telling and treaty, the government shifted focus in 2025 to fund Truth and Healing Commissioners instead, abandoning direct treaty negotiations despite strong advocacy from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for a treaty affirming Palawa sovereignty and land rights.²⁰

In the **Northern Territory (NT)** a change of government led to a concerning rollback of positive initiatives implemented by the previous administration.²¹ Water governance emerged as one of the most critical yet overlooked arenas of self-determination. In the NT, Aboriginal land trusts and remote communities depend heavily on the Great Artesian Basin (one of the world's largest freshwater aquifers) for cultural, ecological, and economic sustainability.²² Growing interest in intensive agriculture, pastoral expansion, mining, and land clearing have heightened tensions around water allocation and groundwater extraction, impacting the fair implementation of the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve policy.²³ In 2025, the NT passed amendments to the Water Act (NT) seeking to strengthen Aboriginal water reserves and clarify administrative processes.²⁴ This followed concerns raised by Aboriginal people about land clearing approvals, impacts on groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and the long-term vulnerability of the artesian systems in the Beetaloo Basin.²⁵ The year saw intense public scrutiny of corporate land clearing for agricultural development, over-extraction of artesian water, inadequate consultation with Traditional Owners, and climate change-related environmental risks.²⁶

Western Australia's (WA) 2025 Aboriginal initiatives focused on economic empowerment, cultural preservation, health, housing, and employment through the Jina: WA Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan,²⁷ Ranger Program expansion,²⁸ and new Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development Workforce Strategies.²⁹ Significantly, WA announced new Stolen Generations Reparations Initiatives designed to achieve better outcomes through self-determination.³⁰

Juukan Gorge: Five years of reckoning

24 May 2025 marked the fifth anniversary of mining giant Rio Tinto's devastating destruction of two rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in West-

ern Australia's Pilbara region.³¹ The rock shelters are among the world's oldest known sites of human occupation, with evidence of uninterrupted cultural presence for approximately 46,000 years.³² Despite this exceptional significance, destruction was permitted under the outdated Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA) and pre-existing mining consent granted in 2013.³³

The latest development involves an ambitious project to build a full-scale replica of the shelters using 3D technology and original fragments. This is being funded by Rio Tinto.³⁴ The initial phase saw the Traditional Owners – the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people, visit French cave replicas for inspiration. The PKKP people signed new co-management agreements with Rio Tinto in 2025, taking greater control over heritage management to prevent future destruction of irreplaceable sacred sites.³⁵

Despite numerous government inquiries – including the 2020 *Never Again Report*³⁶ and Parliament's "A Way Forward" report,³⁷ little has improved Aboriginal heritage protection laws or addressed the power imbalance between the PKKP people and mining companies. The PKKP people continue to advocate for comprehensive legislative overhaul, demanding greater community control over sacred site decisions and cultural heritage protections that cannot be overridden by economic interests. Without decisive reform, repeated harm remains likely; conversely, jurisdictions that act decisively could transform Juukan's legacy into a new era of legal protections grounded in self-determination.

Indigenous women and youth: reshaping the narrative

Indigenous women remained at the forefront of national reform agendas, building on decades of work by leaders such as Pat Anderson,³⁸ June Oscar AO³⁹ and the late Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue.⁴⁰ The year saw continued expansion of women-led advocacy through such bodies as the Wiyi Yani Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice⁴¹ and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance,⁴² whose mission centres on protecting health, human rights and funda-

mental freedoms that are significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women through cultural preservation, health education and coalition building. Women leaders proved central to addressing violence against women and children, reforming child protection systems, and supporting community healing. Their leadership will significantly shape government priorities in 2026–2027.

First Nations youth movements gained unprecedented influence across such areas as climate action, justice, education reform, cultural revitalisation, and sovereignty conversations. Key organisations, such as the Uluru Youth Dialogue,⁴³ Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network,⁴⁴ and National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC)⁴⁵ are the drivers behind change. They have brought energy, innovation, and future-focused perspectives that are reshaping the public narrative and challenging government inaction. Their leadership has become increasingly visible in international forums, from climate negotiations to engagement with UN mechanisms and bilateral youth diplomacy, including the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.⁴⁶

International human rights scrutiny

Australia faced continued scrutiny within international systems throughout 2025. UN treaty bodies highlighted structural racism, over-incarceration, child removal, and gaps in Indigenous rights implementation.⁴⁷ The legacy of the “Torres Strait 8” climate justice decision (2022)⁴⁸ remains highly relevant, with expectations that Australia will strengthen adaptation and mitigation measures for Torres Strait communities still awaiting compensation and concrete action.⁴⁹ Special Rapporteurs and UN committees continued urging Australia to strengthen Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), cultural heritage laws, and anti-discrimination frameworks.⁵⁰

Outlook for 2026

Positive trajectories include strengthened state-level treaty and truth-telling mechanisms, opportunities for Indigenous-led water gov-

ernance and environmental stewardship, prospects for stronger cultural heritage laws in those jurisdictions (where the political will exists), and continued growth in the Indigenous community-controlled sector. The rising influence of Indigenous women and youth advocacy continues to advance, contributing to greater public understanding of Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

The developments of 2025 underscore both the urgent challenges and the renewed opportunities in Australia's journey towards justice, empowerment and self-determination. The legacies of events such as Juukan Gorge continue to shape the national consciousness and policy debates, while evolving frameworks such as Northern Territories' Aboriginal water reserves illustrate how legislative innovation must be accompanied by genuine acceptance of self-determination, empowerment and capacity-building.

Looking ahead, critical drivers of positive change will require sustained investment in the community-controlled sector, strengthened cultural heritage protections, and genuine co-design of programs with Indigenous Peoples – with Indigenous women and youth leadership remaining essential to progress.

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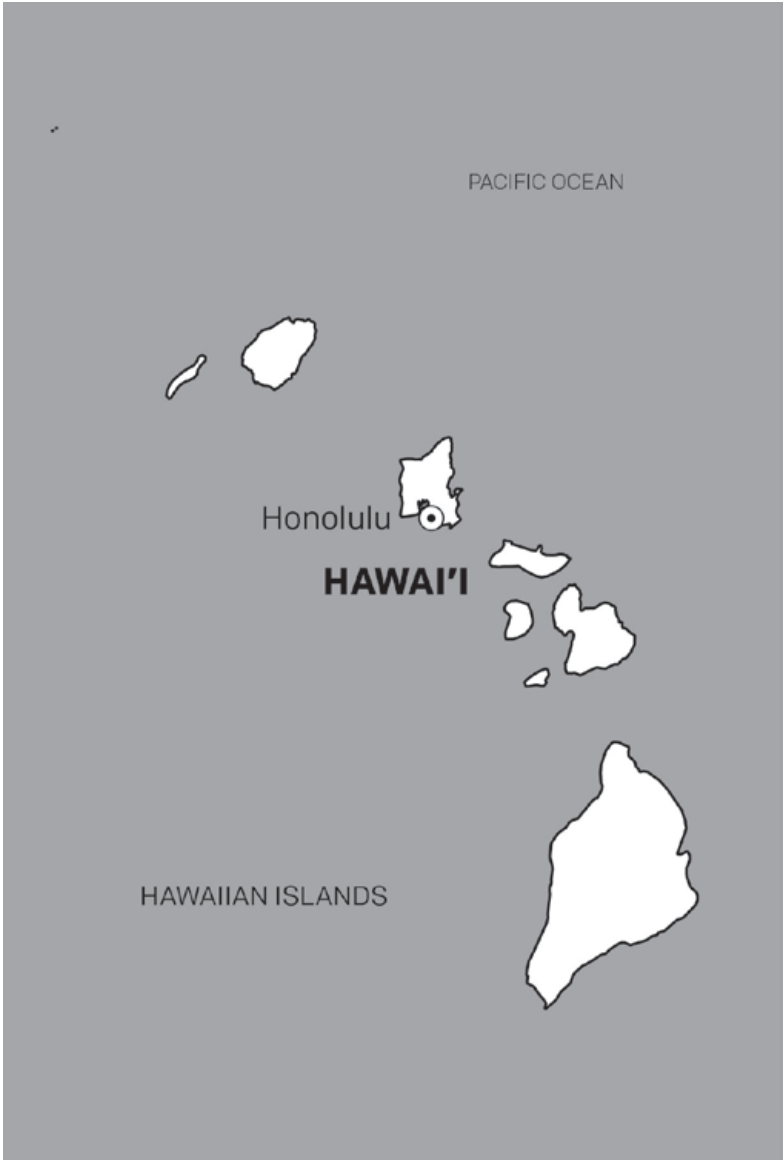
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Hawai'i



Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina (the Hawai'ian Archipelago also known by the name Hawai'i) is made up of 137 islands, reefs and ledges stretching 2,451 kilometers southeast / northwest in the Pacific Ocean and covering a total of 16,640 square kilometers.¹

The Kanaka Maoli, the Indigenous Peoples of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*, make up around 20% of the total population of 1.4 million.²

In 1893, the Government of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*, led by Queen Lili'uokalani, was illegally overthrown and a provisional government established by the United States of America without the consent of the Kanaka Maoli and in violation of international treaties and law. It was officially annexed by the United States and became the Territory of Hawaii in 1898.³ In 1959, a referendum determined the future of Hawai'i by offering only two options: to remain a territory or become the 50th state, omitting the independence option. Hawaii acquired statehood in 1959 and became a part of the United States of America.⁴ The Kanaka Maoli continue to fight for self-determination and self-government and continue to suffer from past injustices and ongoing violations of their rights. Some members are involved in the Hawai'ian sovereignty movement, which considers the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i in 1893 along with the subsequent annexation of Hawai'i by the United States illegal. Among other things, the movement seeks free association with and/or independence from the United States. The Kanaka Maoli maintain that Hawai'i is an occupied nation desiring to exercise self-determination in all its forms.⁵

There have been formal requests for reparations from the United States for the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893 and for what has been described as a prolonged military occupation, starting with the 1898 annexation. The so-called "Apology Resolution" passed by the U.S. Congress in 1993 is cited as a major acknowledgment of the illegal overthrow and wrongful action of the U.S. government, and supportive of claims by the Hawai'ian sovereignty movement.⁶

The United States announced in 2010 that it would endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

(UNDRIP) as a moral guide after voting against it in 2007.⁷ The United States has not ratified ILO Convention No. 169. Indigenous people who are born within the United States of America are generally U.S. citizens; however, they are also citizens of their own nations. The UNDRIP guides the actions and aspirations of Hawai'i's Indigenous Peoples, as do local declarations such as the Palapala Paoakalani.

Resistance and resilience rooted in Indigenous Peoples' rights

The Kanaka Maoli, the Indigenous Peoples of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*, continue a commitment to self-determination rooted in culture and maintain defiance of exploitative policies and projects on the part of a settler system supported by military might and globalized economic priorities spearheaded through tourism.

The Indigenous Peoples of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*'s understanding of one's place in the Pacific positively contributes to the movement in Moananuiakea aimed at pioneering cooperation and conservation for the planet. *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* provides cultural models for Moananuiakea that can ripple across the region of Oceania and contribute to growing global recognition of Indigenous philosophy, providing potential paths forward.

Through cultural practices and language passion projects, the nation building of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* continued to honor their authentic heritage and history while adding to important initiatives in the islands that have an impact beyond in the international realm.

Youth Advocacy, Wai Protec 'Aina Abundance, Ancestral Wayfinding, Cultural Arts: Hawai'i community conditions advance UNDRIP Rights

Youth, community campaigns, ancestral voyaging, cultural practitioners all contribute to a genuine growing of La Hui, inspiring more involve-

ment for *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina's* protection of the natural environment, recognition of land and water rights, honoring of wayfinding, and language preservation through film. These were priority areas for advocacy in 2025.

Youth continue to demand their constitutional right to a healthy, clean, safe and sustainable environment, building on the historic Navahine Case settlement.⁸ The 13 youth plaintiffs in the *Navahine v. Hawai'i Department of Transportation (HDOT)* constitutional climate case settlement acknowledged the right to a life-sustaining climate and, equally important, the HDOT agreed to implement transformative changes to achieve net-negative emissions by 2045. The next important step was taken with the significant organization of the first meetings of the Hawai'i Youth Transportation Council in January 2025, with youth providing potential policies to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and fossil fuel dependency in Hawai'i.⁹

Wai (water) is sacred, and the Hawai'i Supreme Court confirmed that water advocates' constitutional rights were violated when the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) permitted Alexander & Baldwin (A&B), one of the historical Big Five corporations, to drain east Maui streams dry. The Court also affirmed statutory responsibility for considering mauka-to-makai impacts, reaffirming the earlier environmental court and overruling the intermediate court of appeals.¹⁰ *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* must utilize the rights in the UNDRIP to develop a water resource management system based on ancestral practices.

Land rights remain paramount. The United States military remains on sacred lands with threatened condemnation of training lands. *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* responded with a formal proposal to the United States Army Secretary at the end of October 2025, providing priorities of environmental remediation and land restoration as well as increased access for cultural and community associations.¹¹

In the final month of 2025, an imminent deadline to negotiate new leases for military training lands changed. Instead of the Army's desire to take the land through "friendly condemnation", there were strong objections due to community concerns, prompting state objection. Governor Josh Green formed an advisory council with significant Kanaka Maoli leadership to find common ground. Cultural stewardship must remain at the forefront when assessing the environmental and cultural costs of the continued use of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*.

Hokulea, Hawai'i's iconic voyaging canoe, commemorated her 50th birthday on 8 March 2025, marking a half-century of cultural renewal, environmental stewardship and renewed connection to the ocean and entire Earth. The Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) celebrated the legendary double-hulled canoe at the site of her birth at Kualoa, Oahu at the ahu site (altar). At the cultural celebration to honor the 1975 launch of ocean exploration and protection of the planet, there were presentations by Pwo navigators along with cultural performances including an awa (root drink) ceremony.¹³

Hokulea serves as a symbol of cultural revival, Indigenous resilience, planetary peace, and hope for humanity. *Hokulea* was the first voyage canoe in 600 years, inspiring Pacific neighbors to also create ancestral canoes and global partners to *Malama Honua* (care for the Earth). *Hokulea* has sailed nearly 300,000 miles and completed 15 deep-sea voyages in its 50 years. In 2014-17, *Hokulea* completed a worldwide voyage and is currently focused on a *Moananuiakea* voyage around Oceania.¹⁴

Pwo Navigator Nainoa Thompson reflected at the ceremony: "We should just keep launching canoes. And they may not be voyaging canoes. It may be the ideals, the beliefs, the values of a single individual that wants to make a better world. If you could launch something, even if it's a dream, it's worth it. Even if it's an idea, it's worth it. And the birthday is such an important moment for us to dream again, believe again and have courage to let go of the lines."¹⁵

One major dream that did arrive in 2025 was the *Chief of War* series on Apple+, featuring Jason Mamoa in a historical drama about the unification of *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* at the end of the 18th century. The series follows Kai'iāna (Mamoā), an ali'i of Maui in the emergence of Kamehameha I as a leader. The 9-part epic mini-series achieved authenticity, beginning with the first two episodes entirely in Olelo Hawai'i with the remaining ones being 40 – 60% in Olelo Hawai'i. The weekly premiere of each episode prompted gatherings at the University of Hawai'i, at Manoa Kamakuokalani Center for Hawai'ian Studies, uniting professors, students, cultural practitioners and community members to discuss all aspects of *Chief of War*, with each sharing their expertise. *Chief of War* provides a platform for greater storytelling for Indigenous cultures so that they can share the rich histories of voices, values and vision that are vital for our collective future.¹⁶

Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina continues to contribute to subregional and regional cooperation in the Polynesian Leaders' Group (PLG), with multiple meetings across Polynesia in 2025 and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Honiara, Solomon Islands in September 2025.¹⁷

The PLG was founded at the PIF in Auckland, Aotearoa (New Zealand) in September 2011 when the Samoan Prime Minister initiated the meeting with Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, and Niue. At the Tuvalu meeting in 2018, the PLG admitted three new members – Aotearoa (New Zealand), *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina*, and Rapa Nui (Easter Island).¹⁸ *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* regularly participated at the PLG across the Pacific. It is important for *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* to contribute to the secretariat and build the subregional efforts to promote human rights and the rule of law in the region.

Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina reminds the world of its illegal overthrow and continued occupation. As the current United States president continues to threaten military might and the illegal overthrow of other nations, *Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina* recognizes the pattern of the United States and continues to pursue non-violent diplomatic actions at the United Nations to recognize its right to self-determination under international law.

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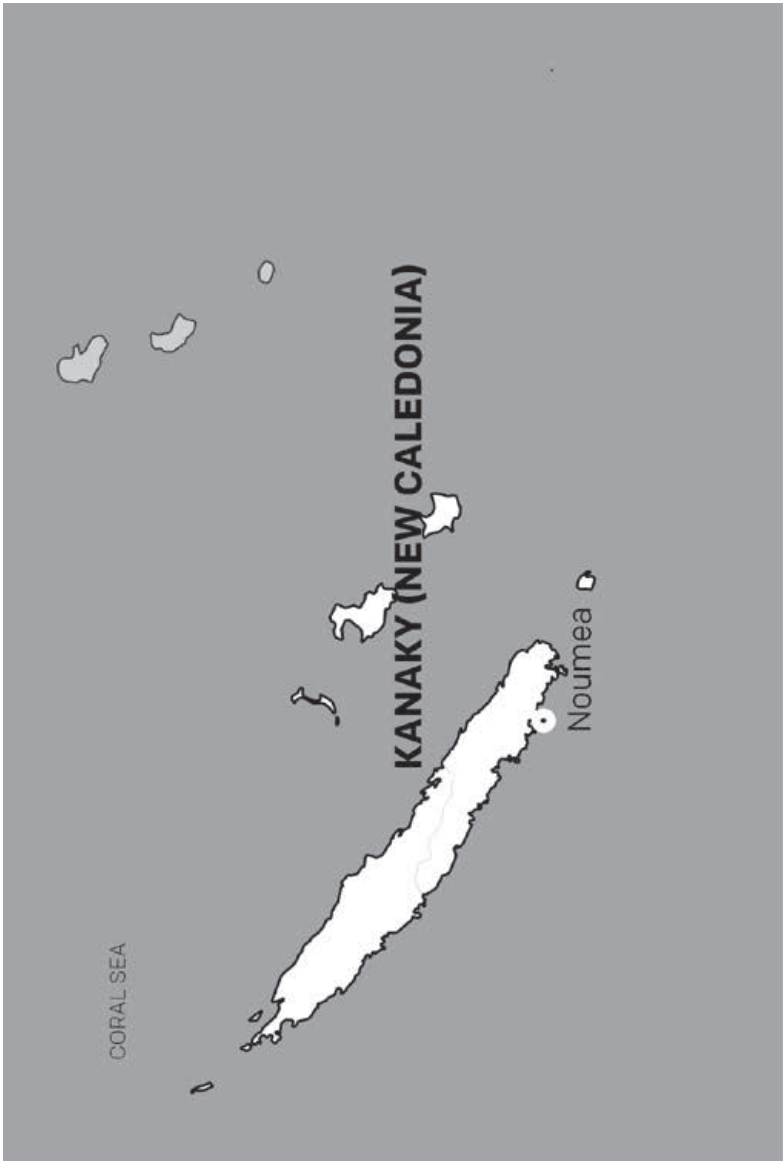
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Kanaky (New Caledonia)



Kanaky (New Caledonia) is an overseas country and territory of the French Republic located 2,000 km off the north-east coast of Australia. France took possession of Kanaky in 1853. Kanaky is on the UN list of territories to be decolonized (Non-Self-Governing Territories).¹ This Melanesian territory had been occupied for thousands of years by the Kanak Indigenous people, who had developed their own culture and institutions. Together with French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna, Kanaky is one of three French collectivities in the Pacific. From 1887 until 1946, as Indigenous subjects of the French Empire, the Kanaks were subject to the *Code de L'Indigénat (Indigenous Code)*, which excluded them from political or public engagement, established reservations and restricted their freedom of movement.² In 1946, the Kanak were granted French citizenship. As French citizens, they are able to participate in political elections including municipal, territorial and also provincial, legislative, presidential and European elections.

The Indigenous Kanak people, estimated at 60,000 in 1853, had fallen to 27,000 by 1920.³ At the turn of the 1970s, an influx of new groups turned the Indigenous population into a demographic minority (41% of the population). The New Caledonia National Statistics Office reported in its 2019 census that the population of New Caledonia stood at 271,407, where 41.2% of the archipelago's inhabitants identify as Kanak, 24.1% as European and 8.3% as Wallisians and Futunians. The rest of the population is divided between Tahitian, Indonesian, Vietnamese, *Ni-vanuatu*, other Asian, and other "communities".⁴

Kanaky is a member of the *groupe du Fer de lance mélanésien* [Melanesian Spearhead Group], an alliance of Melanesian countries comprising the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, Indonesia (associate member) and the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), officially created in March 1988 in Port Vila.⁵

The first Indigenous intellectuals of the 1960s-70s reversed the stigma of the word "*Canaque*", making it a symbol of identity and political pride under the initial English spelling of Kanak. The 1998 Nouméa Accord,⁶ the agreement laying out

the official process to self-determination, independence, and full sovereignty, officially recognized this terminology.

Most New Caledonian administrations do not disaggregate data by ethnicity, making it difficult to obtain reliable socio-economic indicators on the situation of the Kanak in Kanaky society. However, the Kanak are disproportionately represented in the prison system,⁷ and account for approximately 80% of the inmates of the country's only prison, with Oceanians as a whole (Kanak, Wallisians and Futunians, Polynesians, *Ni-Vanuat*) making up 90% despite accounting for less than 50% of the population.

The wealth gap is much more pronounced than in France: in the Nouméa metropolitan area, the poorest 10% of households earn, on average, 13 times less than the richest 10%, whereas this ratio is 5 to 1 in metropolitan France.⁸ According to a recent study conducted in the Northern Province, Kanak people in a similar situation (same age, sex and qualifications) earn an average 32% less than non-Kanak people.⁹

After the 2024 anti-colonial uprising led by the Kanak people

More than a year after the serious events of 2024 in Kanaky,¹⁰ the findings of the UN bodies report a worrying deterioration in the political, social and human rights situation, revealing the failure of the decolonization process initiated by France.¹¹ The Kanak popular mobilization is part of a response to persistent institutional violence and colonial policies that marginalize the Indigenous people in their own country, contradicting the spirit and the letter of the 1998 Nouméa Accord or the third referendum of 12 December 2021, organized without the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Kanak people.

Attempts to modify the electoral roll, which are largely perceived by the Kanak people as a settler-colonial strategy, have heightened tensions and served as a pretext for excessive and disproportionate use of force by France,¹² accompanied by a heavy and permanent militariza-

tion of the territory. The Kanak people and the FLNKS¹³ denounce the lack of independent investigations into the deaths of young Kanaks in 2024 as well as the deportation of political prisoners¹⁴ under conditions contrary to international standards.

Despite numerous UN recommendations,¹⁵ no substantial corrective measures have been implemented by France. The Kanak Indigenous people and the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) therefore reject any draft agreement imposing the definitive integration of Kanaky into the French Republic to the detriment of the right to self-determination. In accordance with international law, particularly UN Resolution 1514,¹⁶ the Kanak people reaffirm that only full sovereignty will allow for a just, peaceful, and lasting decolonization.

Review of France by the UN Committee on the Abolition of Torture on the situation of the Kanak people and Kanaky – 30 April 2025

In its concluding observations published on 30 April 2025, the UN Committee against Torture expresses serious concerns about the human rights situation in New Caledonia following the events of May 2024.¹⁷ It cites credible allegations of excessive, including lethal, use of force by police, gendarmes, and armed forces deployed in the context of political protests related to the proposed electoral reform. This violence resulted in the deaths of several people, primarily Kanaks, as well as numerous injuries.

The Committee also condemns arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment of demonstrators, and a prison situation marked by overcrowding and the persistent overrepresentation of Kanak Indigenous Peoples. It expresses grave concern about the involuntary transfer of Kanak detainees to mainland France and the prolonged solitary confinement of FLNKS President Christian Tein, in violation of international standards.

From a perspective grounded in dignity, justice, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Committee calls on the French State to conduct independent investigations, guarantee effective reparations, strictly regulate the use of force, and end practices that violate the fundamental rights of the Kanak people—an essential condition for lasting

peace that respects international law. (See report of the Drehu customary council of New Caledonia).¹⁸

5-8 May 2025: Deva conclave

The conclave of Deva,¹⁹ held in early May 2025, revealed the deep political divisions surrounding Kanaky's self-determination. Despite the presence of the French State, represented by Overseas Minister Manuel Valls, and representatives of both pro-independence FLNKS and anti-independence parties, no agreement was reached on the institutional future, particularly regarding the composition of the electoral body and the consultation schedule—central points for respecting the right to self-determination.

Kanak independence activists denounced the French State's manipulation of the dialogue to maintain the colonial status quo, while some loyalists opposed any full recognition of Kanak sovereignty. This failure exacerbates political and social uncertainty,²⁰ and reflects the risk of renewed tensions. For the Kanak people, self-determination cannot be reduced to institutional compromises; it requires the full recognition of their political, cultural, and territorial rights, in accordance with international law and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and UN General Assembly Resolution 80/98 adopted 5 December 2025.²¹

The human rights situation of the Indigenous Kanak people

Kanak political prisoner

The report by the Kanaky Solidarity Collective highlights the deportation to France of 69 Kanak prisoners since May 2024, in a prison context marked by structural racial discrimination and detention conditions denounced for years. These deportations, carried out in secrecy, have isolated the detainees more than 17,000 km from their families, exacerbating trauma, psychological distress, and social breakdown. The families, abandoned without institutional support, face a heavy economic and

human burden. The report concludes that these transfers constitute violations of international law, particularly the right to family life and the principle of self-determination of the peoples of a non-self-governing territory. Finally, it emphasizes that the French State is obstructing requests for their return to their homeland, despite several court rulings in favour of the detainees.²²

Militarization of the territory

We can still see today that the non-self-governing territory of Kanaky continues, despite warnings and denunciations by Kanak customary and political institutions, to undergo militarization.²³ Kanaky's situation is that there are more than 2,600 police officers²⁴ and gendarmes deployed on the ground, along with reinforced elite units and armoured intervention vehicles, including 16 Centaure armoured personnel, and 1,650 military and civilian personnel of the armed forces in Kanaky.²⁵

Mass arbitrary arrests

In terms of the 2024 arrests, the judicial report, compiled at the end of April 2025, showed: 502 referrals, 650 deferred court summonses, 243 incarcerations, 520 alternative measures, and 600 cases dismissed without further action. Several figures from the independence movement²⁶ have been arrested, including Christian Tein, President of the FLNKS.

Undignified detention conditions in Nouméa, Camp-Est

At Nouméa Prison, nearly 600 inmates are crammed into cells designed to hold 400. At Camp-Est, in the decrepit buildings inherited from the penal colony, more than 90% of the prisoners are Indigenous Kanaks. After 15 months of silence, the Nouméa prosecutor's office has confirmed the opening of a judicial investigation into the death of an inmate at Camp-Est prison during the May 2024 riots.²⁷ This follows an investigation by *Le Monde* revealing possible violence and failings within the prison. The case reignites questions about the prison conditions, which have been denounced for several years. It also highlights the lack of transparency surrounding the management of the prison during the 2024 events.

In October 2025, 50 Kanak detainees at Camp-Est filed an emergency appeal with the judge to denounce inhumane detention condi-

tions. The court recognized a serious violation of human dignity and ordered urgent measures: end sleeping on the floor, exterminate rats and insects, and instal partitions in the toilets. These actions are to be implemented quickly. However, broader demands, such as reducing prison overcrowding, were rejected as they fall outside the scope of the emergency appeal.²⁸

The Bougival Agreement

The draft agreement resulting from the Bougival discussions²⁹ engages the pro-independence movement and the Kanak Indigenous customary institutions in a profoundly asymmetrical negotiation, where the concessions demanded are immediate, substantial, and largely irreversible, while the counter-offers from loyalists³⁰ and from France remain beyond direct political control. This situation weakens the historical trajectory of decolonization pursued by the Kanak people and their legitimate representatives.

From a legal standpoint, the text maintains the appearance of continuity, with the right to self-determination recognized by international law.³¹ In reality, it effects a fundamental shift: the proposed process now falls under the category of internal decolonization within the French Republic rather than external decolonization leading to full sovereignty. This shift constitutes a major historical rupture as it transforms the Kanak people's struggle for national emancipation into a project of controlled autonomy, with no political deadline or any guarantee of escaping the French constitutional framework.

The agreement establishes the replacement of the Kanak people, recognized as an Indigenous people, with a new and legally undefined entity: the "Caledonian people". This construct dilutes the recognition of the Indigenous Kanak people within a demographic group in which they are already a minority and destined to become even smaller. This choice entails an implicit renunciation of the Kanak people's right to decolonization, in favour of an essentially cultural and symbolic recognition, comparable to models of Indigenous recognition within non-Indigenous states.

The introduction of a fundamental law adopted by Congress constitutes a genuine institutional step forward in terms of self-organization. However, this normative capacity remains strictly subordinate to the national organic law, adopted and amended solely by the French State. The three-fifths supermajority requirement within the Congress of New Caledonia effectively grants a permanent veto to anti-independence forces, neutralizing any possibility of substantial progress towards political emancipation. The most sensitive elements—the country's name, symbols, governance, and financial regulations—are thus relegated to an uncertain future.

The mechanisms for transferring powers, presented as a step towards sovereignty, are largely a legal illusion. Sovereign powers remain subject to complex procedures, the explicit agreement of the State, and successive consultations, creating a lasting structural deadlock. Similarly, the so-called “Caledonian nationality” lacks any real legal autonomy: it remains a subcategory dependent on French nationality, without international recognition or sovereign scope.

The electoral body, finally, enshrines the continuation of settler colonialism. Its gradual opening, correlated with migratory patterns, accentuates the political marginalization of the Kanak people and breaks with the restorative spirit of the Nouméa Accord. This development carries a heavy historical and political burden, given the sacrifices made to defend a protected electoral body.

As it stands, this agreement guarantees neither lasting peace nor profound reconciliation. Without a clear political mandate, transparent internal debate, and collective education, it risks being perceived not as a strategic compromise but as an abandonment. Kanak youth, deprived of any prospect of emancipation, could see it as the definitive end of an historic promise, with political and social consequences that no one can ignore.

The report: Mission of the Peoples of the Pacific in Kanaky New Caledonia

The report³² by the Mission of the Peoples of the Pacific presents an uncompromising assessment of the failure of the decolonization pro-

cess in accordance with UN Resolutions 1514 (XV) and 41/41 A on decolonization in Kanaky,³³ and forcefully affirms the inalienable right of the Kanak people to self-determination. The May 2024 uprising was neither accidental nor opportunistic: it constituted the political expression of structural colonial injustices, exacerbated by decades of broken promises by the French State.

The Mission identifies several major issues. Politically, France does not appear as a neutral arbiter but as an administering power pursuing its own interests, notably through the unilateral unfreezing of the electoral roll, the strategic postponement of provincial elections, and security-related repression. These practices have undermined trust and rendered the Matignon and Nouméa Accords meaningless.

On a socio-economic level, the Kanak people remain the primary victims of inequality: persistent land dispossession, an education system geared towards the needs of the colonial economy, and discrimination in access to employment, healthcare, and justice. Young Kanaks are overrepresented in prisons, while women play a central but insufficiently recognized role in community resilience and peacebuilding.

Faced with this situation, the Mission makes clear and urgent recommendations: the immediate release of imprisoned Kanak political leaders, the organization of free and fair provincial elections without delay, neutral international mediation under the aegis of the Pacific regional bodies, and the negotiation of new institutional arrangements explicitly paving the way for independence.

This report finally calls for renewed regional and international solidarity. The decolonization of Kanaky is not an internal French issue but a matter of justice, human rights, and dignity for all the peoples of the Pacific and beyond.

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Papua New Guinea



Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a country in Oceania that covers an area of 462,840 km², namely the eastern half of the Island of New Guinea and nearby islands. According to the National Statistics Office, as of 2021, it had a population of approximately 11.78 million across 22 provinces.¹ Bougainville Island, which geographically forms part of the Solomon Islands but politically and administratively falls under PNG, became a self-governing region in 2004. The Papua New Guinea Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants, with distinct culture, histories and identities and a strong connection to the land, which is regarded as the source of life, identity, and spirituality. There are over 840 languages spoken in the country² and PNG is considered the most culturally and linguistically diverse country in the world.

PNG is rich in natural resources such as gold, copper, silver, oil, gas, and timber, which make up the majority of the nation's economy. Its key international exports include natural gas, gold, copper, palm oil, nickel, crude petroleum, lumber, refined petroleum, fish and coffee.³ The nation is facing many challenges, including an estimated 39.9% of the population living below the poverty line.⁴ Further, only an estimated 20.9% of the population has access to electricity.⁵ There are also issues around corruption and environmental degradation,⁶ and violence is a significant problem, in particular gender-based violence.⁷

Climate change is significantly affecting PNG, impacting its Indigenous population and the country's development and well-being. The country is facing rising sea levels, coastal and land erosion, saltwater intrusion, coral bleaching, extreme weather events, and health issues, affecting Indigenous communities' lives, livelihoods, food security, health, and culture. Despite these challenges, PNG continues to contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from deforestation, land-use change, and the energy sector, with land use, land-use change, and forestry accounting for approximately 70% of its emissions. PNG also emits carbon dioxide from the energy sector, mainly from the combustion of fossil fuels for electricity generation, which accounts for 80% of the total installed electricity capacity.⁸

The Government of PNG was absent from the vote on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in September 2007 and has not taken any action to change this. Furthermore, PNG did not ratify ILO Convention No. 169 (ILO169).

In 2025, Papua New Guinea (PNG) reached a critical juncture in balancing its massive extractive potential with the urgent need for environment restoration and human rights protections. Extraction of gold, copper, oil, and gas remains the backbone of the PNG economy but 2025 saw a heightened focus on the negative consequences of these operations.

Indigenous Peoples in Papua New Guinea (PNG) continue to be deeply affected by resource extraction injustice and marginalization and 2025 witnessed the continued routine criminalization of Indigenous Peoples, who are disproportionately affected by ongoing armed conflicts, civil unrest, and disputes, which often places them in opposition to state forces, armed groups and criminal networks. Indigenous Peoples in PNG were not included in international security discussions and decision-making processes, maintaining a gap that perpetuates cycles of violence, undermines sustainable peace efforts and consistently ignores Indigenous knowledge, including intergenerational expertise in conflict resolution, justice, mediation and peacebuilding.⁹ Gender-based violence (GBV) and Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence (SARV) remain major challenges in PNG,¹⁰ and 2025 continued to see violence and harassment against Indigenous women and girls living in villages near mining sites and along the mine corridors.¹¹

Mining developments in 2025

Porgera Gold Mine in Enga Province¹²

The reopening of the Porgera Gold Mine in 2024-2025 brought old wounds back to the surface. In mid-2025, the Indigenous Ipili people, through the Porgera Landowners Association, responded to the PNG Prime Minister's statement on the resumption of operations at the Porgera Mine by declaring Porgera an ongoing humanitarian crisis. They

highlighted the lack of a transparent and participatory resettlement plan for the communities who have suffered more than three decades of displacement and collapsing food security, and demanded that this crisis be solved.¹³

Bougainville Panguna Copper and Gold Mine

Throughout 2025, the Panguna Mine Legacy Impact Assessment (PM-LIA) Oversight Committee worked on the findings of a massive independent study that confirmed imminent life-threatening risks from collapsing infrastructure and toxic chemical hazards left behind by Rio Tinto almost four decades ago.¹⁴

In September 2025, the PNG National Court dismissed a major class action lawsuit filed by more than 5,000 Bougainvilleans against Rio Tinto, seeking compensation for the negative social and environmental consequences caused by the mining operations.¹⁵ An appeal was filed with the Supreme Court of PNG, keeping the legal battle for remediation alive.¹⁶

Ok Tedi Mine

As the mine's life extension continues towards 2025/2026,¹⁷ the discharge of untreated waste into the Fly River remains a point of contention. While the company (OTML) maintains its operations with a social licence through Community Mine Continuation Agreement (CMCA), environmentalists have pointed to the environmental disaster harmfully affecting thousands of square kilometres of pristine forests.¹⁸

PNG Indigenous Peoples' rights and 2025 policy shifts

Indigenous Peoples rights in PNG are increasingly tied to the concept of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which saw significant legal and policy movement in 2025.

Draft Mining Bill 2025

The Mining Bill 2025, which is to replace the Mining Act 1992,¹⁹ underwent public consultations in 2025. The Mining Bill reflects Prime Minister James Marape's *Take Back PNG* vision, which aims to ensure that

PNG receives a fairer share of the mining wealth and increasingly shifts Indigenous Peoples and landowners from passive royalty recipients to “equity partners”. This landmark legislation seeks to move PNG towards a “production-sharing” model and aims to ensure that the state and landowners retain ownership of minerals from exploration through to sale, theoretically giving Indigenous Peoples more leverage over how their land is used.²⁰

Land Act Amendments (2025)

New amendments were introduced to curb land grabbing by strengthening the legal weight of customary land titles. These changes mandate that any resource project must have documented FPIC from the specific clans involved, rather than just tribal leaders who might not represent all affected families.²¹

In 2025, the institutional landscape for Indigenous rights in PNG underwent a major shift. The PNG Climate Change Development Authority (CCDA)²² and the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA)²³ moved from being passive regulators to active, albeit controversial, gatekeepers of Indigenous Peoples' land and resources.

Climate Change Development Authority (CCDA)

In 2025, CCDA became the central player in PNG's attempt to monetize its forests, often putting them at odds with extractive interests.

The Carbon Markets Regulation 2025

The CCDA finalized the Carbon Markets Regulation 2025, which formally transposes Article 6 of the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. For Indigenous Peoples, this means that “carbon rights” are now legally tied to customary land rights. However, a major tension in 2025 was whether mining companies could use these credits to “offset” local destruction –a move Indigenous Peoples have termed greenwashing.²⁴

The Green Fee Initiative

Rolled out in late 2025, this is a PGK50 (approximately USD 11) levy on foreign travellers. The CCDA has pledged that these funds will go direct-

ly to community-based climate resilience, specifically for Indigenous Peoples in coastal communities facing rising sea levels.²⁵

Blue Carbon Policy Roadmap:

Launched in August 2025, this CCDA-led Initiative seeks to protect mangroves and seagrasses. Indigenous Coastal clan communities are now being recognized as “custodians” of blue carbon, creating a new legal shield against seabed mining and coastal degradation.²⁶

Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA): Environmental audits and mining accountability

While the CCDA focuses on the future related to climate change, CEPA is currently tasked with addressing the *past* and tackling PNG’s mining legacy issues.

The Porgera Gold Mine Environmental Audit (December 2025)

In a landmark move, CEPA began a comprehensive, multi-year environmental audit of the Porgera Gold Mine. The Indigenous people successfully lobbied the government to halt final benefit sharing agreements until CEPA’s audit could scientifically prove the extent of 30 years of riverine tailings discharge.²⁷

Ok Tedi (OTEMA) Gazettal

In June 2025, CEPA officially gazetted the Ok Tedi Environmental Act (OTEMA). This transition is critical as it brings Ok Tedi Mine under the stricter Environment Act 2000, giving CEPA more powers to penalize the mine for pollution in the Fly River System.²⁸

The Corporate Plan 2025-2027

CEPA’s new strategic plan focuses on regulatory enforcement. For Indigenous Peoples, this means CEPA is now legally mandated to include Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) alongside scientific data in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).²⁹

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Republic of the Marshall Islands



The Indigenous Peoples of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) have inhabited *Jolet jen Anij* (gifts from God) since time immemorial. Marshall Islands peoples are navigators and the culture is matrilineal. Spanish explorers were the first European visitors to RMI in the 15th century. John Marshall, a British explorer after whom the islands are named, sailed through in 1799. Spain claimed the islands as a territory in 1874. American missionaries arrived and RMI became a German protectorate in 1885. At the start of World War I, Japan took control of the islands. The Indigenous Peoples pursued sovereignty and became part of the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) administered by the United States of America at the conclusion of World War II.¹ RMI is still deeply marked by the legacy of the crimes committed against its people by the US, which conducted 67 nuclear tests on Bikini and Enewetak Atolls between 1946 and 1958, while under the US administration.²

RMI came into being as a sovereign nation when the constitution was adopted on 1 May 1979. RMI negotiated for their right to self-determination through a Compact of Free Association from the US-administered UN Trusteeship, entering into force for full independence on 21 October 1986. RMI is one of only four atoll nations in the world and joined the UN in 1991. RMI consists entirely of low-lying coral atolls with 29 separate atolls containing 1,225 islands, 870 reef systems and 160 species of coral. Majuro is the capital and the RMI is ruled by a constitutional government and functions as a parliamentary democracy in free association with the US.³

The resilience of RMI is evident in its culture and the long history of resistance to colonialism and imperial designs that have denied its people their fundamental dignity, including the legacy of US nuclear testing. Today, RMI is widely recognized as a frontline state in the global climate crisis. The RMI demands justice through bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, taking a leading role in the Pacific Islands Forum and at the UN – particularly within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Human Rights Council – leading

on resolutions to create new special procedures and thematic studies important to Indigenous Peoples and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).⁴

Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is continuing its role as an Indigenous Peoples participating in the active promotion and protection of human rights at the national, regional and global level, demanding historical remedy while also defending future generations.

Republic of the Marshall Islands leads the Pacific on global UN human rights body

In 2025, RMI led the Asia-Pacific region at the UN, securing a seat among the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, Switzerland.⁵ RMI represented Indigenous rights and island priorities in the three sessions of the HRC in 2025. RMI will serve on the HRC from 2025 to 2027.

Indigenous issues in RMI also represent the historical and most pressing future challenges for humanity. RMI has built upon its previous accomplishments in the highest UN human rights charter body from its earlier term from 2020-2022 and changed the landscape of the HRC, becoming the only Pacific Islands Nation to serve in the body dedicated to overseeing UN processes of investigative mechanisms and advising the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).⁶

RMI has built on its first term, earlier in the 2020s, championing climate change and nuclear justice and representing Indigenous Peoples' rights in the face of the multi-layered challenges of colonialism. As President Hilda Heine noted at the UN General Assembly: "Our own unique legacy and complex challenges with nuclear testing impacts, with climate change, and other fundamental challenges, informs our perspective, that the voices of the most vulnerable must never be drowned out."⁷

Beyond its own case, RMI has been a champion for Indigenous Peoples who are enduring the nuclear legacy whereby weapons were tested on Indigenous lands, impacting Indigenous Peoples around the

planet. RMI has sponsored resolutions at the HRC to address the nuclear legacy from a human rights-based approach.⁸

President Heine addressed the HRC, sharing some of the human rights violations faced over the decade that continue today, given that nuclear impacts persist forever: “The Marshallese people were misled, forcibly displaced and subjected to scientific experimentation without their consent.”⁹

Connecting climate change and human rights for dignity and nuclear legacy for national liberation

RMI is extremely vulnerable to the multiple impacts of climate change that are facing Island cultures and Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific, including sea-level rise, severe cyclones, warming seas with coral bleaching and drought, among other rights violations. RMI raises climate change and human rights at the HRC, reflecting the real life and death situation Indigenous Peoples face in the current climate emergency facing the atoll nation.

As a member of the HRC from 2025 to 2027, RMI will provide leadership on two major landmark resolutions with cross-regional core groups, underlining the importance of issues to Indigenous Peoples around the planet. RMI led fellow Indigenous Nations on renewing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change and continuing human rights capacity building and technical assistance to address the nuclear legacy.¹⁰

On the climate emergency, RMI created a broad cross-regional core group comprising Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Indigenous Peoples, including climate justice allies of the Bahamas, the European Union, Fiji, Panama, Paraguay and Sudan, illustrating how the climate crisis affects all citizens of the world. As President Heine noted: “Climate change continues to pose a profound threat to our livelihoods, freshwater resources, and cultural heritage while intensifying the risks of natural disasters and displacement.”¹¹

On the nuclear legacy, the core group of Indigenous Pacific Islands of Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa and Vanuatu recognizes the need to address the human rights violations of the past and the generational human rights implications that continue

today and will persist into the future. President Heine spoke with authority for all affected peoples: “We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the human rights challenges and suffering that our people have endured and continue to endure, are never inflicted on others for the sake of these abominable weapons.”¹²

RMI has truly delivered not only for its Indigenous constituents but for all Indigenous Peoples at the HRC since it opened its UN Mission in 2019 and is making an immediate impact as a champion for Indigenous rights. RMI is also involved beyond the global level, meeting with citizens on the ground, even in the diaspora from Hawai’i to the continent of the United States. In partnership with the OHCHR, and with its National Nuclear Commission, RMI hosted a meeting to focus on truth and reconciliation rooted in human rights.¹³

Regarding the impacts of climate change, RMI continued to be a leader in multiple global spaces, protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in their ancestral homelands. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion on the imminent crisis and the rights of future generations, upholding the demands for climate justice.¹⁴

RMI and Palau issued a pioneering call at the UN General Assembly to seek an advisory opinion on climate change from the ICJ on the reduction of carbon emissions by industrialized nations.¹⁵ RMI understands that Indigenous Peoples have been placed on the altar of sacrifice for various reasons, including both nuclear poisoning in the name of security and peace as well as currently rising tides and extreme weather in the name of development and progress.

At the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Honiara, Solomon Islands, RMI’s leadership on Indigenous Peoples’ rights was recognized, especially the right to self-determination. RMI raised both cases of Kanaky (New Caledonia) and West Papua at the meetings, calling for human rights to be a permanent theme addressed at the annual Leaders Meeting.¹⁶

Universal Periodic Review: a Pacific voice defends its human rights record

RMI participated in the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review by sending a high-level delegation to Geneva, and presented its fourth Uni-

versal Periodic Review (UPR) in November in the more than three-hour peer review by fellow UN members on 10 November.¹⁷ The RMI UPR was rooted in an Indigenous participatory and inclusive human rights-based approach coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs in close collaboration with UN agencies, local community associations and national government ministries.

RMI ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2020 and, in February 2025, submitted comments on a draft environmental crime policy, raising ecocide at the ICC in The Hague. Furthermore, on 03 March 2025, the 37th Anniversary of Nuclear Victims Remembrance Day, RMI signed the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.¹⁸

The Marshall Islands human rights-based approach to global climate and sustainability commitments

RMI is also ensuring Indigenous Peoples' rights from a human rights-based approach in the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). RMI agreed to a Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2025, to be held at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in 2026, where RMI will present a report on the status of the SDGs in all islands.¹⁹ RMI will discuss Indigenous rights and share the latest developments in the global goals on the ground, covering implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and various UN human rights covenants and conventions. RMI is primarily matrilineal, whereby land and lineage pass down through women. For SDG 5, RMI will therefore share its cultural foundations for advancing gender equality. RMI will also share the steps taken to create a National Human Rights Institution, reflecting the Paris Principles for greater coordination of international instruments, including the UN SDGs.²⁰ For SDGs 13 to 15, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 30th Conference of the Parties (COP 30) held in Belem, Brazil, RMI presented its third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2031-35.²¹ RMI also created its first national sanctuary in 2025, preventing biodiversity loss around the Bikar and Bokak atolls.²² And, finally, RMI joined nations calling for a moratorium on all deep-sea bed mining at the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) in July 2025 in Nice, France.²³

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PART 2

International Processes and Initiatives

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR, or the Commission) was established in accordance with Article 30 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter) with a mandate to promote and protect human and peoples' rights on the African continent. It was officially inaugurated on 2 November 1987 and is the premier human rights monitoring body of the African Union (AU). In 2001, the ACHPR established a Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities in Africa (WGIP), marking a milestone in the promotion and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa.

In 2003, the WGIP produced a comprehensive report on Indigenous Peoples in Africa which, among other things, sets out common characteristics that can be used to identify Indigenous communities in Africa. The report was adopted by the ACHPR in 2003 and was subsequently endorsed by the AU in 2005. The report therefore represents the official position of the ACHPR, as well as that of the AU, on the concept and rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa. The 2003 report serves as the basis for constructive engagement between the ACHPR and various stakeholders based in the continent and elsewhere, including states, national human rights institutions, NGOs, Indigenous communities and their organizations.

The participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the sessions of the ACHPR as well as in the various activities of the WGIP, which include sensitization seminars, country visits, information activities and research, has also played a crucial role in ensuring and maintaining this vital engagement and dialogue for many years.

In 2020, at the 66th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR, the mandate of the WGIP was expanded to include the rights of minorities, with the following amended name: “Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa” (WGIPM).¹

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR or the Commission) held six (6) sessions in 2025 – four (4) Ordinary and two (2) Extraordinary – sitting for a cumulative total of 63 days to deliberate on matters related to the promotion and protection of human and people’s rights on the continent. The issue of Indigenous Peoples was discussed in three (3) of the sessions through presentation of the Inter-Session Activity Reports by the Chair of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa (WGIPM); consideration of Periodic Reports; adoption of resolutions and declarations as well as communications.

Periodic/State Reports

During this period, the periodic reports of five (5) States Parties, namely Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, were reviewed by the Commission. The Commission also adopted Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the periodic reports of Angola, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe.

On Ethiopia, the Commission noted that neither the report nor the additional contributions provided any substantial information on issues relating to the rights of Indigenous communities.²

Similarly, on Zimbabwe, the Commission observed that the report did not provide any information on the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Zimbabwe. The Commission further noted the State’s response during review claiming that “there are no specific groups of people that are considered as Indigenous people. Zimbabwe is a unitary and democratic state which does not identify with tribes or clans but guarantees that all regions of the country are included in the national development agenda”.³

With regard to the periodic report of Angola, the Commission applauded the government for submitting a detailed report on the situation of “traditional” and “nomadic” populations. The Commission also commended the Government of Angola for:⁴

- i. The adoption of the National Strategy for the Provision of Education to the Nomadic Populations and Ethnic Minority Groups of Angola;
- ii. The adoption of a National Development Plan (NDP) that includes priority actions in the field of cultural policy: “Supporting traditional communities, especially the Khoisan and minority ethnic Groups”;
- iii. The government’s practice of devoting specific funds from the general state budget to the study and monitoring of traditional communities, especially the Khoisan and the minority ethnic groups in the Provinces of Namibe, Huíla and Cuando Cubango.
- iv. The government’s work to gradually eliminate disparities between urban and rural areas, with a focus on the territories of ethnic minority communities, and its effort to address situations of vulnerability and extreme poverty in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and African Union (AU) Agenda 2063;
- v. The legislative and policy measures enacted and being considered to protect and preserve national languages through the Curricular Adjustment Program (2018-2025) and the Angolan Languages Bill;
- vi. The creation of the National Directorate of Communities and Institutions of Traditional Power with the purpose of coordinating public policies for minority groups;
- vii. The inclusion and efforts to implement Article 21(d) and Article 90 of Angola’s Constitution, which establishes a set of fundamental tasks to promote well-being, social solidarity and raise the quality of life of the Angolan people, namely the most disadvantaged population groups; and
- viii. The enactment of the Angolan Penal Code (Law No. 38/20 of 11 November), article No. 212 of which penalizes with impris-

onment of up to two years those who practice discriminatory acts because of race, color, ethnicity, place of birth, sex, sexual orientation, disease, non-impeding or conditioning physical or psychological disability, belief or religion, political or ideological convictions, social condition or origin or any other forms of discrimination.

On the basis of these observations, the Commission made the following recommendations to the Governments of Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Angola:⁵

- i. Ratify ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of 1989;
- ii. Strengthen the legal or administrative framework that specifically protects the rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities, including their right to own, use, control and manage their ancestral lands;
- iii. Take measures for the effective participation of all communities in decision-making bodies, where necessary, through the establishment of quotas; and
- iv. Strengthen and improve access for all communities to essential services, such as education and health.

While reviewing the periodic report of Burkina Faso, the Commission made the same observations as in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, namely that the reports do not contain substantive information on the existence and situation of Indigenous Peoples in the country. The delegation further indicated that there were no Indigenous Peoples in Burkina Faso and did not respond to other questions posed by the Commission relating to the rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁶

The Commission noted the government's initiative for the promotion and protection of the languages of minority peoples/communities, through the gradual transcription of national languages followed by their introduction into the education system as taught languages or languages of instruction.⁷

In light of these observations, the Commission made the following recommendations to the Government of Burkina Faso:⁸

- i. Consolidate the measures taken to guarantee the harmonious coexistence of the populations;
- ii. Take measures for the effective participation of all communities in decision-making bodies, where necessary, through the establishment of quotas;
- iii. Take targeted measures for the protection of ancestral lands, including through the issuance of collective title to property that can be trusted in the courts; and
- iv. Strengthen and improve access for all communities to essential services, such as education and health.

Communications

In the year 2025, the Commission considered a total of fifty-two (52) communications, of which nine (9) were decisions on merits, none related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the periodic report of Ethiopia, the government was urged by the Commission to report on measures taken to implement the decision of the Commission on Communication 419/12 - The Indigenous Peoples of the Lower Omo (represented by Survival International Trust) v Ethiopia (adopted in August 2022).⁹

The case is about Indigenous agro-pastoralist groups from the Lower Omo River Valley (including Bodi, Daasanech, Hamar, Karo, Kwegu, Mursi and Nyangatom) who alleged that the Ethiopian State was implementing large-scale development projects — notably the Gibe III hydroelectric dam and the State-owned Kuraz Sugar estate — without meaningful Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and without adequate environmental and social assessments, severely imperiling their traditional livelihoods dependent on the river's natural flood cycle and destabilizing their economic, social and cultural life.¹⁰

After reviewing submissions from both sides, the Commission found that Ethiopia had violated Article 22(1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in relation to the Kuraz Sugar Project (right to economic, social and cultural development with due regard to freedom and identity) but did not find violations in respect of the Gibe III

dam or other Charter provisions, and directed Ethiopia to conduct (or publicly disclose) an environmental, social and human rights impact assessment on the Kuraz project and to report back on implementation measures.¹¹

Resolutions

The Commission adopted a total of thirty-two (32) resolutions, of which two (2) are related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples. One of the resolutions is a Resolution for the conduct of the WGIPM's draft study on Mapping Indigenous Populations and Communities in Africa.¹²

The WGIPM commenced work towards the development of a Study on Mapping of Indigenous Populations and Communities in Africa in 2024. The objective of the study is to update and supplement the Commission's 2003 Report. It has undergone technical review by the Expert Members of the WGIPM and the next step, in accordance with the established practice of the Commission, is to conduct stakeholders' validation and consultation. However, the commencement of the study was not sanctioned by a resolution of the Commission. The resolution is therefore aimed at aligning the study with the requirements of the Commission and, in this regard, mandates the WGIPM to continue the work associated with the conduct of the study of mapping of Indigenous Populations and Communities in Africa.

The resolution also requests the WGIPM to facilitate an inclusive stakeholders' validation process for the draft Study, including by circulating the Study for comments, organizing validation meetings or consultations, and ensuring the participation of Member States, Indigenous communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders.

The other resolution, which is not directly related to Indigenous Peoples but has significance for their cause is the Resolution on Justice for Victims since 1997 of Serious and Massive Human Rights Violations and International Crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹³

The resolution is based on the findings of, *inter alia*, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Mapping Report on the most serious violations of human rights and international hu-

manitarian law committed between March 1993 and June 2003 in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which establishes beyond reasonable doubt the occurrence of acts of genocide, overwhelming evidence, premeditation, and a systematic genocidal plan during the massacres carried out on Congolese soil.¹⁴

This UN report makes reference to the plight and victimization of the Batwa and Bambuti communities based on their identities. According to the report: “women from the Batwa and Bambuti communities were targeted because of particular belief that raping a Batwa or Bambuti woman was seen as a cure for certain ailments or way to make the perpetrator invincible.”¹⁵

The Resolution urges the Government of the DRC to take all necessary measures, in collaboration with the AU and other stakeholders, to ensure justice for victims.

The Commission further decided to hold a hearing on the situation of the development of effective justice and accountability process for victims of these violations and crimes.

Declarations

In the Second Joint Forum of the Special Mechanisms of the Commission convened from 5 to 6 May 2025 in Banjul, The Gambia, the Forum made the following recommendations to States Parties in relation to the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa:¹⁶

- i. Recognize the essential role of Indigenous communities in conservation efforts;
- ii. Issue collective land ownership certificates in appropriate cases in order to guarantee security of tenure and prevent forced displacements;
- iii. Recognize and give effect to the rights of Indigenous Peoples as defined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
- iv. Integrate the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized communities into development plans.

Statement on the occasion of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples¹⁷

On 9 August 2025, on the occasion of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Chairperson of the WGIPM issued a statement on behalf of the WGIPM, aligning with the global theme by highlighting Indigenous youth as agents of change. The statement called for inclusive education, meaningful participation in resource governance and climate action, and strengthened intergenerational knowledge transmission, with particular attention to girls and young women. It also welcomed the Chairperson of the AU Commission's statement reaffirming commitments under the African Charter, Agenda 2063, and UNDRIP, and advocating inclusive policy-making, equitable resource-sharing, and respect for traditional knowledge.

Inter-Session Activity Reports of the Chair of the WGIPM

Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure of the Commission, Commissioner Litha Musyimi-Ogana, Chairperson of the WGIPM, presented two (2) inter-session reports at the 83rd and 85th Ordinary Sessions of the Commission. The reports outlined activities undertaken to promote and safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa during the reporting period.

On the fringes of the 83rd Ordinary Session (May 2025), the Chairperson convened a meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, representatives of IWGIA, and current and former members of the WGIPM to strengthen collaboration in areas of mutual concern. The meeting resulted in a renewed commitment to enhanced technical cooperation, including in data collection, knowledge-sharing, and the mainstreaming of Indigenous issues within development and human rights frameworks. Participants agreed to reinforce support for the activities of the WGIPM and to improve coordination between the Commission's mechanisms and relevant UN mandates, particularly the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It was further agreed to strengthen the role and participation

of the WGIPM in the University of Pretoria course on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa.¹⁸

The Chairperson also reported on a Letter of Urgent Appeal addressed to President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa concerning reports that the Western Cape Government intends to redevelop the Oude Molen Eco Village heritage site in Cape Town into low-cost (RDP) housing without consultation with Paramount Chief Aran of the Goringhaiqua Goringhaicona Indigenous Traditional Kingdom (GGITK). The Appeal expresses concern that the proposed redevelopment could result in the permanent dispossession of the community from a sacred cultural site where traditional practices and ceremonies continue to be observed. It underscores the potential violation of the community's ancestral land rights, cultural heritage, customary governance systems, and right to development, as protected under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and relevant Commission resolutions on Indigenous Peoples' rights. The Appeal calls upon the Government of South Africa to halt or reconsider the project, undertake meaningful consultations with the affected Indigenous community and independent experts, ensure the protection of land and cultural rights, and report to the Commission on measures taken to address these concerns.¹⁹

University of Pretoria course²⁰

The 15th edition of the Advanced Course on Indigenous Peoples' Rights was held in hybrid format from 24–29 November 2025 at the University of Pretoria. The course provided a comprehensive examination of Indigenous Peoples' rights within African and international legal frameworks. The program covered the concept of indigeneity in Africa; recognition of Indigenous Peoples under international law; UN human rights mechanisms; and the African regional human rights system. Substantive thematic sessions addressed land rights and jurisprudence (including the *Ogiek* and *Endorois* cases), FPIC, the rights of Indigenous women and children, strategic litigation, climate change, development and conservation tensions, business and human rights in the Congo Basin, intellectual property protection of Indigenous knowledge, and the right to culture, and engagement with UN treaty bodies. Case studies from Ken-

ya, DRC, South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania grounded discussions in practical realities, while group-based subregional exercises strengthened applied analysis and comparative learning.

The course brought together a distinguished faculty drawn from UN mechanisms, the African Commission system, academia, and civil society. Key presenters included Dr. Albert K. Barume (UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples), Commissioner Litha Musyimi-Ogana (Chairperson, ACHPR WGIPM), Samuel Tilahun (Expert Member, WGIPM), Dr. Melakou Tegegn (former Expert Member, WGIPM), Dr. Francis Magare (ACHPR Secretariat), Melanie Clerc (OHCHR), Lola García-Alix (IWGIA), Lucy Claridge (International Lawyers Project), Prof. Joshua Castellino (Brunel University), Prof Ademola Jegede (University of Venda), Lassana Kone (Forest Peoples' Program), Lesle Jansen (AC-CRA), Jane Meriwas (Samburu Women Trust), Ole Kaunga (IMPACT), Edward Porokwa (PINGO's Forum), Petrus Hatupopi, and Dr Paul Mulindwa, among others. The program also featured the launch of *The Indigenous World 2025*, with a special focus on Indigenous youth.

A total of 60 participants completed the course, with 35 attending in person and 25 virtually. Participants represented nine African countries—Kenya, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana, Nigeria, DRC, and South Africa—as well as Belgium, Mexico, Spain, Bangladesh, Italy, France, and the UK. The cohort included representatives of Indigenous communities, government officials, National Human Rights Institutions, regional bodies such as the ACHPR and African Court, and civil society organizations, reflecting the course's strong emphasis on applied advocacy, institutional engagement, and cross-regional collaboration.

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Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum for cooperation between the eight Arctic States and Arctic Indigenous Peoples. For three decades, the Arctic Council has set a consensus-based precedent, including six Indigenous Peoples' Organizations in its decision-making structures. As the preeminent forum for cooperation and knowledge production, the Arctic Council aims to be responsive to the priorities and needs of Arctic inhabitants on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Arctic Indigenous Peoples are represented on the Council by six Permanent Participant organizations: Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North and Saami Council. The Permanent Participants participate at all levels of the Arctic Council, initiate and lead or co-lead projects, and contribute to the Arctic Council's expert work and political proceedings. The Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, established in 1994, is a support secretariat for all six Permanent Participants and their participation on the Council. Led by a Board with members from each of the six Permanent Participants organizations and three state representatives, the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat today resides in conjunction with the Arctic Council Secretariat.

The category of Permanent Participant was created to provide for active participation and full consultation with Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic Council's deliberations, as recognized in the Council's founding document, the Ottawa Declaration (1996). The declaration also recognized "the traditional knowledge of the [I]ndigenous [P]eople[s] of the Arctic and their communities".

Although it is the eight Arctic member states that formally have decision-making power in the Arctic Council, decisions

are taken by consensus among the eight Arctic Council member States and the Permanent Participants. The Chair of the Arctic Council rotates every two years among the Arctic States.

Navigating tumultuous geopolitical waters

2025 was marked by an ongoing and complex geopolitical landscape, with the Arctic experiencing a period marked by uncertainty and shifting priorities. In such times, when attention is often focused on security, it becomes crucial to make sure that the voices and priorities of Indigenous Peoples are not overlooked.

The Arctic Council's mandate, as articulated in the Ottawa Declaration, explicitly excludes military security. The Arctic Council's Strategic Plan 2021-2030 guides its work towards the Arctic as a "region of peace, stability and constructive cooperation that is a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and secure home for all its inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples, and where their rights and wellbeing are respected."¹

As of 2025, the Arctic Council political-level meetings had been on pause since 2022, while scientific and Working Group-level meetings had resumed virtually. Following the announcement of the pause, none of the eight Arctic member states altered their membership or rejected any of their participation in the cooperation, as had happened in other international fora. All eight states maintained a political will to engage in the Arctic Council and, together with Permanent Participants, they negotiated modalities for decision-making and gradually resumed work of the Arctic Council Working Groups. For further developments in 2022-2024, see the Arctic Council chapter in IWGIA's *The Indigenous World 2024*.²

Today, the political level – the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic States and Heads of Delegation of the Permanent Participants, formerly meeting on a regular basis in person, do not meet but take decisions by written procedure, while the two Arctic Council Chairship transition meetings since 2022 have been held online and without Ministerial participation.

While the biannual Arctic Council Ministerial Meetings would under normal circumstances conclude with declarations, including language on the mandate and ambitions for the Council's work, the meetings to mark the transition of the Arctic Council Chairship from one member state to another in 2023 and 2025 concluded with Joint Statements laying out the path for continued cooperation.^{3, 4}

Indigenous Peoples' crucial and unique role in the Arctic Council

The Permanent Participants' status in the Arctic Council is unique in international cooperation, with Indigenous Peoples engaged in decision-making. The unique structure of the Arctic Council thus serves as good practice for regional and international intergovernmental organizations and has inspired other international negotiations throughout its existence.⁵

Looking from the vantage point of 2025, Arctic Indigenous Peoples' cooperation stands on more than 50 years of organized collaboration. Beginning in the early 1970s, notably through the 1973 Arctic Peoples' Conference to coordinate common positions, Indigenous Peoples laid the groundwork for their engagement in international discussions and decision-making on Arctic issues. By the time the Arctic Council was established, they were organized and ready to negotiate their seat at the table with the Arctic States.^{6, 7} This history underpins the Indigenous Peoples' crucial role in the Arctic Council today, where their status, knowledge, and cooperation remain fundamental to the Council's legitimacy and effectiveness.

As stipulated in the Arctic Council Ottawa Declaration, Permanent Participant organizations are all representative organizations of Arctic Indigenous Peoples living either across state borders or uniting under one Indigenous Peoples' Organization within one state. Building on each of their own values and priorities for their peoples in the work of the Council, the Permanent Participants are actively engaged in all six Arctic Council Working Groups, and numerous projects. The following sections outline the Permanent Participants' active participation and full consultation in the Arctic Council throughout 2025.

Transition of the Arctic Council Chairship from Norway (2023-2025) to the Kingdom of Denmark (2025-2027)

During the successful transition from the Norwegian Chairship (2023-2025) to the Kingdom of Denmark Chairship (2025-2027) on 12 May 2025, in the Romssa-Tromsø Statement, Arctic States and Permanent Participants reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace, stability and cooperation in the Arctic, acknowledging the role of the Arctic Council as the preeminent forum for circumpolar cooperation. The Statement further recognizes the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, their vital role in the Arctic Council and their special relation to the Arctic.⁸

Norway, who chaired the Council from 2023 taking over from the Russian Federation, prioritized strengthening cooperation with the Permanent Participants during a gradual resumption of work, highlighting the importance of their contributions at all levels of the Council. The overall objective for Norway's Chairship was to promote stability and constructive cooperation with Arctic youth and Arctic Indigenous Peoples as cross-cutting priorities.

The six Permanent Participants were aligned in their push for the Arctic Council to resume work in as active a manner as possible, recognizing the circumstances. Introduced during the Norwegian Chairship in 2023, under unusual circumstances, a new meeting format of the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Official (SAO) Chair meeting with all six Permanent Participants provided an important platform for the continuation of the Permanent Participants influence over the strategizing and prioritizing of work under each Working Group, as well as navigating the geopolitical situation.

These regular meetings enabled dialogue, information sharing and direct consultation with the Permanent Participants on Arctic Council matters during the current circumstance where the political level still does not meet. The SAO Chair - Permanent Participant meetings were the first in-person meetings that were held since the announcement of the Council's strategic pause. Norway held four such meetings, one of which was in January 2025.⁹

The Kingdom of Denmark Chairship priorities and engagement with Arctic Indigenous Peoples' organizations in 2025

In May 2025, the Kingdom of Denmark (constituting Denmark, Kalaallit Nunaat and Faroe Islands) assumed the Chairship of the Arctic Council. Having introduced an Inuk as Arctic Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark, and having agreed for the government of Kalaallit Nunaat, Naalakkersuisut, to lead the Kingdom's Chairship, a new era for direct Indigenous leadership of the Arctic Council was introduced.

In preparation for the Chairship's term and program, the Kingdom of Denmark consulted formally with the six Permanent Participants through Chairship's consultation meetings held during the Norwegian Chairship, as well as informally with the Inuit Circumpolar Council. Indigenous Peoples are high on the agenda of the Kingdom's Chairship. The priority of the Chairship is to maintain the Council as vibrant and resilient for the benefit of the people living in the Arctic, to remain in constructive cooperation and as a stable region. The Chairship's priorities recognize that Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives are essential to understanding and managing changes in the Arctic and working for the integration of Indigenous Knowledge alongside scientific insights in the work of the Council.¹⁰ The Kingdom of Denmark continued Norway's example of SAO Chair-Permanent Participant meetings and held two such meetings in 2025, one also including the Arctic Council Working Groups, in June 2025. The 2026 January meeting also included a preliminary introduction by the incoming Swedish Chairship (2027-2029) on early planning of their Chairship.

One of the Chairship's overarching focuses is on youth, which the Chairship will implement through its Youth Committee (CYC), with representation of two Permanent Participant youth in its make-up, and the Arctic Youth Conference in 2027.¹¹ Permanent Participants have been instrumental in engaging Indigenous youth in the Arctic Council by, for example, including youth delegates actively in the meetings.

Another important priority of the Kingdom of Denmark is oceans, which will be highlighted with the Chairship's Ocean Connectivity Conference embedded in the University of the Arctic Congress in 2026, in Torshavn, Faroe Islands.¹²

The Arctic Council: promoting peace through cooperation

With the intent and spirit of the Arctic Council being inclusivity, peace and cooperation in the Arctic, the cooperation serves as an example of exceptionalism in times of rising geopolitical tension. Through their perseverance in maintaining the preeminent body for cooperation in the Arctic, Permanent Participants are leading the way in upholding and promoting peace through cooperation.

The people-to-people and cross-border cooperation of Indigenous Peoples, inherent as peoples who have lived and thrived in the Arctic since time immemorial, predating the construct of states, supports the agenda of the Arctic States in continuing to engage in the Arctic Council.

The Arctic, undergoing rapid changes and warming three to four times faster than the rest of the globe, is a region of great interest to non-Arctic States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other actors, and maintaining strict Arctic agenda-setting cooperation with all Arctic States and Indigenous Peoples at the table is a strategic endeavor.

Serving as a room for communication, coordination and cooperation, the Arctic Council continues to form an important body underpinning a human approach to the Arctic. The Arctic Indigenous Peoples, through their Permanent Participant status, thus hold an important and pivotal role in maintaining and strengthening cooperation in times of increased tension.

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Rosa-Måren Magga, *Executive Secretary, Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat*

Linda Lyberth Kristiansen, *Advisor, Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat*



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by its founding fathers, five of the now 10 Member States: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The other five Member States joined later: Brunei Darussalam on 7 January 1984, followed by Viet Nam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999. The ASEAN Leaders signified a consensus to admit Timor Leste as ASEAN's 11th Member State in October 2025.¹ The ASEAN Secretariat Building is located in Jakarta, Indonesia. It serves as the headquarters for the ASEAN Secretariat.

The ASEAN Charter was adopted in November 2007 and came into force in December 2008. It is the legally binding agreement among the Member States that provides ASEAN with a legal status and institutional framework.

ASEAN's fundamental principles, more commonly known as the "ASEAN Way", are founded on non-interference, respect for sovereignty and decision-making by consensus. Although lauded by the ASEAN Member States (AMS), this latter principle has been considered a major challenge in moving things forward, particularly within the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC).

Despite there being around 100 million people identifying as Indigenous in Southeast Asia,² Indigenous Peoples' terms are "sensitive" topics within the AMS. As such, issues involving Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights Defenders (IPH RDs) rarely make it to the discussion table. However, the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue was initiated in 2013, inviting different stakeholders and fostering openness among the AMS to discuss human rights issues in the region.

ASEAN peace and security: advancing the right to peace through human rights engagement

ASEAN has long had a central role in conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding efforts in Southeast Asia. It has focused on dialogue, confidence building, and quiet diplomacy, guided by the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter³ —particularly non-interference, consensus-based decision-making, and respect for sovereignty—, to secure peace and stability in the region. Following this, initiatives under Priority Programme 2025 of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) were initiated to reinforce the peace and human rights linkages in the region.

On 1–2 July 2025, AICHR held its programme on the right to peace in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which saw the launch of AICHR's Thematic Study on the Right to Peace⁴ alongside the AICHR Regional Training Programme on Human Rights. The training programme underlines how conflict and human rights intersect such that, when conflict occurs in one place, all of ASEAN is affected; its flagship theme has now become “Pathways and Approaches to Peace in ASEAN”. The first workshop under this programme is entitled “Building Peace: From Conflict Prevention to Sustainable Peace”. The workshop laid the foundation for deeper regional discussions on how human rights-based approaches can contribute to long-term stability and peace in ASEAN Member States.

Responding to the changing geopolitical and security environment in the region, AICHR has launched six interconnected workshops aimed at drawing up ASEAN-specific pathways and conceptual frameworks for peace. These efforts are very much grounded in the provisions of the ASEAN Charter and the AICHR Terms of Reference and are sensitive to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of ASEAN Member States. An additional workshop was held on 23 October 2025 in Selangor, Malaysia to assist stakeholders with a framework in which to discuss this initiative. The workshop hoped to promote meaningful dialogue and a cross-sharing of ideas while establishing an organized system for the documentation and retention of institutional memory surrounding conflict as a vector for human rights. In engaging in initiatives such as these, AICHR also tries to strengthen the collective power and capacity of ASEAN to deal with new challenges and promote peace through a human rights perspective.

ASEAN Peoples@ASEAN 2025: strengthening civil society engagement and Indigenous Peoples' voices

The ASEAN Peoples@ASEAN 2025 event was convened by Malaysian civil society organizations (CSOs) in partnership with ASEAN civil society networks on 24 and 25 May 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event marked the first ASEAN Peoples' Solidarity Event, building on more than a decade of advocacy and engagement led by the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF), which has consistently brought critical human rights, governance, and development issues to the attention of ASEAN institutions and Member States.

The two-day event featured a diverse programme of workshops, exhibitions, forums, roundtable discussions, and research presentations, all aligned with ASEAN's regional priorities. A grand opening ceremony formally launched the event, highlighting unity, cultural diversity, and regional cooperation. The gathering aimed to foster a shared sense of purpose among the peoples of ASEAN and to encourage active participation in advancing peace, prosperity, and sustainable development across the region.

Indigenous Peoples' rights and contributions were a key focus of the event. A total of 51 participants consistently attended the Indigenous Rights sessions, reflecting strong interest and engagement. In collaboration with PACOS Trust, Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS), Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), Save Rivers, Pertubuhan Wanita Orang Asal Malaysia (PWOAM), and other civil society partners, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) provided full or partial support to 16 Indigenous participants, ensuring meaningful representation and participation.

The Indigenous Rights sessions attracted not only Indigenous representatives but also significant interest from non-indigenous participants, particularly during discussions on the roles of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity protection and ecological conservation. These discussions highlighted Indigenous knowledge systems and community-based approaches as essential to addressing environmental and climate challenges in the ASEAN region.

In addition, as an organization holding consultative status with the AICHR, AIPP was invited to attend the launch of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN Vision 2045,⁵ further reinforcing the role of Indigenous Peoples and civil society in shaping ASEAN's long-term regional vision. Unfortunately, the plan does not mention Indigenous Peoples.

4th ASEAN–EU Civil Society Organizations Forum and Interface Meeting on Human Rights

The 4th ASEAN–EU Civil Society Organizations Forum was convened on 13–14 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, bringing together 52 civil society organizations from ASEAN and the European Union (EU) to engage in constructive dialogue on regional and international human rights issues. The Forum was supported by the EU Delegation to ASEAN and provided an important platform for interaction between CSOs, AICHR, and representatives of the EU.

Over the two-day programme, participants exchanged experiences, shared insights, and developed recommendations⁶ aimed at promoting a more inclusive, accountable, and participatory human rights framework within ASEAN–EU cooperation. Discussions focused on strengthening civil society engagement, enhancing regional human rights mechanisms, and fostering collaborative approaches to address emerging and persistent human rights challenges in the region.

Following the CSOs Forum, an Interface Meeting between Civil Society Organizations, AICHR, and EU representatives was held on 15 October 2025, in conjunction with the 6th ASEAN–EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for direct engagement between CSOs, AICHR representatives from Thailand and Indonesia, and EU officials, including the EU Ambassador to ASEAN.

AIPP participated in the Interface Meeting for the first time in person. During the discussions, AIPP raised key concerns regarding the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in ASEAN and expressed its interest in contributing to the development of the Regional Action Plan on the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment. AIPP's participation contributed to advancing Indigenous Peoples' perspectives within ASEAN–EU human rights and environmental policy dialogues.

Overall, the Forum and Interface Meeting served as effective platforms for strengthening ASEAN–EU cooperation on human rights and for amplifying civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ voices in regional policy processes.

Advancing business and human rights in ASEAN–EU cooperation: reflections from the 6th ASEAN–EU Policy Dialogue side event

As part of the 6th ASEAN–EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights, a dedicated side event entitled *“ASEAN–EU Dialogue on Intensifying Actions and Overcoming Barriers in Implementing Business and Human Rights and Environment in ASEAN and the EU”* was convened on 16 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event brought together policymakers, civil society actors, and experts to examine concrete pathways for strengthening accountability and implementation of business and human rights standards across both regions.

AIPP participated as a speaker on Mandatory Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (mHREDD). The event highlighted new initiatives in regulation, implementation challenges, and recommendations for regional alignments by which to change international human rights and environmental benchmarks. AIPP emphasized that addressing systemic human rights and environmental harms to Indigenous Peoples, such as those committed by extractive industries, agribusiness, infrastructure development, and transnational supply chains in ASEAN, is a priority area for the integration of mHREDD into the work plan.

Undertaking due diligence frameworks that not only comply with procedural requirements but which also meaningfully incorporate Indigenous Peoples’ rights must include the rights to self-determination, land and territorial rights, and the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), AIPP stressed. The discussion highlighted the need for ASEAN and EU action on business and human rights to have coherence, especially as binding due diligence mandates take root in the EU and will impact global standards.

Panellists and participants considered the following as barriers to effective implementation: gaps in enforcement, lack of access to rem-

edy for affected communities, and the need for stronger safeguards for human rights defenders. AIPP's engagement helped advance a rights-based and people-centred view in the ASEAN–EU policy discussion, highlighting the importance of including Indigenous Peoples as stakeholders for better, accountable, and sustainable business practices.

The sessions also created space for dialogue and were an invaluable opportunity for advocates and policymakers to discuss the practicalities of using the mHREDD as a mechanism for preventing harm, and for promoting accountability in both regions' strategies for mHREDD.

AIPP welcomes ASEAN human rights declarations, calls for rights-based implementation

ASEAN's Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment, and the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realizing Inclusive and Sustainable Development were adopted by the members of ASEAN as a result of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (26–28 October 2025). The declarations are welcomed⁷ by AIPP as significant steps that reaffirm ASEAN's commitment to human rights and sustainable development.

AIPP advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' rights by ASEAN and AICHR members when implementing and enforcing the declarations at all levels. In response to these declarations, while taking note of the statement made by the UN experts on 30 October 2025, concerns were raised regarding the use of the term "indigenous" "instead of the internationally recognized term 'Indigenous Peoples'".⁸ It was also emphasized that referring to "Indigenous Peoples" alongside "local communities" in the declarations should not suggest that both groups enjoy the same rights under international law. AIPP has also been worried that Indigenous Peoples are still portrayed as "vulnerable groups" or "stakeholders" rather than rights holders and environmental stewards, a view which diverges from the promise enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This gap requires addressing urgently, and AIPP urges both ASEAN and AICHR to work towards a more inclusive, rights-based implementation.

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Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹ is an international treaty under the UN, adopted in 1992. The CBD has three overall objectives: to conserve biodiversity, promote its sustainable use, and ensure the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources (Art. 1). The CBD recognizes the importance of traditional knowledge (Art. 8j) and customary sustainable use of biological resources (Art. 10c) for the achievement of its objectives. There are 196 Parties to the CBD.²

The CBD has developed programmes of work³ on thematic issues such as marine, agricultural and forest biodiversity, and on cross-cutting issues such as traditional knowledge, access to genetic resources, and protected areas. All the programmes of work have a direct impact on Indigenous Peoples' rights and territories.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB)⁴ was established in 1996 during the 3rd Conference of the Parties (COP 3) as the Indigenous Peoples' caucus in the CBD processes. Since then, the IIFB has worked as a coordination mechanism to facilitate Indigenous participation in, and advocacy at, the CBD through preparatory meetings, capacity-building activities, and other interventions. The IIFB has managed to get many of the CBD's programmes of work to consider Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge, as well as their customary use of biodiversity and effective participation.

In 2010, the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10)⁵ adopted the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity⁶ and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which included the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets to halt the global loss of biodiversity by 2020.⁷ Concluded in 2020, none of these Targets were met.

In 2022, at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)⁸ was adopted after a long and postponed negotiation process. The KMGBF consists of four long-term Goals to be achieved by 2050 and 23 action-oriented Targets to be completed by 2030. Overall, the purpose of the KMGBF is to steer the world's efforts towards halting and reversing the ongoing global loss of biodiversity by 2030 and ensure a “world living in harmony with nature” by 2050. The KMGBF acknowledges in an unprecedented manner the important contributions and roles of Indigenous Peoples in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and obligates CBD Parties to a human rights-based implementation of the Framework. Indigenous Peoples are explicitly mentioned in multiple sections of the KMGBF, especially Section C; in one of the four Goals (Goal C); and in seven of the 23 Targets (Targets 1, 3, 5, 9, 19, 21 and 22).⁹

25-27 February 2025 - resumed session of the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16.2)

COP 16, which took place in Cali, Colombia between 21 October and 1 November 2024, extended to overtime and then had to be suspended due to a loss of quorum. This postponed the adoption of multiple COP decisions important to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).¹⁰ Parties resumed the session of COP 16.2 in Rome, Italy from 25 to 27 February 2025.¹¹ Key COP decisions adopted at this meeting included:

Decision 16/31¹² on the monitoring framework for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

As reported in the Indigenous World 2025,¹³ COP 16 negotiations enabled important progress in updating the monitoring framework and completing the indicators. The traditional knowledge indicator on land

tenure and land-use change in the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples and local communities was included as headline indicator 22.1 for Target 22 of the KMGBF in the draft decision,¹⁴ allowing monitoring of the security of land tenure of Indigenous Peoples and land-use change on their lands and territories. This decision was adopted at the final plenary session of the COP 16.2 meeting in Rome and makes it mandatory for Parties to use this indicator when reporting on Target 22 in their 7th and 8th national reports. The decision further recognizes the value and contributions of community-based monitoring and information systems as complementary to improving global biodiversity knowledge, data and information.

The inclusion of the traditional knowledge indicators in the monitoring framework represents a significant achievement for Indigenous Peoples under the CBD. These traditional knowledge indicators are as follows:

For Target 9 of the KMGBF, headline indicator 9.2 and binary indicator 9.b; for Target 13, headline indicator 13.b; for Target 21, component indicator 21.1; for Target 22, headline indicator 22.1 and binary indicator 22.b; and for Target 23, binary indicator 23.b.

Decision 16/32¹⁵ on the mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review, including the global review of collective progress in the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to be conducted at the 17th and 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Decision 16/32 adopted the template for the 7th and 8th national reports due 28 February 2026 and 30 June 2029, respectively, which will inform a mid-term global review of KMGBF implementation at COP 17 in 2026 and culminate in a global report on collective progress on the implementation of the KMGBF at COP 19 in 2030. The global review will be a party-driven process drawing primarily on information from national reports, achievements under National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and relevant recommendations of the subsidiary bodies, working groups, dialogues and analysis of other relevant information.

Decision 16/32 further decided that the global report would primarily focus on assessing the progress of implementing the KMGBF including a target-by-target assessment of progress towards the 23 targets, the 2030 mission, and other elements, including its section C. The re-

port should include an analysis of how the indicators in the monitoring framework have been applied, as well as assessments and reports, including those of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). It should also draw upon the information on commitments by actors other than national governments, including disaggregated information on contributions from Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth. Relevant traditional knowledge, innovations, practices and technology of Indigenous Peoples should also be used while ensuring the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples. To prepare the global report, decision 16/32 established an Ad Hoc Scientific and Technical Advisory Group with a timebound mandate to COP 17.

Finally, Decision 16/32 adopted the core reporting elements for the commitments of actors other than national governments in order to ensure the whole-of-society approach as set out in the KMGBF.¹⁶

Decision 16/34¹⁷ on resource mobilization

Decision 16/34 decided to implement Article 21¹⁸ of the CBD by establishing the long-awaited permanent arrangement for the financial mechanism and addressing the global finance gap by assessing and approving the mobilization of resources from all sources. It was further decided that the financial mechanism would be under the authority, guidance and accountable to the Conference of the Parties and operate within a democratic and transparent system of governance, ensuring a structure that is fair, equitable, inclusive efficient and representative. To deliver on this mandate, an intersessional process was established on the basis of a road map where, by COP 17, the criteria for the institutional structure to operate the financial mechanism would be developed further; by COP 18, a decision would be made as to whether to establish a new entity to operate the financial mechanism or confirm an existing entity in that role; and if the decision at COP 18 is to establish a new entity, its operations should start by COP 19. Taking this into account, the COP shall determine the institutional structure to permanently operate the financial mechanism no later than COP 19.

Decision 16/34 recognizes that, despite the important role of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the Convention and its protocols as well as in achieving the KMGBF, they often lack adequate access to biodiversity finance. It therefore calls upon Parties and other relevant

actors to improve the access and increase the availability of financial resources. To support and enable the strategy for resource mobilization, the provision of timely and accessible financial support to Indigenous Peoples should also be enhanced and ensured.

18 October 2025 - Workshop on the assessments adopted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2024 and forthcoming assessments

On 18 October 2025, ahead of SBSTTA-27, an information workshop on recently completed assessments by the IPBES¹⁹ took place in Panama City. The purpose of the workshop was to consider the findings of the recent IPBES Nexus Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health,²⁰ and the Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity.²¹ Participants also received an overview from IPBES experts on the assessments currently underway, including the second global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services.²² The intension was to provide an opportunity for Parties and stakeholders to engage directly with the authors of the IPBES assessments and to discuss how to use the findings and forthcoming assessments in the implementation of the KMGBF and to provide a platform to prepare Parties for the discussions on this item at SBSTTA-27.

20-24 October 2025 - 27th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-27)

The SBSTTA-27²³ was held from 20-24 October in Panama City and hosted by the Government of Panama. The meeting adopted a total of 10 recommendations, including:

Recommendation SBSTTA-27/1²⁴ on the global review of collective progress in the implementation of the KMGBF, which approved an

annotated outline and structure for the global report on collective progress. The recommendation requested that Executive Secretary prepare the global report on the basis of decision 16/32²⁵ under the guidance of the Ad Hoc Scientific and Technical Advisory Group. Further, the Executive Secretary was requested to collect information through the online reporting tool on commitments by actors other than national governments, including disaggregated information on contributions from Indigenous Peoples and provide support for an informal technical dialogue among Parties, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth and other stakeholders, in order to collect inputs to the global review, including on best practices, gaps and solutions.

Recommendation SBSTTA-27/2²⁶ on matters related to the work Programme of the IPBES and implications of its assessments for the work undertaken under the CBD. Parties discussed the IPBES Nexus Assessment Report and the Transformative Change Assessment Report; however, they were not able to agree on the approach, which left the recommendation incomplete and to be discussed further at SBSTTA-28, which will take place between 27 July and 1 August 2026.

Recommendation SBSTTA-27/2²⁷ on biodiversity and climate change. This recommendation made progress in advancing enhanced coordination and synergies across the three Rio Conventions.²⁸ However, Parties were unable to reach a consensus on several issues before the meeting concluded, including the annex to the recommendation on the supplement to the Voluntary Guidelines for the Design and Effective Implementation of Ecosystem-based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction. These issues will be reconsidered at COP 17.

27-30 October 2025 - 1st meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and Other Provisions of the Convention Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (SB8J-1)

As reported in the *Indigenous World 2025*,²⁹ COP 16 decision 16/5³⁰ established the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and other provisions of

the Convention related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (SB8J), with a mandate to provide Parties with advice on matters of relevance to Indigenous Peoples and local communities within the scope of the Convention and its protocols. At the first meeting of the SB8J (SB8J-1),³¹ held from 27-30 October 2025 in Panama City, a total of six recommendations were adopted and forwarded to COP 17.

On organizational matters and election of officers, in line with the practice of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j),³² which the SB8J replaces, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) designated seven Indigenous members, one from each of the seven sociocultural regions recognized by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), to serve as friends of the Bureau and to participate in Bureau meetings and act as co-chairs of possible contact groups. The following representatives were designated:

- Africa – **Lucy Mulenkei** (Indigenous Information Network)
- Arctic – **Gunn-Britt Retter** (Saami Council)
- Asia – **Jennifer Corpuz** (Gawis Indigenous Rights)
- Central and South America and the Caribbean – **Ramiro Batzin** (International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity)
- Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia – **Aleksei Tsykarev** (Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples and Public Diplomacy “Young Karelia”)
- North America – **Rochelle Diver** (International Indian Treaty Council)
- Pacific – **Christine Teresa Grant** (Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation)

One of the members has to serve as the Indigenous co-chair of the SB8J, and **Gunn-Britt Retter** (Saami Council) was selected to take on this role.

The recommendations adopted by SB8J-1 included:

Recommendation SB8J-1/2³³ on the modus operandi of the SB8J. One of the critical pending issues from COP 16 was the adoption of the modus operandi of the SB8J and its functionality, in order to ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples. The discussions on this item were rather difficult, expressing divergent views among Par-

ties in this regard. The main issues revolved around functions, operating principles and procedural matters, on the Bureau and selection of co-chairs and on friends of the Bureau. Discussions related, in particular, to how representatives from Indigenous Peoples should be selected, and whether they should be selected from the seven sociocultural regions as defined by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, or from the five UN regional groups. Parties were not able to reach a consensus on this item, and the recommendation was forwarded incomplete for further discussion at COP 17, which will be held in October 2026 in Yerevan, Armenia. The position of the IIFB remains that nominations by Indigenous Peoples should be through their own governance structures, representatives and organizations, across the seven sociocultural regions.³⁴

Recommendation SB8J-1/3³⁵ on proposed elements for the guidelines related to Tasks 1.1 and 1.2 of the programme of work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the CBD related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities to 2030. Decision 16/4³⁶ from COP 16 adopted the programme of work on Article 8(j), including specific tasks to be taken under each of the eight Elements. The first meeting of SB8J was mandated to consider the development of guidelines related to Tasks 1.1 and 1.2 under Element 1 on conservation and restoration to support the implementation of Target 2 and Target 3 of the KMGBF. The guidelines are meant to strengthen the legal and policy framework for the recognition of the role of Indigenous and traditional territories (ITTs) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in spatial planning, restoration and conservation. Parties were unable to reach a consensus on several issues, and further work remains to be completed at COP 17.

The IIFB called for Parties to adopt guidelines that recognize the tremendous contributions of Indigenous Peoples to the conservation of biodiversity on their lands and territories. The guidelines should ensure the rights of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with the UNDRIP, and should identify, recognize and respect ITTs as distinct systems supporting the implementation of Target 3, without having to be designated as Protected Areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).³⁷

Recommendation SB8J-1/4³⁸ on the process to review and update the Voluntary Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts Within the Context of

Article 8(j) and Related Provision of the Convention. Under Task 5.4 of Element 5 on strengthening the implementation and monitoring of progress in the programme of work on Article 8(j), the SB8J was requested to review and update the *Voluntary Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts Within the Context of Article 8(j)* to ensure its alignment with the KMGBF. At its first meeting, the SB8J considered this task and agreed on the way forward, including the Terms of Reference for the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group, which will review the synthesis of views received and provide technical advice and recommendations. Parties were not able to agree on the composition of the expert group. The SB8J will need to consider this item at its second meeting and provide a recommendation for consideration at COP 18.

The IIFB requested, *inter alia*, that when selecting Indigenous Peoples' representatives to the expert group, the internal decision-making processes and Indigenous Peoples' own governance structures should be respected in the nominations from the seven sociocultural regions.³⁹

Recommendation SB8J-1/5⁴⁰ on the provision of advice on traditional knowledge for the global report on collective progress in the implementation of the KMGBF. The SB8J discussed the inclusion of traditional knowledge in the global report on collective progress, and made, *inter alia*, a request to the Executive Secretary, under the guidance of the Ad Hoc Scientific and Technical Advisory Group for the preparation of the global report, to include inputs related to traditional knowledge, including best practices, challenges, gaps and solutions. The importance of including Indigenous women and youth in the preparation of the 7th and 8th national reports was stressed, along with the need to reflect the contributions of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth in the implementation of the KMGBF in the global report. Parties were also encouraged to facilitate submissions on Indigenous knowledge systems and the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, ensuring that such information is obtained with their FPIC, and that this information could be used in the global report on collective progress. The IIFB emphasized the importance of addressing challenges and barriers encountered in the process of making contributions on traditional knowledge to the global report.⁴¹

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Defending the Rights of Indigenous Women

Indigenous women number some 238 million worldwide –approximately 6.2% of the global female population– and play an essential role in protecting territories, cultures and ancestral knowledge. However, they continue to face profound and structural challenges.

Violence and criminalization disproportionately affect Indigenous women and girls. In Canada, for example, more than 4,000 have been reported missing or murdered in recent decades, a widely recognized crisis. Globally, Indigenous women defenders suffer threats, criminalization and attacks for defending their lands and resources, with particular severity in Latin America, where murders of women environmental leaders are on the rise. This violence combines factors of gender, Indigenous identity and territory, and often occurs with impunity and a lack of access to justice.

In the regulatory sphere, there has been significant but insufficient progress. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) sets fundamental standards for the protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples although its implementation remains uneven. Only 24 States have ratified ILO Convention 169, the only binding instrument on Indigenous rights. A significant step forward was taken in 2022 with CEDAW General Recommendation 39, the first international standard to comprehensively address the rights of Indigenous women and girls, reinforcing State obligations in the areas of participation, land, health, education and protection from violence.

Taken together, this picture reflects both the magnitude of the challenges and the opportunities that exist to advance towards the full recognition of Indigenous women's rights.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Indigenous women have consolidated a solid and coordinated global movement capable of influencing a number of the global decision-making spaces. From their territories to multilateral forums, their leadership has woven local, regional and global networks that are defending peace, collective rights and the continuity of their cultures. Among these networks, the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI), created 25 years ago, is noteworthy. It brings together women leaders from seven socio-cultural regions and has become a key player in promoting political participation, strengthening grassroots organizations and raising awareness of the demands of Indigenous Peoples.

These networks –such as the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA), the Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN), the Network of Indigenous Women in Asia (NIWA), the African Indigenous Women's Organization (AIWO) and the Pacific Indigenous Women's Network (PIWN)– play a strategic role in collective processes of territorial defence, community peace and human rights. Through their sustained work, Indigenous women held active positions in spaces historically closed to them in 2025, such as the UN Security Council, climate negotiations, and national peace talks, demonstrating that peacebuilding is also driven from the territories and up towards the international arena.

With a quarter of a century of global coordination, Indigenous women continue to show that their leadership is indispensable for advancing towards a more just, diverse and sustainable world.

International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI): a quarter of a century weaving peace and security from Indigenous diversity

FIMI's advocacy at the UN: building peace from the contributions of Indigenous women

During 2025, FIMI advocated in different UN spaces for inclusive mechanisms whereby Indigenous women could fully participate in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and community security.

Earlier in the year, at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), held in March at UN headquarters, FIMI and its allies promoted a peace and security agenda for global discussion. There, Indigenous women from around the world demanded greater visibility, participation and funding to combat the multiple expressions of violence, inequality and discrimination that affect them.¹

They denounced the fact that extractivism, the militarization of territories and so-called exclusionary “climate solutions” are generating new forms of violence against Indigenous women.² The Indigenous delegates demanded guarantees of protection for women environmental defenders –who face criminalization and attacks for protecting their lands–, as well as respect for free, prior and informed consent in all actions affecting their territories.³

FIMI emphasized the importance of including Indigenous women in high-level debates and ministerial forums so that their proposals and recommendations can guide public policy.⁴ In the presentation of the Global Report on the State of Indigenous Women's Rights at the CSW, FIMI highlighted an alarming fact: one-third of the defenders killed in 2024 were women, exposing the extent to which gender-based violence is suffered in Indigenous communities.⁵ Faced with this reality, the women leaders demanded that States adopt laws and policies with sufficient resources to guarantee the rights of Indigenous women and girls, eradicate violence and ensure their collective rights –including access to land and self-determination. As Tarcila Rivera Zea, president of FIMI, concluded, Indigenous women must be recognized “as part of the solution and not just as a problem or group receiving assistance”⁶ in peace and development efforts.

During the 24th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (April 2025, New York), a global interregional and intergenerational dialogue dedicated to Indigenous women's rights took place for the first time.⁷ This space recognized that fully integrating Indigenous women's voices and leadership is essential for a sustainable future.⁸ In this context, prominent women leaders highlighted the contribution of Indigenous women to the resolution of global challenges.⁹ Colombia's Environment Minister, Lena Yanina Estrada, summed up the collective vision by stating: “We are owners of the territories, not guardians. Defenders of life, builders of peace.”¹⁰ This statement reflected the con-

sensus at the UN that Indigenous women not only preserve cultures and environments but also lead peacebuilding processes in their communities, defending life and proposing solutions to the climate crisis, violence and other threats.

The new UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr. Albert K. Barume, endorsed this view in his October 2025 report. Barume highlighted the “urgent need for stronger recognition and protection” of Indigenous rights –particularly in terms of territorial demarcation, legal recognition and protection from criminalization and violence- stressing that such rights “significantly contribute to [the...] security” of both Indigenous Peoples and society as a whole. He also called for a paradigm shift, urging States to stop considering Indigenous Peoples as marginal actors in international security.¹¹

Indigenous women have longstanding generational experience of conflict resolution, community justice, mediation and peacebuilding, based on their ancestral knowledge and practices of caring for life. However, they have historically been ignored in Security Council resolutions and other international forums. Even when their role is recognized, they are often excluded from discussions and formal decision-making processes on peace and security.

Lasting peace is therefore linked to respect for collective rights and women's leadership in defending land and territories.

During the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP30 in Belém, Brazil, together with its allies, the FIMI co-organized the Global Summit of Indigenous Women and Youth. This historic meeting brought together more than 200 women leaders from different continents to consolidate a global agenda that strengthens the links between climate justice, peace and security from the perspective of Indigenous worldviews, emphasizing that the protection of life and territories is inseparable from lasting peace for Indigenous Peoples.

In the political declaration adopted, the participants reaffirmed that there can be no climate justice or community security without full recognition of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and the effective participation of women and youth in decision-making processes, especially on issues of climate finance, protection of women defenders and defence of territories, this latter being a key expression of comprehensive security and sustainable peace for their communities. They

also demanded direct, simplified and culturally-appropriate financing mechanisms that respond to their strategic priorities and guarantee the economic and territorial security of Indigenous women as pillars of peace in their communities.

Another significant and symbolic advance in 2025 was the international recognition of the fundamental role of Indigenous women. In November, the UN General Assembly officially adopted International Day of Indigenous Women (to be celebrated every 05 September).¹² This historic proclamation –the result of years of advocacy on the part of Indigenous women and their allied organizations– is an act of memory, justice and commitment. The corresponding resolution honours the “strength, wisdom and leadership” of millions of Indigenous women across the seven socio-cultural regions of the world,¹³ recognizing their contributions to the defence of territories, the protection of languages and cultures, the transmission of ancestral knowledge and community organization. FIMI welcomed this decision as a fundamental step forward and urged that the new International Day serve to reaffirm the responsibility of States to eliminate the racism, discrimination, violence and inequalities still faced by Indigenous women.¹⁴

It should be noted that, in 2022, another international mechanism –the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)– adopted General Recommendation No. 39, a pioneering instrument that recognizes the individual and collective rights of Indigenous women and girls. The adoption of this recommendation involved the design and implementation of a Plan of Action to ensure the commitment of States through policies and budgets for Indigenous women and girls.

Indigenous women weaving peace in their communities: meetings and actions to strengthen the fabric of peace

In 2025, the FIMI celebrated its 25th anniversary as a global mechanism for Indigenous coordination and leadership, recognizing a quarter of a century of collective struggle for the rights, justice and political participation of Indigenous women from their diverse worldviews. Between 19

and 21 June 2025, Lima, Peru thus welcomed women leaders from the seven socio-cultural regions of the world to a meeting that was much more than an historical commemoration: it was a space for memory, reflection and strategic planning to strengthen the role of Indigenous women in peacebuilding, territorial security and multilateral policies. Under the slogan “Weaving together for our rights”, the participants paid tribute to the founders, shared lessons learned and reaffirmed that international advocacy and community action were two sides of the same struggle for the comprehensive peace of our peoples, in which respect for collective rights, self-determination and the protection of territories are fundamental pillars of security and peaceful coexistence for present and future generations.

This link between the global and the local was not limited to the commemorative sphere. While pushing for change in the international arena, Indigenous women also continued to build peace and security from the community up throughout 2025. They are leading local initiatives in different regions aimed at conflict resolution, restorative justice, violence prevention and intercultural dialogue, often linking these efforts with their global advocacy.

One notable example is that of Felicitas Martínez Solano, a Me'phaa (Tlapaneca) leader from Guerrero, Mexico. A pioneer in implementing community justice systems, Martínez Solano was the first woman coordinator of the CRAC-PC Community Police of San Luis Acatlán. Under her leadership, the communities have consolidated a model of Indigenous justice based on re-education and social reintegration, in contrast to the punitive approach of the State.¹⁵ This community system allows for an immediate response to minor offences, establishing its own rules and sanctions. Instead of long prison sentences, offenders are encouraged to repair the damage and contribute positively to the community during the day while serving short periods of detention at night.¹⁶ The results have been remarkable: according to Martínez Solano, this approach is not only more effective in the Indigenous context but also represents significant savings for the Mexican State, by reducing court and prison costs.¹⁷ Although the Mexican Constitution recognizes Indigenous jurisdiction, Felicitas notes that, in practice, many of these rights still remain “on paper only”.¹⁸ Her tireless work nonetheless demonstrates how ancestral justice can strengthen local peace, resolving

conflicts by repairing the fabric of the community and reducing violence. The example of Felicitas Martínez –which was even reported in the international media in 2025–¹⁹ is inspiring other Indigenous women to reclaim their own normative systems as a contribution to security and peaceful coexistence.

Indigenous women have also taken on leading roles in national peace processes in Latin America. One such important precedent was the participation of Colombian Indigenous women leaders in the 2016 Peace Agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), ensuring the inclusion of an ethnic and gender approach in the implementation of peace.²⁰ In 2025, these same women leaders –organized in networks such as Indigenous Women for Peace– continued working to ensure that the Agreement's commitments were being implemented in the territories, from land restitution to illicit crop substitution programmes. Similarly, in Peru, young Quechua women such as community court interpreters are contributing to peace and justice by breaking down language barriers in the courts.²¹ Their work guarantees the right to a fair trial for Quechua speakers and prevents conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings in the legal system. These interpreting and support actions enable disputes to be resolved with respect for Indigenous identity, reinforcing the communities' trust in the State justice system.

In Africa, Indigenous women have led processes of peacebuilding and social transformation.²² In some regions of the Sahel and East Africa, for example, it is the women who mediate local conflicts over access to water and pasture, drawing on their traditional knowledge of resource management. FIMI points out that, thanks to women's leadership in such initiatives, community agreements for peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers have been reached, thus reducing inter-ethnic violence. In addition, policies against harmful practices –such as child and forced marriage– and in favour of girls' education have been promoted by Indigenous women in African countries, contributing to safer and more inclusive societies.²³ The election of several female Indigenous councillors in Uganda was a transformative event in 2025, an unprecedented development that “changes power structures from the ground up”.²⁴ The presence of Indigenous women in Ugandan local government not only raises the visibility of their communities but

also opens up opportunities to address social conflicts from an inter-cultural and gender-based approach, thus strengthening peace in these territories.

In the Asia-Pacific region, young Indigenous women combined their international advocacy with the implementation of local dispute resolution projects based on Indigenous custom. Such is the case of communities in Nepal where, in the absence of the State, Tharu women have organized community peace committees to mediate family conflicts and ensure the safety of women and girls. In the Pacific Islands, Indigenous women have been at the forefront of community-based climate resilience initiatives (e.g., developing traditional “Power System” models of resource management), on the understanding that environmental degradation generates tensions that can escalate into conflict.²⁵ By addressing the climate crisis with local and culturally-relevant solutions, these women leaders are also preventing future scenarios of insecurity and displacement.

It is important to note that many of these efforts are taking place in contexts of persistent structural violence. Defending their territory from extractive interests often places Indigenous women at risk. In Canada, for example, the reality of more than 4,000 missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls highlights the intersection between gender-based violence (GBV), racism and State neglect.²⁶ In Latin America, militarization and socio-territorial conflicts continue to threaten the lives of community leaders: in 2023 alone, dozens of Indigenous women defenders were criminalized or attacked for opposing mining and oil projects. In response, FIMI and its partner organizations redoubled their international reporting of these cases and created solidarity networks for the protection of women defenders. One example was FIMI's support for the urgent call to stop repression and militarization in Amazonian communities, where Indigenous women warned that security cannot be achieved through State violence but only through respect for dialogue and the autonomy of the peoples.

Despite the challenges, Indigenous women have strengthened their spaces for collective care and healing among themselves, recognizing that their emotional well-being is a pillar that sustains the struggle for peace. One example of this is the feminist resilience circle organized by the “Leading from the South” consortium, where strategies

for self-care, holistic protection and mutual support were shared in the face of intensifying multiple crises (climate, health, political).²⁷ These intercultural practices of care –woven from community values– are in themselves acts of peacebuilding as they reverse the impact of violence and reinforce the bonds of solidarity across borders.

Conclusion

Peace and security are not foreign concepts to Indigenous Peoples but are deeply intertwined with their vision of balance and harmony, as well as with their struggles for life, land and dignity. Indigenous women's activities at the UN and other international mechanisms have succeeded in highlighting urgent demands: an end to violence and discrimination, protection for women defenders, respect for their territories and the right to participate on equal terms in all peace processes. At the same time, from their communities, Indigenous women have undertaken exemplary initiatives for conflict resolution and justice, demonstrating to the world that ancestral knowledge offers sustainable solutions to the current global crises.

Indigenous women are weaving our voices together from the most remote corners of the world to the halls of the UN, making it clear that “our history does not die, our word does not end”.²⁸ We are the ones who, with threads of resistance and hope, continue to open paths of justice, dialogue and reconciliation for our peoples. If 2025 taught us anything, it is that there can be no peace without Indigenous women; with us, peace has stronger roots and a more inclusive horizon for all.

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*The **International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)** is a global network that brings together Indigenous women from seven socio-cultural regions. FIMI is focused on advocacy, capacity building, economic empowerment and leadership development.*



European Union Engagement with Indigenous Issues

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 Member States. Its legislative and executive powers are divided between the EU main institutions: the European Parliament (co-legislative authority), the Council of the European Union (co-legislative and executive authority) and the European Commission (executive authority). In addition, the EU has its own diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS) with EU Delegations throughout the world.

The EU maintains trade relations with the whole world and is the biggest donor of development aid.¹ Aside from the influence within the territory of its Member States and its influence in international organisations, the EU also has a global impact, being an international key player in the area of human rights, development, and monitoring of corporate and environmental issues.

The EU forms part of the international process of promotion and protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights. Five EU Member States have ratified ILO Convention 169² and the EU supported the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 as well as the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014.

In recent years, the EU has moved from a relatively passive position regarding the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights to a much more active involvement in ensuring the effectiveness of these rights in its policies.³

However, the shift in the European political balance and ongoing international tensions is threatening this commitment to Indigenous Peoples' rights and risks rolling back the progress achieved in recent years.

Progress on the EU efforts to confront violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights in global value chains

2025 marked the start of a new European legislative term, with a newly-elected Parliament assuming office and inheriting a set of far-reaching reforms adopted at the end of the 2024 term. These reforms are designed to reinforce corporate accountability, environmental protection, and the sustainability of global supply chains. Directive (EU) 2024/1760 on corporate sustainability due diligence (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive – CSDDD),⁴ Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 on deforestation-free products (EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products – EUDR),⁵ and Regulation (EU) 2024/1252 establishing a framework for critical raw materials (Critical Raw Materials Act – CRMA)⁶ all form part of the European Green Deal strategy.⁷ This strategy seeks to reconcile ecological transition, industrial competitiveness, and the promotion of human rights within an increasingly globalised system of value chains.

These instruments did not emerge in a normative vacuum. Rather, they reflect a gradual awareness within European institutions of the structural human rights violations linked to transnational economic activities and, more specifically, of the harms suffered by Indigenous Peoples. The EU is not merely an abstract normative actor in this field; it is also a direct observer of these violations through its external action and cooperation instruments. European programmes dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders, such as ProtectDefenders.eu,⁸ as well as information-gathering mechanisms operating through human rights focal points in EU delegations, regularly document violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights. These are frequently associated with extractive, agro-industrial, or infrastructure projects driven by private actors.⁹

These findings of human rights violations have fuelled a political and legal dynamic aimed at moving beyond the limitations of soft law and voluntary corporate social responsibility. The justiciability of human rights, and particularly the rights of Indigenous Peoples, has progressively emerged as a central issue in inter-institutional debates. The right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), has become

a focal point of these discussions, crystallising tensions between economic imperatives, the sovereignty of third States, and the protection of fundamental rights.¹⁰

In this context, the CSDDD represents the most fully developed expression of this normative shift. It seeks to impose a duty of due diligence on large companies operating on the European market that covers their entire value chains with regard to human rights and environmental impacts. The directive explicitly acknowledges, in its recitals, the particular situation of groups exposed to heightened vulnerability, among which Indigenous Peoples are included, linking their protection to UNDRIP and the principle of FPIC. This reference, stemming in particular from the work and amendments advanced by the European Parliament during the previous legislative term, reflects a clear political intention to align EU law with international human rights standards.

The EUDR reinforces this orientation by linking the fight against deforestation with the recognition of land tenure and land-use rights. By making access to the European market conditional upon compliance with the legislation of the country of production, including land-related laws, the regulation falls short of fully granting binding force to the rights of Indigenous Peoples as recognised by UNDRIP and international jurisprudence. Nevertheless, it opens a normative space in which Indigenous Peoples' rights may be taken into account indirectly through the domestic legal frameworks of partner countries. The explicit references to Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, and FPIC in the recitals of the regulation demonstrate a growing understanding of the structural link between deforestation, land-grabbing, and the marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples.

The CRMA, finally, fits into this dynamic in a more ambivalent manner. While the adopted version no longer contains direct textual references to Indigenous Peoples, the preparatory work and parliamentary debates reveal genuine concern regarding the social and territorial impacts of strategic mining projects. Several amendments sought to introduce enhanced consultation requirements for Indigenous Peoples, or even explicit references to FPIC. Although these proposals were not retained in the final text, they contribute to a body of normative indicators pointing to an initial intention not to dissociate the security of European supply chains from the requirement to respect human rights.

Taken together, these three instruments reflect, at least during the upward phase of the European policy cycle, a willingness to strengthen the justiciability of Indigenous Peoples' rights through indirect but binding mechanisms, particularly via economic law and internal market regulation.

Normative backlash and contemporary tensions: competitiveness, security, and the retreat from ambitions to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights

2025 was marked by the fact that this dynamic of normative shift has, however, encountered growing resistance since the end of the previous legislative term, and even more so following the political reconfiguration brought about by the most recent European elections. The rise of conservative and far-right groups, combined with a geopolitical context shaped by the war in Ukraine, the dismantling of USAID, recurrent pressure from the United States, international trade tensions, and intensified competition for access to strategic resources, has profoundly reshaped the EU's priorities.

In the name of economic competitiveness and the security of its borders and supply chains, the EU has initiated a retreat that leaves behind its ambitions to strengthen the justiciability of human rights. The repeated postponements of the EUDR's¹¹ entry into force, the delays affecting parts of the CSDDD's requirements, and the discussions and adoption of "Omnibus"¹² directives aimed at simplifying and lightening the obligations arising from the CSDDD all illustrate this trend.

The initial CSDDD regulation was scheduled to take effect on 30 December 2024 but it had already been postponed to the end of 2025. During 2025, it was revised again, with the new version adopted on 18 December 2025, which postponed its entry into force to 30 December 2026 for all operators, except for small and micro-enterprises, which will benefit from an additional one-year grace period (30 December 2027).¹³

The CSDDD Directive itself was the subject of a Commission proposal on 26 February 2025, known as the "Omnibus I package", which was adopted in April 2025 under the somewhat explicit name Omni-

bus I, “Stop-the-Clock”. This directive postponed the transposition and implementation of the first phase of the CSDDD by one year.¹⁴ Subsequently, in December 2025, the European Parliament adopted a provisional agreement to drastically reduce the sustainability reporting and due diligence framework.¹⁵

Under this revised framework, the scope of application was significantly raised: only companies with more than 5,000 employees and a turnover of EUR 1.5 billion will now be subject to due diligence obligations. The requirement for a complete mapping of value chains was replaced by a logic based on “reasonably available information”. The obligation to implement a climate transition plan was removed, and potential sanctions were capped.

This proposal also provides that the new due diligence regime will only enter into force from July 2029, thereby delaying its practical application by several years.¹⁶

The CRMA provides another revealing arena for these tensions. Despite analyses and warnings issued by civil society, notably the Sámi Council,¹⁷ highlighting the risks and shortcomings of this legislation, it has not been subject to any proposals for postponement or revision, unlike the EUDR and CSDDD regulations. The designation of extractive projects as “strategic projects” allows for the acceleration of administrative procedures and the provision of enhanced political and financial support, even in sensitive contexts. Several supported or proposed projects concern Indigenous territories, both within and outside the EU. The removal of explicit references to FPIC in the final text of the regulation, combined with this logic of acceleration, raises serious concerns about the erosion of procedural and substantive safeguards for Indigenous Peoples. This concern is not hypothetical: projects under the CRMA, such as the Nussir mine in Sápmi, Norway, and the Geir mine in Sápmi, Sweden, have already been denounced for violating the rights of Indigenous Peoples, highlighting the tangible risk that the EU could actively support initiatives that infringe upon human rights.¹⁸

Presented as necessary to preserve the competitiveness of European companies in relation to their international counterparts, these initiatives call into question the durability of enhanced due diligence mechanisms, particularly where they concern rights perceived as legally or politically sensitive, such as FPIC.

This normative retreat should not, however, be interpreted as a complete break with the previous trajectory. Rather, it reveals a structural tension between two competing narratives: on the one hand, that of an EU aspiring to act as a normative power, promoting human rights on a global scale; on the other, that of a Union unsettled by the rise of conservatism, in which arguments centred on security, economic sovereignty, and inward-looking priorities are gaining increasing traction. Within this intermediate space, the rights of Indigenous Peoples appear as adjustment variables, sometimes mobilised as reference standards, sometimes relegated to the background in favour of strategic objectives deemed more pressing.

In this contrasted context, the role of the existing human rights protection system implemented by the European administration becomes decisive. The continued presence of explicit references to Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, and FPIC in certain instruments, combined with the broader architecture of EU fundamental rights law, provides interpretative levers capable of curbing an overly abrupt dismantling of recent normative achievements. The key question is therefore no longer solely that of the legislator's intent but rather the capacity of the EU system, through interpretation and administrative and judicial implementation, to withstand contingent political shifts.

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Indigenous Peoples

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the UN that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and malnutrition. Founded in 1945, its goal is to achieve food security for all. With 194 Members (193 countries and the European Union), FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide. Its normative work is highly relevant in all matters related to land, food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and genetic resources.

FAO's work on Indigenous Peoples' issues is guided by the 2010 FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the content of which is based on international legal instruments such as the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In 2014, FAO created an Indigenous Peoples Unit (PSUI) as the focal point for its work with Indigenous Peoples within the Organization.¹ One of the main priorities of PSUI's joint work with Indigenous Peoples has been to progressively incorporate Indigenous Peoples' views into the normative work of FAO, particularly through ministerial technical committees, FAO Governing Bodies, and UN conventions.

PSUI holds the Secretariat of the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food and Knowledge Systems (Global-Hub), an innovative think tank launched in 2020 that brings together Indigenous and non-indigenous experts, valuing Indigenous Peoples' knowledge on an equal footing with academic knowledge to generate evidence for policy-making on sustainable food systems.

FAO additionally hosts the Secretariat of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the foremost international and intergovernmental platform on food security and nutrition. Reformed in 2009, the CFS is intended to be an inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform integrating representatives from governments, UN agencies, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, financial and research institutions, philanthropic foundations, and the private sector. The CFS reports to the UN General Assembly via the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the FAO Conference. The CFS policy discussion process is grounded in scientific, evidence-based reviews prepared by an independent High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN). The CFS is jointly supported by the three Rome-based Agencies – FAO, IFAD and the World Food Programme – which provide core funding, technical expertise, and jointly constitute the CFS Secretariat.

The relevance of the CFS to advance policy-making on FAO's mandate cannot be overemphasized. The CFS formulates and endorses policy recommendations and provides guidance across a broad range of food security and nutrition issues. For example, in 2012 the CFS endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

2025 was a crucial year in FAO's work with Indigenous Peoples, with two key normative processes unfolding: the review of the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management in order to incorporate the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples; and the preparation of a High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) report on the promotion of Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems. Both processes are the result of joint work by the FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit (PSUI) and Indigenous leaders and follow recommendations from the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) to FAO, thereby ensuring coordination and coherence at different levels. While 2025 was a fundamental

year for these processes, work had been ongoing for several years, as is often the case for normative processes involving different actors and FAO Members.

Besides these long normative discussions with FAO Members that include Indigenous Peoples' voices and views, 2025 also saw stronger FAO engagement with Indigenous Peoples to work jointly on Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems; Indigenous Peoples Biocentric Restoration; FPIC; collective rights, climate action and biodiversity. Across normative processes, policy spaces, territorial field work and the promotion of Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems, FAO has deepened a relationship that is grounded in rights, dialogue and mutual learning. As global crises of climate, biodiversity loss and food insecurity intersect, the experiences and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples offer pathways towards more equitable and resilient futures.

2025 will always be remembered as the year in which Indigenous elders brought HOPE to FAO during the 80th anniversary of the Organization.

FPIC and the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (ICCPM)

At its 21st Session in 2022, the UNPFII requested FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) to amend the ICCPM to take into account the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples.² In 2023, FAO created a joint working group with WHO, with the collaboration and support of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), and the Chair of UNPFII, marking the start of the review process of this Code of Conduct.³ In 2025, the perspectives and concerns of Indigenous Peoples were collected through an online questionnaire designed specifically for Indigenous Peoples⁴ and were reflected in the proposed ICCPM amendment that will be discussed by FAO Members at the upcoming 30th Session of the FAO Technical Committee on Agriculture (COAG) in 2026.⁵

FAO's work to ensure that FPIC is guaranteed in pesticides management is an important step in expanding the inclusion of FPIC in normative processes. The objective of this amendment, as requested by

the UNPFII, is to ensure that pesticide governance frameworks explicitly recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, FPIC, and their collective and customary rights over lands, territories and resources. The amendment of the Code of Conduct to include Indigenous Peoples' rights represents a critical step toward preventing harm, reducing conflict and ensuring that global standards respect Indigenous Peoples as rights and knowledge holders and custodians of biodiversity.⁶

As per UNDRIP and the 2010 FAO policy on Indigenous Peoples, FAO remains committed to supporting the implementation of FPIC across projects, processes and discussions affecting Indigenous Peoples' lives. FPIC was made compulsory within FAO in 2015 when the PSUI amended the FAO project cycle, the Programme Review Committee and FAO's Environmental and Social Standards (ESS8), which inform FAO's global portfolio of projects.⁷

Preparation of the HLPE-FSN report on Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems and traditional practices

Thanks to joint work by the Global-Hub and the Coalition on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems,⁸ and the leadership of seven FAO Members, together with the UNPFII and Indigenous leaders, the CFS made a significant achievement at its 51st plenary session in 2023. Adopting its four-year Programme of Work (MYPoW 2024–2027),⁹ it included a proposal on Indigenous Peoples food systems, and a request to the HLPE-FSN to prepare a report on "Preserving, strengthening and promoting Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems and traditional practices for sustainable food systems".

This HLPE-FSN report will be presented at the 54th CFS plenary session in October 2026. This is a critical opportunity for Indigenous Peoples, following their repeated requests to have FAO Members discuss Indigenous Peoples' issues in plenary sessions. Additionally, in 2027, the CFS will, for the first time, host a dedicated stream of policy discussions on Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems. FAO Members, academia, Indigenous Peoples, the private sector, the UN and civil society will be able to make comments and share their views. This, too, is an important step forward, and it will be vital to ensure the

full participation of Indigenous Peoples in these policy discussions affecting their lives.

The HOPE Room and the FAO Museum (MuNe)

A major milestone in 2025 was the inauguration of a new FAO Museum (MuNe) at FAO headquarters on World Food Day. Dedicated to food and agriculture, the Museum includes a HOPE Room at its heart. The HOPE Room was co-created over several months by the PSUI and an Advisory Group of Indigenous Peoples to ensure that Indigenous Peoples would have a space to tell their stories in their own terms and with their own voices. Elders from the Advisory Group named the space “HOPE”, symbolizing what Indigenous Peoples bring to contemporary food systems, biodiversity stewardship and collective futures.¹⁰

The HOPE Room deliberately combines state-of-the-art digital technology with living cultural artefacts to showcase Indigenous Peoples’ food and knowledge systems as dynamic, innovative and adaptive.¹¹ The exhibition is organized into seven stations – one for each Indigenous socio-cultural region – displaying objects, stories and video installations that reflect territorial relationships, food practices, spirituality and governance. The seven stations converge into a spiritual centre, called the spiritual heart of the HOPE Room, symbolizing the elements of unity for the millions of Indigenous Peoples in the world.

The HOPE Room was inaugurated by the Indigenous Peoples’ Advisory Group together with Chief Deskaheh of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, who visited FAO for the first time and had a bilateral meeting with the FAO Director-General – 102 years after his predecessor was denied the right to speak at the League of Nations in Geneva.¹² This was an historical moment for FAO on the occasion of its 80th Anniversary.

The Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples’ Food and Knowledge Systems: thirteen ongoing drafting committees

As part of its efforts to promote Indigenous Peoples’ food and knowledge systems as essential for sustainable food systems transformation,

in October 2025, FAO hosted the third in-person meeting of the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food and Knowledge Systems in Rome, convening some 150 participants from more than 50 organizations and 23 research institutions. The meeting advanced multiple collaborative research processes and resulted in four new drafting committees addressing emerging policy-relevant themes, including: Indigenous Peoples and social protection; carbon markets; conservation policies; and labelling and certification.¹³ This added to the nine other ongoing drafting committees of the Global-Hub, focusing on: Indigenous Peoples' food security; ocean and freshwater-based food systems; impacts of ultra-processed foods; food composition; food systems of Indigenous hunter-gatherers; co-creation of knowledge and ethical research engagement with Indigenous Peoples; notions of poverty; importance of mobility, nomadism, transhumance and collective rights for biodiversity; and contributions to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and Indigenous Peoples' biocentric restoration.

The Global-Hub works to compile evidence on the importance of Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems in order to support upcoming policy discussions at the CFS and other technical committees. It has been working on the institutional recognition of the uniqueness and importance of Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems within global food governance processes for several years. In 2025, the Global-Hub provided technical support and consolidated evidence to inform preparations for the first-ever HLPE-FSN report dedicated to Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems, to be released in 2026.

Collective rights, territories and governance of natural resources

In 2025, FAO continued to emphasize that Indigenous Peoples' collective rights to their territories, lands, waters and resources are fundamental for the continuity of their food and knowledge systems and for biodiversity and ecosystem conservation. FAO's work under this pillar has addressed collective rights not as abstract principles but as living territorial management and governance systems that sustain food security, cultural integrity and peace. FAO's work has consistently reinforced the fact that the erosion of collective rights increases conflict

risks while their recognition contributes to stability, environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

A key area of work in 2025 focused on Indigenous Peoples' mobility, land use and territorial governance.¹⁴ FAO and the Global-Hub contributed to advancing evidence on the role of mobility, nomadism and transhumance in sustaining biodiversity and resilient food and knowledge systems. These perspectives challenge static and exclusionary land-use models and call for governance frameworks that recognize Indigenous Peoples' territorial practices.¹⁵ This work is fundamental in relation to the 2026 UN International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

FAO also strengthened its engagement on Indigenous Peoples' stewardship of forests, fire-dependent ecosystems, and aquatic territories. In 2025, FAO advanced work on Indigenous Peoples' fire management practices, highlighting their role in reducing wildfire risks, protecting biodiversity and sustaining food systems. These practices, rooted in collective governance and intergenerational knowledge, are increasingly recognized as relevant for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.¹⁶ FAO's Fire Hub, which has more than 20 advisors from States and Indigenous Peoples, offers an avenue of work for approaching fire management in a multifaceted way.

Engagement in biodiversity governance and CBD processes: the Global Programme on Indigenous Peoples' Biocentric Restoration

FAO's engagement in biodiversity governance in 2025 was closely linked to its work on Indigenous Peoples' rights. The Organization continued to actively participate in processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with a particular focus on Indigenous Peoples' rights, FPIC and territorial governance.

Following the adoption of the new Programme of Work on Article 8(j) at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) in 2024, FAO participated in the resumed COP16.2 negotiations in 2025 and, later in the year, in the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) (SB8J). These processes marked an important institutional advancement in the recognition of Indigenous Peoples within the CBD architecture.

FAO further consolidated the Global Programme on Indigenous Peoples' Biocentric Restoration in 2025, a venture that has been co-developed with Indigenous Peoples' organizations since 2018. This places Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, cosmogonies, and territorial governance at the centre of ecosystem restoration. As part of the UN Decade of Ecosystems Restoration, Indigenous Peoples' biocentric restoration seeks to "recover the lost memory of the territories", restoring living relationships between peoples, lands, waters and biodiversity.

Throughout 2025, the Programme was implemented in seven countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Ecuador and Peru – through partnerships with Indigenous Peoples' organizations such as Centro CINDES, Coletivo Jupago Kreká, ONIC, Asociacion de Mujeres Cabecares de Kabata Konana, Ekta Parishad, and INBAR. In the specific case of Brazil, a tripartite agreement with the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI) and its National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI) enabled national scaling of the programme.

FAO has started to incorporate a new component on Indigenous Peoples' fire management into the Indigenous Biocentric restoration programme.¹⁷

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Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC)

The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC or the Caucus) is the only Indigenous Youth-led collective within the UN Major Group for Children and Youth. The Caucus is a distinctive space because it brings together Indigenous Youth from all over the world, representing each of the seven socio-cultural regions. The Caucus promotes their participation as a collective in various international forums in order to create a unified movement. It is recognized by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and collaborates with key mechanisms, such as the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, to promote the rights of Indigenous Youth.

The Caucus was established in 2000 and formally inaugurated in 2006. Since then, it has met during the annual sessions of the UNPFII to discuss and draft global statements. In 2008, the Permanent Forum and its Secretariat recognized the GIYC as an Indigenous Youth Working Group. Through this platform, the Caucus ensures the continuity of Indigenous Peoples' leadership and participation in global decision-making processes.

"If human rights are to mean more than rhetoric, and if they are to be applied to those who do not enjoy them, they must first be enjoyed by Indigenous Peoples, who were the original inhabitants of the continents and islands of this world. The most fundamental of these rights is self-determination, that is, the right to live on and control our lands, and to pass on our culture to future generations as peoples and not as populations; we also have an international right as nations to take our place in the society of nations."

- Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask, Na Wahine Noa people, in the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 1985

"To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" are among the first words of the UN Charter.² Peace and security are thus central to all branches of the UN system. From its inception, the vision of civil and political rights was individualistic. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) was the first to propose a reformulation of UN thinking: a vision that incorporates Mother Earth and collective rights, particularly one that recognizes Indigenous nations as nations before the UN.

The progress made by Indigenous Peoples has resulted in laws and new constitutions. Rather than affirming pluralistic rights, however, it could be said –following Kymlicka–³ that international law attempts to codify "best practices" while actually only codifying "minimum standards" or the "lowest common denominator" of Indigenous Peoples' rights. There is a need to deepen the legitimate demands for these rights, instead of viewing them as threats to national security.

Indigenous Peoples, particularly their youth, now need to be "re-institutionalized" within the UN, on the basis of their proposal for Good Living. The reformulation initiated by the WGIP can provide global answers for the peace of all peoples.

Furthermore, the fundamental responsibility for peace and security lies with the UN Security Council. The Security Council is the only body that can take decisions that are binding on all members, and no other body can legally enforce compliance. Reform of the Security Council is therefore essential for strengthening the effectiveness of the UN.

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the UN in 2025, the UN80 initiative⁴ builds on the Pact for the Future⁵ and UN 2.0, two lines of work focused on internal change within the UN. Although resolution A/RES/79/1 approving the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations dates from 2024, both strategies will be implemented until their review in 2028. The Pact for the Future contains chapters on sustainable development; peace and security; science and technology; youth and future generations; and, finally, transformation of global governance. A number of the proposals take Indigenous Youth into account within the Pact.

Among them, the chapter on science and technology includes action 32, which states: "We will protect, build on and complement In-

digenous, traditional and local knowledge.” In addition, the chapter on transforming global governance envisages the collaboration of Indigenous Peoples with governments, parliaments and the UN system in the meaningful development of UN programmes. Finally, commitment 16 of the Declaration on Future Generations lays down a commitment to recognize and respect the right to territory and the economic, social and cultural development of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with the law and with obligations under international human rights law.

While the right to self-determination is included in the Pact for the Future, it does not guarantee an Indigenous vision in the transformation of the UN. However, the UN80 initiative and its mandate⁶ forms a gateway to strengthening the role of Indigenous Peoples as nations with a voice within the UN. The initiative focuses on the importance of the role of women and youth in the design of specific UN mandates (strategic coordination and evidence-based decision-making, among others). This is important for Indigenous Youth because it would help implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in a coordinated manner throughout the international law system.

We therefore present below the challenges that are testing the resilience of multilateralism and the proposals of Indigenous Youth for the prevention and maintenance of peace.

As the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC), we will focus on interpreting peace and security for young people from the perspective of the UNDRIP, based on the rights to self-determination (art. 3), autonomy (art. 4) and effective participation (arts. 18 and 19). We will also analyse the rights to life (art. 7), dignity (art. 15), the prohibition of forced displacement (art. 10) and demilitarization (art. 30).

Rights to self-determination, autonomy and effective participation

The debate on the rights of Indigenous Youth is today undergoing profound political and economic transformations. According to the UN Secretary-General's New Year message,⁷ we are witnessing the greatest transfer of power in our time: not from governments to people but from governments to private technology companies. This scenario is

highly concerning for the right to self-determination, particularly for Indigenous Youth and children.

During the 24th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the GIYC joined calls to rethink the scope of the right to self-determination. States tend to reduce this right to the application of Free, Prior and Informed Consultation (FPIC), without recognizing the different expressions of the right to self-determination. This is particularly detrimental to Indigenous Youth and adolescent organizations, which face structural barriers to their existence and development.

Several members of the GIYC raised the need for direct funding mechanisms for Indigenous Youth during the 24th session of the UNPFII. On behalf of the GIYC, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs requested that these mechanisms be reviewed and facilitated by the UN system. Alongside this, together with the GIYC, the National Association of Friendship Centres called for the full implementation of the UNDRIP in the financing of basic and essential services for Indigenous Youth, as well as the cessation of extractive projects.

Access to funding remains a major barrier. Between 2022 and 2024,⁸ only 0.96% of grants from major climate foundations supported youth-led climate initiatives. Unfortunately, we have no studies on funding for Indigenous Youth. This is partly due to administrative requirements that force Indigenous Youth organizations to adopt bureaucratic structures and methodologies in order to access funding directly. The desire for funding arises from a need to support community life plans: accessible health systems, promotion of Indigenous knowledge as a source of employment, and the strengthening of Indigenous languages and the oral history of elders.

In this context, the GIYC called for the permanent recognition of Indigenous Youth in decision-making processes, requesting specific funding and structural inclusion. These recommendations were incorporated into the *Report on the 24th session of the UNPFII*⁹ and the *Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* on the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional economies,¹⁰ which underscore the urgency of including Indigenous Peoples in the reform of the international financial architecture, as well as the need for institutional support to enable Indigenous Youth to participate in the different

UN spaces. At the international level, the GIYC also maintained its demand for direct funding for Indigenous Youth during COP30 on climate change, particularly during the dialogue with the UN Secretary-General at the Annual Youth Roundtable.¹¹ This annual dialogue is a tradition of the Secretary-General's office, where they listen to the direct demands of global youth during the COP climate change negotiations. 2025 was the first year that saw improved participation on the part of Indigenous adolescents and youth in the Annual Youth Roundtable and the dialogue was moderated by a young Indigenous woman, Maricelma Francelino Fialho Cândido. The Secretary-General agreed that greater participation on the part of young people, especially Indigenous Youth, would lead to better results in the fight against climate change. He also acknowledged calls for more direct and less bureaucratic funding for Indigenous Peoples and pledged to improve conditions to make this possible.

In addition, actions such as the repatriation of ancestral belongings led by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representatives reflect a concrete dimension of self-determination, linking identity to historical memory. The return of ancestral belongings was made possible through constant demands to the Vatican. This action represents an important step forward in facilitating the safe return of our ancestors and belongings. The participation of Indigenous Youth in this space was supportive of intergenerational healing and sets an example for other Indigenous nations around the world.

Rights to life, dignity, prohibition of forced displacement, and demilitarization

The rights to life, dignity and the prohibition of forced displacement nonetheless continue to be seriously violated, especially for Indigenous children.¹² A UNICEF report contains testimonies that recount discrimination in schools and concerns about the future of Indigenous children. The testimony of one Piraguay child from the State of Ceará, Brazil states:

"Yes, in my territory there are two (...) quarries and a farm (...). And they exploit our territory (...) they extract water from our

waterfall to sustain themselves. And the quarries are devastating the entire mountain range, destroying everything, deforesting. But we were able to take over and dismantle one of them, and now only the other one remains, which we are in the process of trying to deactivate permanently.”

These experiences are exacerbated in contexts of armed conflict. The Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict¹³ documented 646 grave violations against children in Colombia, of which 38% affected Indigenous and Afro-descendant children, including recruitment, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals.

Despite these concerns, peacebuilding efforts can be seen, such as those observed by the Peacebuilding Commission in different regions of Colombia, as well as South-South cooperation initiatives.

Finally, proposals co-led by the GIYC, such as the first Global Youth Declaration on Mercury,¹⁴ highlight the need to fund research and remediation activities on the part of Indigenous Peoples, recognizing that mercury pollution constitutes a persistent and intergenerational violation of human rights. In particular, it highlights the importance of “Establishing safe and empowering spaces where children and youth in all their diversity can voice, document and share with decision-makers their testimonies and priorities on mercury pollution”.

Taken together, these elements demonstrate that guaranteeing the rights of Indigenous Peoples requires a comprehensive understanding of self-determination, effective participation by Indigenous Youth, and concrete measures to protect the life and dignity of Indigenous children in contexts of discrimination, conflict, and environmental degradation.

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Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Indigenous Peoples have always been “data warriors”.¹ Their ancient traditions recorded and protected information and knowledge through art, carving, song, chants, and other practices. Deliberate efforts to expunge these knowledge systems were part and parcel of colonization, along with state-imposed practices of counting and classifying Indigenous populations. As a result, Indigenous Peoples often encounter severe data deficits when trying to access high-quality, culturally-relevant data to pursue their goals. Meanwhile there is an abundance of data that reflects and serves government interests regarding Indigenous Peoples and their lands

The concept of Indigenous data sovereignty is a relatively recent one, with the first major publication on the topic only appearing in 2016.² Indigenous data sovereignty is defined as the right of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, access and possess data that derive from them, and which pertain to Nation membership, knowledge systems, customs, or territories.^{3, 4, 5} Indigenous data sovereignty is supported by Indigenous Peoples’ inherent rights to self-determination and governance over Indigenous Peoples, territories, and resources as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), as well as in domestic treaties. Indigenous data sovereignty recognizes that data is a strategic resource and provides a framework for the ethical use of data to advance collective Indigenous well-being and self-determination.^{6, 7}

In practice, Indigenous data sovereignty means that Indigenous Peoples need to be the decision-makers around how data about them are used. Given that most Indigenous data is not currently in the possession of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous data governance is seen as a key lever for addressing

Indigenous data sovereignty. Indigenous data governance harnesses Indigenous Peoples' values, rights, and interests to guide decision-making about how their data are collected, accessed, stored, and used.⁸ Enacting Indigenous data governance results in Indigenous control of Indigenous data through both internal Indigenous community data governance policies and practices, and in governing external stewardship of Indigenous data via mechanisms and frameworks that reflect Indigenous values.

Introduction

2025 saw continued operationalization of Indigenous data sovereignty, alongside major challenges. The definition and understanding of Indigenous data sovereignty continued to be refined, while the principles established in key works, including the CARE Principles,⁹ advanced with a focus on implementation. The Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference,¹⁰ held in Canberra in April 2025, brought together over 250 Indigenous Peoples' representatives from around the globe to assess a decade of progress in the Indigenous data sovereignty movement.¹¹ The conference emphasized that, while foundational rights frameworks, principles and protocols are now established, the urgent challenge remains that of addressing the systemic barriers that keep the vast majority of Indigenous data under the control of non-Indigenous nation-states and institutions. The conference produced a communiqué¹² identifying three foundational actions for effective Indigenous data sovereignty: advancing Indigenous data priorities, addressing systemic barriers to Indigenous data governance, and building Indigenous data capability.

International mechanisms, including within the UN system, strengthened and reiterated the importance of data as a fundamental aspect of Indigenous self-determination and human rights. The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) integrated this into its 18th session, presenting and adopting its draft study, *Right of Indigenous Peoples to Data, Including with Regard to Data Collection*

and Disaggregation: Draft Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which frames data as a “cultural, strategic and economic resource” anchored in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).^{13, 14} Further, during the session, EMRIP issued Advice No. 18, which situates data rights within the framework of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including Article 3 on self-determination. It calls on states to recognize and protect Indigenous data sovereignty through laws, policies and frameworks and sets out that Indigenous control over data is an expression of their inherent sovereignty and right to self-determination.

The ratification of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge,^{15, 16} which was adopted in 2024, has had its first two ratifications, by Malawi (December 2024) and Uganda (July 2025). It will enter into force following ratification by 15 contracting parties. Further, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Cali Fund for the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits from the use of Digital Sequence Information on Genetic Resources (DSI),¹⁷ signalled a growing global recognition that the governance of genetic resources, DSI, and traditional knowledge must better protect the interests and rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2025 also saw the approval of *IEEE 2890-2025*,¹⁸ following a five-year-long process, for which two consultation webinars were held in 2023. These were recognized by the Global Indigenous Data Alliance (GIDA) as including the active participation of Indigenous members in the process to develop the Recommended Practice.¹⁹ *IEEE 2890-2025* is the first global standard for the provenance of Indigenous data, and it operationalizes ethical demands into industry specifications – the standard details the process for describing and recording the provenance, the origin and history of ownership, of data derived from Indigenous Peoples, lands, and waters.

In August 2025, GIDA’s “CARE Directs Us Home”²⁰ communiqué warned against treating the CARE Principles as a static compliance checklist. Instead, it reasserted CARE as high-level guidance designed to direct researchers toward the distinct, community-specific protocols of the Indigenous Peoples involved.²¹ These developments occurred against the backdrop of the rapid proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which poses an increasing risk of digital colonialism and cultural erasure.

Peace and security: data as a domain of conflict

2025 also highlighted the role of data sovereignty in helping to address the physical safety of Indigenous communities and the defence of their territories.

Surveillance and criminalization of defenders

The intersection of data and security was highlighted in the interim report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples,²² Dr. Albert K. Barume, presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2025.²³ While the report focused on land demarcation and titling, it underscored how the lack of official data on Indigenous territories creates governance vacuums that are often exploited by illicit actors, leading to conflict and instability. Cadastral systems, and particularly land registries, satellite imagery and geographic information systems can and are being used to facilitate dispossession of Indigenous Peoples.

Parallel reports from civil society have shown an increasing trend in Indigenous land defenders facing “emerging digital threats”. During the opening of EMRIP’s 18th Session, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, denounced how:

*States are using AI-driven surveillance tools to track and harass Indigenous rights defenders. Information from Indigenous communities, including maps and artwork, is used to train AI models without consent. And Indigenous Peoples are still largely excluded from key policy decisions on the development of AI.*²⁴

The criminalization of these Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights Defenders increasingly involves digital surveillance, biometric data collection, and the use of sophisticated data systems to track and prosecute those protecting their territories.²⁵ In Peru alone, 226 Indigenous land defenders were identified as at risk, with data systems being weaponized by state and corporate actors to monitor their movements.²⁶ This represents a worrying trend in data being weaponized against Indigenous Peoples, and reinforces the call for Indigenous data sovereignty and governance.

Cybersecurity and digital colonialism

As digital tools become more decentralized and access to them is democratized, communities are actively working to digitize, preserve, catalogue and share traditional knowledge and linguistic heritage. However, in doing so, they also face increased cybersecurity risks, including vulnerability to data breaches and misuse of their data when traditional knowledge, genetic information or territorial data are digitized and stored on external platforms – including academic, institutional and state registries, databases and cadastral systems. Digitized archives and cultural databases are increasingly being copied, scraped or republished on a massive scale, turning community archives and university-hosted collections into targets for AI training – while the provenance of the data, and the ownership of it, is often contested. Many collections of Indigenous data – including data gathered without consent by churches, government and researchers, are tagged as open source and are publicly accessible.²⁷ Throughout 2025, Indigenous data continued to be misappropriated and commodified without consent.

The rapid proliferation of AI continues to be identified as a “new form of colonization”.²⁸ AI systems, often trained on scraped data, including Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge and science, threaten to appropriate cultural heritage on an industrial scale. Generative AI, including photo and video, are also well-documented in misappropriating and misrepresenting Indigenous Peoples’ traditional clothing, knowledge and customs. The rise of AI has transformed the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty into an issue of immediate and existential urgency. AI’s capacity for scaled, decontextualized data extraction, and malicious use of data and content to attack and threaten Indigenous defenders and communities, poses an unprecedented threat. The development of robust, sovereign data governance cannot be a mere aspiration but is a necessity for cultural survival.

Notable Indigenous data sovereignty developments in national contexts

North America: In the United States, the Census Bureau planned to host its first Indigenous Data Sovereignty Symposium in February 2025,

signalling a commitment to data stewardship. The event was, however, then postponed until further notice and was not held.²⁹ Further, the Trump administration revoked Executive Order 14112, which resulted in the removal of key legal architecture for Tribal self-determination, signalling a regression in federal support.³⁰

In Canada, the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) advanced the First Nations Data Governance Strategy, focusing on the repatriation of First Nations data sets from federal agencies.³¹ Federal agencies continued to work on the implementation of the UN-DRIP Act, passed in 2021, and an Indigenous Data Strategy.

Oceania: The Government of Western Australia implemented a mandatory Aboriginal Data Governance Policy in May 2025,³² recognizing Aboriginal rights to govern the collection, ownership, and use of their data and requiring health entities to recognize Aboriginal ownership of data.

In Aotearoa, the current state of Māori data sovereignty and governance is challenging. In, “State of the Nation - Māori Data Sovereignty/ Māori Data Governance in 2025 - Tino Rangatiratanga Raraunga ki Aotearoa 2025”, the report highlights the critical importance of Māori data sovereignty in the age of AI to prevent bias, create new opportunities and to uphold Māori rights. The report also highlights a significant disparity between established Māori data governance frameworks and their practical implementation across various sectors. One key finding is the widespread inconsistency in defining and managing Māori data, coupled with under-resourcing of Māori data initiatives within many government entities.³³

Asia: In 2025, regional efforts on Indigenous data sovereignty continued to take shape, driven by Indigenous leaders and civil society. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), a regional Indigenous Peoples’ organization, made data sovereignty a strategic priority in its 2025-2029 plan.³⁴ AIPP and its 46 members across 14 countries in Asia recognize that strengthening Indigenous data systems is crucial for asserting self-governance in a region where many states do not officially recognize Indigenous Peoples.

In July 2025, during the EMRIP, the Asia Indigenous Caucus (facilitated by AIPP) convened a high-profile side event entitled “*Indigenous*

Peoples' Data Sovereignty as a Means to Achieve Self-Determination as Enshrined in the UNDRIP". This event put forward Asian Indigenous perspectives, emphasizing that community-controlled data on demographics, land use, and traditional knowledge are essential to realizing and asserting the rights enshrined in the UNDRIP.³⁵ In 2024 and 2025, AIPP continued to advance the Asian Framework on Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty, which was first published in 2023.³⁶

Africa: On 9 August 2025, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) issued a strong statement³⁷ highlighting the impact of emerging technologies on Indigenous communities' rights. The Commission explicitly underscored the importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for any initiatives involving Indigenous Peoples' knowledge or data, especially in digital systems. It warned against AI systems exploiting Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) without compensation or perpetuating bias and called for these technologies to be designed in ways that reflect Indigenous worldviews and protect their rights. Finally, the first call from the ACHPR reads, "States are encouraged to develop national AI strategies that are inclusive of IKSs [sic] as well as Indigenous perspectives and uphold data sovereignty." Nevertheless, challenges across the continent remain acute. As is common across the globe, many African states do not have disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples, and the issue of non-recognition remains critical.

Conclusion

2025 saw Indigenous data sovereignty continue to navigate a contested frontier of rights, governance, and security. The right of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, access, and possess their data is paramount. Persistent challenges remain, including access to funding and resources to build infrastructure; train personnel; develop long-term governance systems and protocols; address technical capacity constraints; and constraints in regard to access to spaces where technologies and data are being designed and built; as well as limited support in legal frameworks and recognition at the national and subnational level.

However, taking stock of the last decade of concerted effort and foundational work in defining principles, raising awareness and establishing compelling rights-based arguments, there can be no question of the validity and urgent need to respect and implement Indigenous data sovereignty and governance. As the movement enters the next decade, the theme of the 2025 Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference is prescient in terms of moving beyond principles and into practice. The challenge remains clear: to build the infrastructure and legal firewalls necessary to ensure that Indigenous data remains a tool for Indigenous-led collective well-being, advancement, and science, rather than an instrument of surveillance and dispossession.

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Indigenous Health

The Indigenous Determinants of Health Alliance (IDHA) is an Indigenous Peoples' Organization¹ dedicated to advocating for and supporting the implementation of culturally safe, rights-based health systems for Indigenous communities globally. Since its inception in 2022, the IDHA has worked to advance Indigenous rights across the UN system. IDHA's central contribution is the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)–sponsored Indigenous Determinants of Health (IDH) framework, which reframes health beyond clinical outcomes and positions it as a precondition for the realization of all Indigenous rights, including self-determination, peace, land governance, and cultural survival.² Grounded in the realities of Indigenous Peoples across the globe, the IDH framework provides: a) guidance for agencies on how to approach Indigenous health in a rights-based and culturally safe manner, and b) tools for Indigenous leaders to advocate for accountability under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).³

The IDH framework comprises three studies that identify, operationalize, and evaluate institutional performance in their compliance with Indigenous Rights and in the incorporation of an Indigenous perspective to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #3 on healthy lives and wellbeing. These studies introduce the construct of *Indigeneity* as an overarching determinant of health by identifying 33 risk and protective factors specific to Indigenous Peoples.⁴ The framework elaborates on Indigenous knowledge-based strengths, as well as the circumstances stemming from colonialism, cultural erasure, and land dispossession that have shaped Indigenous Peoples' health disparities today.

Indigenous health in 2025: building momentum for systemic change

2025 marked a critical acceleration in the global recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to health. While advocacy for culturally grounded, rights-based health systems is not new, 2025 saw a convergence of institutional attention across the UN system, reinforcing Indigenous health not merely as a technical need but as a prerequisite for peace, justice, and sustainable development. This growing recognition was reflected in the announcement of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) 25th session theme for 2026, *"Ensuring Indigenous Peoples' health, including in the context of conflict."*⁵ This theme affirms what Indigenous Peoples have long asserted: health is foundational to cultural survival, self-determination, and planetary health. Indigenous Peoples' health is so intrinsically connected to the health of Mother Earth that the degradation of ecological, nutritional, and social systems has resulted in increased illness or chronic conditions for Indigenous Peoples,⁶ which in turn equates to measurable harm across generations. The 2026 UNPFII theme also reflects the expanding institutional reach of the Indigenous Determinants of Health (IDH) framework,⁷ which elaborates on institutional risk and protective factors impacting Indigenous Peoples' health across disciplines. 2025 continued to emphasize that ensuring Indigenous Peoples' health requires continued vigilance, unified advocacy, and system-wide reforms across global agencies.

In April 2025, the UNPFII made recommendations to create a policy infrastructure that would expand Indigenous Peoples' rights to health and cultural safety, in alignment with the UNDRIP. Key 2025 UNPFII recommendations for agencies included: adopting the IDH evaluation instrument;⁸ increasing Indigenous Peoples' participation⁹ in decision-making in agencies such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹⁰ and the UN Ocean Conference;¹¹ and eliminating structural barriers, violence, and discrimination. The UNPFII has likewise requested that the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) halt the conflation of Indigenous Peoples with stakeholders through intercultural initiatives, in compliance with UNDRIP provisions, and acknowledges midwifery as an ancestral practice.¹² These recommendations acknowl-

edge and reinforce the need to advance systemic change and mark a step towards upholding cultural safety and Indigenous Peoples' rights.

World Health Organization's (WHO) World Report on the Social Determinants of Health Equity

Following the 2023 WHO Executive Board recommendation,¹³ in May 2025, WHO released its World Report on the Social Determinants of Health Equity,¹⁴ which formally recognized both the Indigenous Determinants of Health and *Indigeneity* as overarching determinants of health. This was a landmark moment, acknowledging that health disparities among Indigenous Peoples are rooted not only in access to services but in colonial developments and that the Indigenous perspective of health goes well beyond a clinical setting and into all other aspects of life.

Conflict, health, and peacebuilding

In its 2025 meeting, the UNPFII endorsed a major study entitled "Impact of Colonization and Armed Conflicts on Indigenous Peoples' Rights: The Imperative of Peacebuilding".¹⁵ Whether military, environmental, political, or resource-driven, conflict constitutes a direct and structural determinant of Indigenous Peoples' health. Peer-reviewed evidence demonstrates that conflict-related land dispossession, displacement, and environmental degradation are consistently associated with adverse Indigenous health outcomes, including loss of food systems, erosion of cultural and governance systems, psychological distress, and intergenerational trauma.¹⁶

UN Convention on Biological Diversity

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) began implementing Decision 16/19¹⁷ in Panama in October 2025, officially referencing the IDH framework in its Global Plan of Action on Biodiversity and Health. The CBD invited contributions from Indigenous Peoples and the UNPFII

to guide operational frameworks under Article 8(j),¹⁸ which aims to ensure traditional knowledge is respected and integrated into biodiversity policy and practice. One concern raised during and after this meeting was the use of the combined category “Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities” in the CBD, without distinguishing the legal and rights-based differences between them.¹⁹ During the negotiations, the UNPFII president, Aluki Kotierk, stated that:

*The Forum calls on all Parties to... ensure that the distinct status and rights of Indigenous Peoples are fully recognized, respected, and protected in all aspects of the Convention's implementation.*²⁰

Although local communities may be geographically proximate and experience significant vulnerabilities, they do not share the holistic, spiritual, cultural, and historical trajectories of Indigenous Peoples. While these communities face real challenges, they differ fundamentally from Indigenous Peoples in terms of legal and political status. Indigenous Peoples are recognized as rights-holders under UNDRIP, whereas local communities are engaged primarily as stakeholders. The persistent institutional conflation of Indigenous Peoples with stakeholders obscures this distinction, weakening recognition of Indigenous-specific rights and undermining accountability for obligations related to health, cultural continuity, and intergenerational wellbeing.²¹

UN Convention on Climate Change

While the November 2025 UNFCCC meetings (COP30) in Brazil announced a record-setting level of Indigenous Peoples' participation, disruptions by large numbers of local Indigenous groups revealed a persistent gap between presence and power. Indigenous representatives reported feeling marginalized in negotiations, especially in critical areas heavily impacting Indigenous determinants of health, including Non-economic Loss and Damage (NELD), adaptation financing, and climate-related displacement.²² NELD areas are intrinsically connected to health: loss of ancestral knowledge, languages, ceremonial spaces,

and sacred ecosystems, all of which are explained in the IDH framework, have an impact on Indigenous health. The IDH framework has been proposed to evaluate these impacts in order to define and measure such losses.²³ It is critical that NELD for Indigenous Peoples are appropriately addressed since climate change intersects with every aspect of Indigenous life. Recognition of IDH at COP30 is also a recognition that disrupting ecosystems means a loss of knowledge, culture, practice, and linguistic elements. Climate disruptions impact individual and collective wellbeing in profound ways,²⁴ including pushing Indigenous youth to migrate due to the compounded losses.

2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4)

At the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake held in Ethiopia in July 2025, Indigenous leaders held a session in which they reaffirmed that ancestral food systems are not merely sustenance but also crucial elements in ceremony, medicine, language, and identity.²⁵ Despite the increased participation, many Indigenous leaders expressed concern over the lack of meaningful influence over decision-making and the absence of UNDRIP-aligned safeguards,²⁶ especially since the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is one of the few agencies with a codified Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) policy.

Second Global WHO Traditional Medicine Summit

In December 2025, the WHO convened the Second Global Summit on Traditional Medicine Stocktake in India, highlighting the growing institutional recognition of ancestral health systems. Framed as part of WHO's 2025-2034 Traditional Medicine Strategy, the Summit positioned traditional knowledge as a tool for integrative global health.²⁷ Nonetheless, Indigenous leaders from across the globe challenged the event's lack of structural or meaningful inclusion. Through a strategic statement documenting the Summit's systemic shortcomings, Indigenous leaders called out the Summit for its tokenistic representation and failure to uphold Indigenous rights as per the UNDRIP.²⁸

A challenge ahead: fragmentation of the Indigenous health agenda across UN bodies

One of the most urgent challenges noted by Indigenous leaders in 2025 was the fragmentation of Indigenous health governance across the UN system. While agencies such as WHO, CBD, FAO, PAHO, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) all engage with dimensions of Indigenous health, their efforts remain largely uncoordinated, siloed by mandates, funding streams, and institutional frameworks that do not entirely incorporate the Indigenous holistic perspective.²⁹ Furthermore, trade regimes are increasingly recognized as directly impacting health outcomes, as recently described by the Commercial Determinants of Health.³⁰ These challenges are compounded by growing liquidity constraints across the UN system, with Indigenous leaders warning that the recent gains in staffing and participation risk being reversed.

Conclusion

As global attention to Indigenous health increases, the path forward must remain grounded in the UNDRIP, cultural integrity, and self-determination. For Indigenous Peoples, the environment, food systems, peace, and biodiversity are core health indicators. When disrupted, they lead to measurable harm and health outcomes. Health connects to all dimensions of Indigenous life: land, governance, and culture. While 2025 saw progress in recognition of IDH, these gains only contribute to a foundation. Sustained, unified engagement by Indigenous leaders is essential to ensure that momentum is not lost but transformed into coordinated, systemic change. Frameworks such as the IDH can support this but Indigenous voices must lead the way forward.

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Indigenous Peoples' Advocacy at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 to tackle climate change. In 2015, the UNFCCC adopted the Paris Agreement, a universal agreement to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. The goal of the Paris Agreement is to hold "...the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C..." (Art. 2a).¹

Given that only nation states recognized under the United Nations (UN) are eligible for UNFCCC membership, all other sectors of society are regarded as "observers". For centuries, Indigenous Peoples have fought for recognition of their collective, inherent rights as *distinct Peoples* with self-determination equal to that of nation states. While these rights *have* been recognized in international human rights law, and again *reaffirmed* in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous Peoples at the UNFCCC remain mere observers without any decision-making power. Indigenous Peoples are therefore trapped between the convention state/non-state binary, unaccommodated within the legal framework of the UNFCCC.

Despite being a restrictive place for everyone but state parties, the UNFCCC does acknowledge that achieving sustainable development requires the active participation of all sectors of society. Nine "constituencies" are therefore recog-

nized as the main channels through which broad participation is facilitated. Indigenous Peoples constitute one of these constituencies and thereby exercise an influential role in global climate negotiations, albeit still as “observers”. The Indigenous Peoples’ constituency is organized in the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC, also known as Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus) serving as a representative mechanism for articulating positions and statements on behalf of the world’s Indigenous Peoples, and for undertaking effective advocacy work at UNFCCC negotiations and meetings.

Indigenous Peoples have asserted their collective right to self-determination at the UNFCCC, demanding a process for enhanced recognition and participation. This led to a negotiation process culminating in 2015 with the establishment of a Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples’ Platform (‘the Platform’). Being a dedicated space for knowledge exchange, capacity-building and policy dialogue, the Platform has gradually been operationalized over the last 10 years. The Platform is stewarded by a Facilitative Working Group (FWG), the only constituted body under the UNFCCC with equal representation between Indigenous Peoples and Parties and, further to this, with Indigenous members *self-selected* by Indigenous Peoples in each of the seven socio-cultural regions of the world. The FWG underwent a review in 2024, adopting its third, three-year workplan (also known as the Baku Workplan) at the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP 29).

The Platform initially raised the expectations of Indigenous Peoples who, through the negotiation process in 2015, demanded a platform that would facilitate their full and effective participation in the UNFCCC negotiations through a human rights-based approach.² This wide-reaching mandate was refused by Parties who instead offered a mechanism with a much more limited mandate. It therefore remains to be seen if the Platform will prove to be the long-term avenue for Indigenous Peoples to elevate their influence and direct participation at the UNFCCC beyond that of observers in accordance with Indigenous Peoples’ rights to self-determination as distinct peoples.

We dedicate this article to the courageous leadership of Daria Egereva, Co-Chair of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), who was unjustly detained by Russian authorities on 17 December 2025 after participating in the UN Climate Change Conference, COP 30 in Belém (Brazil). At the time of writing this chapter, Daria remains in custody, potentially facing a decades-long prison sentence. Daria, your voice at the UNFCCC and beyond, strengthens the struggles of many Indigenous Peoples, and reminds the world that climate justice is inseparable from Indigenous Peoples' rights and self-determination.³

Introduction

For the first time since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Earth Summit), the Conference of the Parties returned to Brazil for its 30th session (COP 30). In November 2025, in the northern state of Para, over 56,000 participants –government representatives, heads of states, UN staff, media, civil society and, of course, representatives of Indigenous Peoples– made the trip to Belém.

The Brazilian Presidency, led by Ambassador André Corrêa do Lago (a former negotiator), spent the year championing the “Amazonia COP”, trying to reinvigorate multilateralism, and use it as an opportunity to accelerate implementation and ambition through a global “mutirão” against climate change, a global effort of cooperation among peoples for the progress of humanity.⁴ Mutirão, a word in the Tupi-Guarani language, also signalled the Presidency’s stated commitment to make it an “Indigenous COP”, increasing the presence and participation of Indigenous Peoples from Brazil and globally.

This return to the Amazon took place against a backdrop of accelerating climate impacts and inadequate global responses. Both the 2025 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Synthesis Report, produced by the UNFCCC Secretariat, and the 2025 UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report, confirmed that emissions continue to track in the wrong direction, putting the world on a trajectory of 2.3–2.5°C warming if NDCs are fully implemented, and around 2.8°C under current policies.⁵

Record numbers of Indigenous representatives from all seven socio-cultural regions, 900 in the official Blue Zone alone, showed up in Belém to push for just, equitable, and decolonial responses to the intersecting causes and repercussions of the climate crisis. Despite the outward commitments of the COP Presidency, Indigenous Peoples, yet again, faced, and had to navigate, a space not built for them. In the Blue Zone, Indigenous Peoples struggled to translate their presence into power, seeing limited references to their rights, knowledge systems, and leadership in official COP decisions. Outside the Blue Zone (and in the real world), Indigenous Peoples in Brazil continued to face expanded mining and oil development, mercury contamination, and deforestation, witnessing the ongoing destruction of the Amazon.⁶ This contradiction between increasing participation and ongoing dispossession lies at the heart of Indigenous Peoples' participation within the UNFCCC.

COP 30: a Global Mutirão?

With 56,000 in attendance, COP 30 was the second largest in recent years. However, this number was undoubtedly smaller than desired, due to the soaring costs of travel and accommodation, even for Party representatives.⁷ Hosted at the Hangar Convention and Fair Centre of the Amazon, the space featured both a Blue Zone (the official UNFCCC space) and a Green Zone (organized by the Government of Brazil).

The disproportionate influence of the fossil fuels sector manifested at COP 30 yet again. Nearly one in every 25 participants, over 1,600 in total, were fossil fuel lobbyists, representing a proportional increase of 12% from Azerbaijan, and still double the number of accredited Indigenous representatives. Alongside the formal UN meetings, a large number of Indigenous Peoples, activists, and members of civil society created parallel spaces for advocacy, marching outside of the venue on 15 November (for the first time in years given the previous three COPs had been hosted by governments who have criminalized civilian space and demonstrations) and convening events at the People's COP.⁸

The Brazilian Presidency continued the tradition of hosting a World Leaders' Summit, with one major modification: it was hosted several days before the opening of the session. While this eased security protocols, it also created the perception of complete separation: a perception that had been felt in previous years but not actively discussed. The

participation of Indigenous Peoples and civil society at the two-day Summit was also quite restricted, indicating a step back from the already limited participation in previous years.

The official session opened with minor negotiations on the agenda but general support for the Presidency's proposals on dealing with late agenda additions on climate finance, ambition, unilateral trade measures (in response to the United States), and data transparency. On Tuesday night (13 November), however, the sleepy session awoke with a bang, as frustrated Indigenous activists from Brazil, alongside local demonstrators, forced themselves into the entrance of the Blue Zone in an act of civilian disobedience to protest against a lack of promised access.⁹ The next day, a peaceful protest by Indigenous Peoples blocked the entrance of the venue for several hours, forcing participants to enter through another entrance. In a poorly judged response to these protests, a distressing letter from the UNFCCC Executive Secretary Simon Stiell to the Brazilian Presidency¹⁰ called for increased security presence, leading to the rapid militarization of the venue and the surrounding area by Federal and State police forces.

Meanwhile, the negotiations inside the Blue Zone continued. Despite claims that there would not be a "cover decision", the Brazilian Presidency took the spirit of the *mutirão* concept and produced a Global *Mutirão* text that regrouped the four agenda additions, as well as important issues that were not on the formal agenda. With several iterations (and a forced break due to an electrical fire at the African Pavilion, which required an evacuation of the entire venue), the Global *Mutirão* text was adopted and featured a series of commitments surrounding climate ambition and a reaffirmation of the Paris Agreement's increasingly illusive temperature goal.¹¹ The text makes limited reference to Indigenous Peoples (two references in the preamble) but calls for urgent action and support for deep, rapid and sustained reductions in emissions (in line with calls from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), through largely voluntary exercises. Other highlights of the text include the establishment of a two-year work programme on climate finance and an aspirational call for the tripling of adaptation finance. It further launches a Global Implementation Accelerator as well as a Belém Mission to 1.5 for the implementation of NDCs and National Action Plans (NAPs).

The main controversy surrounding the Global *Mutirão* text was the complete absence of references to fossil fuels, satisfying several Par-

ties for whom an exclusion had been a red line. In response, COP President Corrêa do Lago announced they would bring two “roadmaps” to present outcomes at the next COP. One focused on transitioning away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly, and equitable manner, and the other on deforestation, entitled the Forest and Climate roadmap. These initiatives were bizarrely characterized as an “unprecedented global debate on the future of fossil fuels” by the COP 30 Presidency, especially in the face of rising geopolitical tensions, although not all commentators would share their enthusiasm.

The second, more substantial decision of COP 30 related to the *indicators* of the Global Goal on Adaptation. Following an accelerated technical phase where nominated experts reduced a list of indicators from over 500 to exactly 100 grouped into 10 categories, Parties were concerned about their potential to infringe on national sovereignty without sufficient funding. The landing zone, much to the chagrin of those working on indicators, was to arbitrarily reduce and modify the initial list to only 59 indicators and create a two-year Belém-Addis Vision to develop guidance for their operationalization. During the final plenary, however, several countries expressed disappointment, including yet another overlooked (and ultimately ignored) point of order.

For Indigenous Peoples, the most significant advancement of COP 30 was contained in the Just Transition Work Programme decision.¹² For the first time ever, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was referenced in an operative paragraph due, in large part, to a strong advocacy campaign led by the Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus. Paragraph 12i recognizes the importance of the rights of Indigenous Peoples “and of obtaining their free, prior, and informed consent”. It calls for all just transition pathways to “respect and promote the internationally recognized collective and individual rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the rights to self-determination, and acknowledge the rights and protections for Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact”. The decision also committed to the development of a new Just Transition Mechanism intended to support international cooperation, technical assistance and capacity-building. While indeed Indigenous Peoples welcomed the strong rights language, the Caucus had called for the inclusion of specific rights safeguarding in relation to mineral extraction, an issue that proved too controversial for Parties to agree upon.¹³

Other important areas of negotiation for Indigenous Peoples included the conclusion of negotiations on the Belém Gender Action Plan.

Over the next eight years, the Plan acknowledges Indigenous women within an intersectional gender framework and recognizes their leadership and knowledge systems; however, it contains limited concrete obligations or accountability mechanisms. Also relevant was the Guidance to the Green Climate Fund, which encourages the development of direct access modalities, including for Indigenous Peoples, and to the Global Environment Facility, which invites it “to ensure safeguards for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and to consider Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives and diverse knowledge systems in its decision-making”.

Decisions on the Standing Committee on Finance encouraged continued engagement with Indigenous Peoples, while Article 6 decisions requested the Supervisory Body of the Paris Agreement Credit Mechanism to facilitate the engagement of “those that cannot easily participate in the mechanism, including Indigenous Peoples.” By contrast, decisions related to the Global Stocktake and the Sharm el-Sheikh Mitigation Ambition and Implementation Work Programme made only limited reference to Indigenous Peoples, despite the 2025 report of the Mitigation Programme highlighting the “vital role of Indigenous Peoples” and the need “to support them in the sustainable management and use of forests, as well as the importance of recognising their land rights and traditional knowledge, including as part of long-term mitigation policies”. These limited references underscore the ongoing challenge of achieving consistent and progressive recognition of Indigenous Peoples across decision areas that directly affect them.

Indigenous Peoples: growing representation in the UNFCCC

Indigenous Peoples’ presence was front-and-center at COP 30, as the COP Presidency appointed Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Sonia Guajajara, as the leader of the Circle of Peoples and Sineia De Vale (also the Co-Chair of the IIPFCC) as Special Envoy. The Circle of Peoples, controversially to some, established two smaller Commissions, one focused on traditional communities and the other on Indigenous Peoples. Much time and energy from Indigenous representatives of the seven regions was spent on deliberating and weighing up the cost-benefit analysis of officially joining the Commission, with two regions withholding their

support. The main concern was potential duplication of the specific and official role that the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus holds within the process, including in its connection with the COP President and the UN-FCCC.

In advance of the official opening, the IIPFCC hosted the largest preparatory meeting in the history of COPs, where over 500 representatives of Indigenous Peoples registered to participate and prepare for their participation in the two-week meeting. The two-day meeting included strategic discussions on key agenda items, the development of unified Indigenous advocacy positions, and capacity-building activities for Indigenous delegates engaging in COP30. The Indigenous Peoples' Pavilion returned to the Blue Zone (funded with support from a wide number of allies) in a central location, not far from the venue's entrance. Despite uncomfortable heat and noise pollution from surrounding pavilions, the Pavilion featured over 70 events from representatives of the seven regions.

During the two weeks, key reports were released. The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and the IIPFCC updated their compilation report, *Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Knowledge in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*.¹⁴ The report shows a substantial increase in references to Indigenous Peoples in COP decisions (between 15-21 decisions each COP since COP 25). In parallel, a report supported by the COP 28 High-Level Champion Razan Al-Mubarak, *Guardians of the Climate: Indigenous Peoples' Leadership in Climate Action*,¹⁵ was officially released, highlighting over 700 case stories of Indigenous Peoples' adaptation and mitigation efforts from all seven regions. Finally, an updated mapping of NDCs and their references to Indigenous Peoples was launched, with an expectation for a further update in the new year.¹⁶

Although there were no scheduled negotiations on the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform, at its own initiative the Brazilian Presidency forced negotiations on a decision to address a gap in their interpretation of the composition of the Facilitative Working Group (FWG): the representation of local communities. The discussions were largely advanced through bilateral discussions between Parties, beginning with the unilateral addition of three local communities' representatives appointed by States. Indigenous Peoples, and many supportive Parties, resisted this proposal, citing procedural concerns with the precedent of overstepping the forthcoming FWG review scheduled for

COP 32 in 2027, as well as the absence of clear procedures for self-representation and self-nomination of local communities to the FWG. Responding to Indigenous Peoples' urgent advocacy towards Parties on this particular issue, Brazil backed down and saw their proposal significantly watered down. The final decision adopted on the matter simply acknowledges the work of the Brazilian Presidency in convening discussions on local communities, welcomes the efforts of local communities in strengthening their engagement in the Platform, and requests that the Secretariat prepare an informal report as input for the COP 32 review.¹⁷ Discussions between Indigenous Peoples and those representatives of local communities in the informal constituency advanced in a productive way, discussing strategies to avoid the manipulation of State governments.

Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform

2025 marked the conclusion of the term for the second cohort of Facilitative Working Group (FWG) members. Thirteen new members from Indigenous Peoples and States were appointed to continue the mandate and implement the six collective actions outlined in the Baku Workplan. The UNFCCC Secretariat continued the tradition of hosting "Informal Dialogues with Contributors" in advance of each FWG meeting, supporting the participation of Indigenous contributors.

Over four days from 10-13 June, in Bonn, Germany, FWG 13 was the first meeting hosted by the new cohort. Following a short opening ceremony featuring previous members, the new members elected their first set of Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs (two Indigenous representatives and two Party representatives, respectively) for a one-year term.¹⁸ Following this election, the meeting opened with its agenda, largely focusing on familiarizing the new members with the six collective approaches outlined in the Baku Workplan and identifying key activity co-leads and focal points for relevant bodies and work programmes.¹⁹ The session followed previous formats with breakout group discussions, providing time for contributors to input on the various agenda items being discussed. Of note, a significant group of local communities (largely from Brazilian "traditional" communities) were present, largely supported by the COP 30 Presidency, and hosted their own breakout discussions. The

FWG also adopted its annual theme “Ambitious and just climate action rooted in holistic stewardship”, as guidance for the implementation of the activities occurring at COP 30.²⁰

FWG 14 took place in Belém, between 4-7 November. The session featured strong participation from Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Parties, and observers, following a similar agenda to FWG 13. Following a ceremonial opening, the meeting was addressed by Dr. Youssef Nassef, UNFCCC Director of Adaptation, Daria Egereva, Co-Chair of the Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus, Edel Moraes from the COP 30 Presidency, and, for the first time, a “representative” of local communities, Alhasan Attahiro Jaoji. The meeting used a similar format, small breakout discussions and interactive posters, to discuss the implementation of the six collective approaches. Key areas of discussion included the staggering of members on the FWG (some will finish after 2-year terms), events taking place at COP 30, and discussions with bodies inside and outside the UNFCCC. The implementation of Activity 5.3 on the development of an ethical protocol on the protection and use of Indigenous traditional knowledge was flagged as a key area for Indigenous Peoples to support the appropriate protections of their knowledge systems. The outcomes of the meeting were summarized in the Co-Chairs Summary of Decisions.²¹

The fifth annual gathering of knowledge keepers represented the first of the new work programme. Following a late confirmation of financial support, a reduced number of Indigenous knowledge holder representatives (only 3 per region) travelled to Belém, while a similar invitation was made for State nominations of local community knowledge holders. Only a limited number of knowledge holders were nominated by States; however, the precedent was deeply problematic for Indigenous members who, despite their best efforts, continue to navigate the conflation of the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and of local knowledge. The session included a full-day preparatory meeting (Annual Gathering) followed by a second meeting with Parties, constituted bodies, and other NGOs (Annual Dialogue). For the first time, the Secretariat was responsible for a summary of the recommendations from the discussion, focused on the four sharing groups, in order to explore holistic ambition, resilience and stewardship, transitions, and futures.

A day later, a six-hour Seventh-Generation Round Table was held. The session built on previous experiences but introduced new dynamics and approaches. It contained two parts: a story circle that invited

nominated knowledge holders, both from Indigenous Peoples and from local communities, to share their lived perspectives, and then a series of breakout discussions focused on highlighting their leadership in their intergenerational responsibility and well-being. All the discussions contributed to the framing of a new Seventh-Generation Policy Lens that will continue to be developed. The recommendations were presented in the Annual Intergenerational Dialogue with Parties, Constituted bodies, and allied organizations.

COP 31: moving to Türkiye (with an Australian twist)

Without a doubt, Indigenous Peoples continue to make progress in influencing global climate governance, increasing their presence and creating unique spaces in colonial institutions that were built on their exclusion. Frustration remains, however, as decisions neglect to include the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Looking forward, Indigenous Peoples will bring these perspectives to COP 31 in Türkiye, where a Frankenstein-esque arrangement concluded at COP 30 with Türkiye being the President and Australia the President of Negotiations, awaits.²² Mr. Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change in Türkiye, was appointed as the COP President to navigate this unique partnership in the midst of the increasingly stormy waters of global multilateralism. A pre-COP in the Pacific, a region where Indigenous territories stand to be swallowed by climate change-induced sea level rise, offers yet another opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to translate rhetoric into concrete action.

The Platform is a space of influence but the questionable representation of local communities continues to create unique challenges for Indigenous Peoples to navigate. It is abundantly clear, however, that the leadership of Indigenous Peoples takes place on the ground –in our lands, waters, and territories– in partnership with our knowledge keepers, women, youth, and gender-diverse individuals, rather than at the COP. This is the only way that Indigenous Peoples can continue pushing for transformative, decolonial, and just change in the face of status quo incrementalism at the UNFCCC.

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Indigenous Persons with Disabilities: Promoting Human Rights through the Implementation of Normative Framework in 2025

As disability rates rise worldwide, their impact on Indigenous communities has become particularly profound and far-reaching.¹ An estimated 54 million Indigenous individuals live with disabilities, including 28 million Indigenous women. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, 45 million Indigenous persons with disabilities experience extreme poverty and vulnerability, exacerbated by inadequate services, natural disasters, and climate crises.

Indigenous persons with disabilities are frequently denied autonomy and the ability to exercise their individual and collective rights. They must navigate the tension between asserting these rights and the societal norms that marginalize them.

Conventional disability frameworks often fail to acknowledge Indigenous collective rights and cultural identities. Rooted in colonial perspectives, these frameworks emphasize individual deficits rather than structural barriers, resulting in policies that disregard Indigenous values, social customs, and traditional knowledge systems.

The relationship between Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities, and peace and security has gained increasing global attention, particularly within international human rights discourse

led by the UN. While Indigenous communities have long defended land, culture, and self-determination, Indigenous persons with disabilities remain among the most marginalized within these populations. In this context, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, José Francisco Calí Tzay, presented Indigenous Persons with Disabilities, Report A/HRC/57/47 in 2024 within the human rights framework of the UN. The report emphasized that Indigenous persons with disabilities experience compounded and intersectional discrimination rooted in colonial legacies, structural racism, poverty, and geographic marginalization which, together, restrict access to health care, education, employment, and meaningful political participation.²

Similarly, in its General Recommendation No. 39 (CEDAW GR 39), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, highlighted the gender and disability specific vulnerabilities faced by Indigenous women and girls, including Indigenous women and girls with disabilities. It underscored the need to address intersecting forms of discrimination and to adopt culturally-appropriate, disability inclusive, rights based measures grounded in self determination and substantive equality, to ensure their full participation and protection within peace, security and development frameworks.³

Multilateral human rights agenda and institutional focus on Indigenous persons with disabilities

In 2025, global attention on Indigenous persons with disabilities was shaped primarily by multilateral human rights processes within the UN system. Key deliberative spaces, including the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Human Rights Council, CEDAW Concluding Observations (CO) to Member States (such as to Nepal), thematic reporting by UN Special Rapporteurs, and formulation of the CEDAW Road Map 2025 in Nepal, as well as other initiatives in the national context of Nepal, collectively reinforced the principle that Indigenous rights, disability inclusion, intersectionality and sustainable peace are inseparable.

For example, on 26 January 2025, the CRPD committee⁴ invited a *“Call for Submission on the draft guidelines on addressing multiple*

and intersectional forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities” to further guide states parties and other duty bearers in addressing the implementation gaps and to collect a repository of good practices when addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. Responding to this call,⁵ the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NID-WAN), Women Enabled International, Asia Pacific Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities Network (APIWDN) and Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN), together with regional organizations, submitted a joint report on climate, leadership, sexual health and reproductive rights, and intersectional discrimination linking to women with disabilities and Indigenous women with disabilities.

These discussions emphasized that Indigenous Peoples continue to face structural inequality rooted in colonial dispossession, discrimination, and exclusion from decision-making. Within this broader context, persons and women with disabilities are increasingly recognized as experiencing compounded marginalization requiring targeted yet culturally- and gender-grounded policy responses at all levels. The shift toward intersectionality marks an important evolution in global Indigenous policy discourse, moving beyond generalized rights recognition toward differentiated identities and lived realities.

Indigenous identity and disability

Indigenous men and women with disabilities experience intersectional discrimination shaped by ableism, sexism, racism, poverty, and geographic isolation. Many face barriers to healthcare, education, political participation, and culturally-appropriate services. Historical assimilation policies and institutionalization have further excluded them from community decision-making and traditional knowledge systems. Despite these challenges, Indigenous disability advocates emphasize resilience grounded in collective identity, spirituality, and traditional healing. Global disability advocacy initiatives in 2025 called for: recognition of self-determination and meaningful participation for Indigenous persons and women with disabilities, protection of languages, cultures, and knowledge systems in accessible formats, Indigenous control over

education, health, and social services, and social protection measures. These priorities demonstrate that disability inclusion is inseparable from Indigenous sovereignty and peacebuilding.⁶

Aligning with these guidelines at the national and subnational levels, the Gandaki Province Government adopted the *Persons with Disabilities Act* in Gandaki Province,⁷ which illustrates attempts to localize global human rights commitments within governance, security, and development frameworks. Pratima Gurung and Krishna Gahatraj from NIDWAN were selected as experts to frame the Act from June to September 2025, which included constitutional commitments to inclusion and social justice in Nepal. The key principles embedded in the Act included equality and non-discrimination, accessibility of public services, participation in governance, protection from violence and exploitation. The Act adopts a rights-based definition aligned with the CRPD, recognizing disability as the interaction between impairment and societal barriers and discussing structural and intersectional discrimination, diverse persons with disabilities, disaggregated data, and access to mother tongue language. Indigenous persons with disabilities and their rights related to dignity and equality provisions therefore contribute indirectly to conflict prevention and social cohesion.

Rights, voices and representation

The recognition of Indigenous men and women with disabilities' rights, voices, and representation is essential to achieving sustainable peace and security. Peace should not be understood merely as the absence of armed conflict, but rather as a comprehensive condition grounded in justice, dignity, inclusion, and the protection of both individual and collective rights. For many Indigenous communities shaped by histories of colonization, dispossession, and systemic marginalization, peace is closely tied to self-determination, cultural continuity, and equitable access to social, political, and economic resources and access. Within this context, Indigenous persons and women with disabilities often experience intersecting forms of exclusion, making their meaningful inclusion central to any effective peace and security framework.

Representation, therefore, is not symbolic but a practical requirement for equitable and sustainable peace. Participation and representation of Indigenous voices at the 3rd Global Disability Summit in Berlin in 2025 was exemplary with its Call to Action for Commitments⁸ and hosting four side events in the Summit.⁹ Pratima Gurung,¹⁰ representative of the IPWDGN, centred the voices of Indigenous persons and women with disabilities as speaker in several side events during the Summit and underscored the importance of participation as a key principle of human rights that permeates all aspects of private and public life in a context in which Indigenous persons with disabilities continue to be one of the most marginalized groups in the world. She delivered a compelling call for action, emphasizing that meaningful participation “is not about our individual rights, it is also about collective self-determination. We need to create innovative solutions and our own spaces to be able to participate and express our voices.”¹¹

Represented in several global, regional and national arenas, the voices have echoed for supporting Indigenous-led disability organizations and their voices are a critical step towards inclusive peace. Indigenous persons with disabilities are urging the promotion of intersectional leadership among women, youth, and persons with disabilities that will further strengthen inclusive governance and social cohesion. They collectively assert that when Indigenous persons and women with disabilities participate meaningfully in peace negotiations, disaster response planning, governance processes, and policies become more responsive to real community needs and more capable of addressing structural inequalities.

Context of climate and technology

Peace and security are urgent for Indigenous persons with disabilities in relation to climate change and technological transformation. Climate impacts such as extreme weather, environmental degradation, and displacement threaten ancestral lands, cultural continuity, and access to healthcare, disproportionately affecting those with disabilities. At the same time, inclusive technologies such as assistive devices, telehealth, and digital communication can enhance education, participation, and

community resilience, while unequal access or external control may deepen exclusion and undermine sovereignty. Ensuring justice requires disability-inclusive climate action, equitable technological access, Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and the meaningful leadership of Indigenous persons with disabilities in climate and environmental discussions, digital aspects, and peacebuilding decision-making processes. In this context, there have been gradual initiatives at the global, regional and national levels for disability-inclusive climate action. Access to information and technology has remained critical in this.

Aligning with these, from 24 August through to October 2025, in Nepal, NIDWAN conducted eight national and community-level consultations, including *Sagarmatha Sambah* (a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum), in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of Nepal, National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, UN agencies and 18 civil society organizations (CSOs) from Nepal. These consultations emphasized the formulation of Nationally-Determined Contribution (NDC) 3.0, incorporating the Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) lens for the first time in Nepal, and highlighting the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities and Indigenous knowledge in both the formulation of NDC 3.0 and its implementation at the local level with all these stakeholders.

Amid numerous climate-related summits, conferences, workshops, and events promoting climate justice initiatives, September 2025 was widely recognized as a Climate Summit month. In this context, the National Summit on Disability and Climate Change 2025 was held for the first time on 16 and 17 October 2025, in Kathmandu, Nepal. The summit, themed *"Intersecting Identities, Shared Resilience: Indigeneity, Disability, and Gender in Climate Action"*, was jointly organized by NIDWAN and the National Human Rights Commission-Nepal. It brought together more than 65 multi-stakeholders such as the Government of Nepal, UN agencies, European Union, as well as CSOs and community representatives from different provinces of Nepal. It featured panel discussions, interactive sessions, world café-style dialogues, and the Call to Action 2025 aimed at mainstreaming disability-inclusive climate action.

NIDWAN also hosted two pre-COP30 (the UN climate talks held in Brazil in 2025) side events during the SB62 meetings in Bonn, Germany

from 17-19 June 2025. The following events: *"Climate Finance: Stories from the Grassroots in the Global South"*, featuring testimonies of Indigenous women with disabilities, and *"Gender-Just, Disability-Inclusive Climate Action"*, presented from a disability-justice perspective, emphasized that pre-COP and COP outcome documents must include lived experiences and ensure the availability of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, particularly Indigenous persons with disabilities.¹²

In addition to these climate dialogues, a side event entitled *"Indigenous and Disability Rights and Inclusion in a Changing Climate"* was organized on 12 June 2025 during the 18th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD. During his opening remarks, Dr. Albert K. Barume, highlighted Indigenous voices at the forefront of climate and health justice from the lived experiences of different Indigenous persons with disabilities across the globe who are on the frontline of the climate crisis and discussed the 2024 human rights report on Indigenous person with disabilities.

Furthermore, during London Climate Action Week (20-28 June 2025), the event *"Respecting Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Climate Change Research and Action Related to Health and Water and the Way Forward"* was convened through collaboration between Minority Rights International, NIDWAN, and the Endorois Indigenous Women Empowerment Network. This dialogue highlighted Indigenous knowledge, health, and water governance perspectives from Nepal, Kenya, and the US, engaging stakeholders from more than 30 countries and initiating broader global conversations on water, ecosystems, and climate justice and technology.

Collectively, these initiatives further positioned NIDWAN to convene more than four side events at COP30 in Belém, Brazil (10-21 November 2025), bringing together representatives from feminist, disability, Indigenous, climate, and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) communities to advance the agenda of disability inclusion and the rights of Indigenous persons with disabilities within global climate negotiations. The NIDWAN team actively participated during the COP process and held several bilateral meetings with the UNFCCC Secretariat and members of the Indigenous Peoples' Constituency to advocate for the formation of a Disability Caucus and constituencies. The Indigenous Peoples' Constituency submitted a for-

mal letter supporting the inclusion of Indigenous persons with disabilities in the formation of the Disability Caucus under the UNFCCC.

The NIDWAN and Latin America team of Indigenous persons with disabilities also participated in the Indigenous Women and Youth Global Summit in Brazil during COP 30. They came together to shape a collective message rooted in territory, memory, and collective strength, promoting inclusion and intersectionality while contributing to collective leadership and solidarity around integrating the rights of Indigenous women and women with disabilities. After the COP, post-COP events were held with several conversations in different parts of Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America by Indigenous persons and women with disabilities. All these interventions directly linked disability rights with the peace and security framework, aligning with international norms UN-DRIP, CEDAW GR 39, CRPD and 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, including the humanitarian protection principles. Access to technology has remained a challenge for them.

Social development and disability inclusion

Social development and disability inclusion for Indigenous persons with disabilities are essential to achieving sustainable peace, justice, and security within Indigenous communities and the broader society. Integrating disability inclusion into peace and security frameworks is not only a human rights obligation but also a pathway towards transformative, inclusive, and community-centred peace. Across the seven geopolitical regions, initiatives for disability inclusion and movement-building have increased substantially. For example, the Second Asia-Pacific Regional Convening on Movement Building and Leadership Development for Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities was held over four days in March 2025 in Kathmandu, Nepal, bringing together representatives from 12 countries through APIWDN, which has been actively working to ensure and promote the rights of Indigenous women and girls with disabilities, particularly in support of the implementation of CEDAW GR 39. The regional convening provided space to reflect on country contexts, leadership development, and strategies for strengthening collective movements.

Similarly, APIWDN participated in the 25th anniversary celebration of the International Forum of Indigenous Women on 20-21 June 2025, in Lima, Peru, where testimonies of honour, solidarity, and disability inclusion were shared among Indigenous sisters. Dipika Lama from the APIWDN likewise delivered a statement on 10 March 2025 during the 58th Session of the Human Rights Council Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The statement urged the enforcement of legal protections against workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence while ensuring equal access to decent work for diverse women with disabilities, access to social protection, poverty reduction, and health programmes that comply with the CRPD. In addition, the Global Indigenous Women's Coordination Meeting on 11 March commemorated the opening of the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), fostering constructive dialogue among global leaders, experts, and parliamentarians on Indigenous women and women with disabilities. Participants shared lived experiences, achievements, challenges, and strategies to strengthen their collective presence in global decision-making spaces. Indigenous women with disabilities also contributed as speakers in side events such as *"Stepping Up, Standing By, and Speaking Out for Women's Rights Movements"* and *"Empowerment of Women Across the Rio Conventions: Gender Perspectives in Addressing Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Desertification"*, highlighting global initiatives and the broader role of disability inclusion in advancing gender justice and sustainable development.

The CEDAW committee's Concluding Observations (CO) on the seventh periodic report of the Government of Nepal, issued on 24 February 2025, highlighted significant gaps in the constitutional recognition of the rights of Indigenous women. In paragraph 46(a), the Committee expressed concern at the lack of explicit recognition of Indigenous women's rights, including their collective right to self-determination in line with international standards. In paragraph 47(a), it recommended that Nepal amend its Constitution to clearly recognize the rights of Indigenous women, including self-determination, while adopting approaches that respect the diversity of women's lived realities. The CO further addressed multiple areas related to definitions, implementation mechanisms, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks necessary to advance gender equality and non-discrimination. In response, national-level ini-

tiatives aimed at developing a CEDAW Roadmap were initiated on 4 August 2025 by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens,¹³ in collaboration with UN agencies, CSOs, and other relevant stakeholders. These efforts represent a progressive step forward, including the inclusion of issues affecting Indigenous women and women with disabilities in national gender equality planning processes.

Ultimately, peace and security cannot be achieved without the full inclusion of Indigenous persons and women with disabilities. These perspectives reveal the interconnected nature of human rights, environmental stewardship, cultural survival, and social justice. By supporting Indigenous- and disability-led initiatives, protecting ancestral lands, ensuring accessible and culturally-grounded services, honouring FPIC, and promoting inclusive leadership and governance, societies can move beyond narrow definitions of peace toward transformative and enduring justice. In this way, the empowerment of Indigenous persons and women with disabilities will become not only a matter of rights but a foundation for collective resilience, dignity, diversity and sustainable peace.

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International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Indigenous Peoples

The Indigenous Peoples' Forum at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (IPFI) was established in 2011 as a permanent process of consultation and dialogue between representatives of Indigenous Peoples' institutions and organizations, IFAD and governments. The Global Meeting of the Forum convenes every second February in conjunction with IFAD's Governing Council, the Fund's main decision-making body. A series of regional consultations lead up to each Global Meeting, ensuring that the Forum reflects the diversity of perspectives and recommendations gathered from Indigenous Peoples around the world. The overall process is guided by a Steering Committee (SC) composed of representatives of Indigenous Peoples' organizations from the different regions, representatives of Indigenous youth, the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF) Board, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and IFAD. A unique process within the UN system, the Forum aims to improve IFAD's accountability, enhancing its development effectiveness for Indigenous Peoples. The Global Forum process helps IFAD implement its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and translate the policy's principles into action on the ground.

In April 2025, IFAD participated in the 24th session of the UNPFII, including as a panellist in the *Dialogue on Indigenous platforms established within UN entities*, alongside Indigenous representatives, Member States and UN agencies, presenting its main mechanisms for engagement with Indigenous Peoples

and highlighting the IPFI as a best practice for institutionalized participation of Indigenous Peoples within a UN organization.

2025 marks the first year of the IFAD 13th replenishment period (2025-2027), during which IFAD has committed to a set of monitorable actions relevant to its engagement with Indigenous Peoples, such as (i) Ensuring that at least 10 new projects include Indigenous Peoples as a priority target group; (ii) Replenishing the Indigenous Peoples' Assistance Facility (IPAF); and (iii) Continuing support to the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD (IPFI). IFAD's updated Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples guides IFAD's overall work for engagement for the decade 2022-2032.¹

Theme of the 7th Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD

Under the theme "*Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination: A pathway for food security and sovereignty*", the Seventh Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD (IPFI) was held in Rome from 10-11 February 2025.

In preparation for the Global Meeting, regional and sub-regional consultation meetings took place between August and November 2024, gathering insights on the theme to inform the Global Meeting with different perspectives from the regions.

The theme focuses on the importance of self-determination with respect to food security and sovereignty. Self-determination enables Indigenous Peoples to strengthen food systems by preserving their food practices, biocultural values, and holistic development approaches. Deeply connected to their lands, territories and resources, Indigenous Peoples rely on sustainable practices tied to specific ecosystems, preserving biodiversity while ensuring food security. Secure land tenure and autonomy over resource management are vital for them to maintain their identity and ensure a stable, diversified food supply in harmony with nature. The Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination is closely tied to the preservation, promotion and transmission of their traditional knowledge. This knowledge, accumulated over centuries,

guides sustainable agriculture and food production, promoting biodiversity, healthy ecosystems, and resilience to climate change. Indigenous culinary and storage techniques enhance the quality and nutritional value of food, supporting balanced diets essential for optimal health. The role of Indigenous women in preserving this knowledge and of Indigenous youth in bridging tradition with modern practices is critical in this endeavour.

Self-determination also enables Indigenous Peoples to pursue economic development aligned with their cultural values and ecological practices. Their economies, rooted in small-scale farming, hunting, fishing and crafts, reflect principles of solidarity, reciprocity, and balance with nature. Indigenous governance systems, grounded in traditional laws and customs, provide the framework for exercising self-determination, allowing collective decision-making on land use, resource management, and food production in culturally appropriate and sustainable ways. Such governance is essential for them to maintain resilient food systems and adapt to environmental and economic challenges. Indigenous Peoples face persistent challenges to self-determination, including land dispossession, discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, and the erosion of traditional knowledge and identity. Climate change further threatens their livelihoods and cultures. Efforts to assert their rights often result in violence and displacement. These barriers undermine food security, sovereignty and the ability to address global challenges such as poverty and environmental sustainability. IFAD supports Indigenous Peoples' self-determined development in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the 2030 Agenda by prioritizing their culture, knowledge and identity. Over the years, the governance and implementation of the IPAF have set an example of best practice in self-driven development. The IFAD's Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples emphasizes working as equal partners, ensuring their meaningful participation in IFAD's operations, and applying Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

The Seventh Global Meeting of the Forum²

IPFI is IFAD's main instrument for policy dialogue and oversight. Following regional and sub-regional consultation meetings involving over 450 participants, IFAD hosted the Seventh IPFI Global Meeting in Rome

in February 2025. It brought together 37 Indigenous delegates from 25 countries and around 150 IFAD staff and observers. During the Forum, delegates formulated a Synthesis of Deliberations and developed biennial regional action plans together with IFAD regional and country teams to monitor the implementation of the Policy in operation.

During the annual IFAD Governing Council (GC) session, a dedicated Governors' Dialogue allowed Member States to engage directly with Indigenous leaders on the Forum's outcomes and discuss actionable solutions for sustainable and inclusive development. Additionally, delegates participated in the *"Leaders' Dialogue: Investing in Nutrition"*, integrating Indigenous Peoples' perspectives into global discussions on nutrition financing and food security.

While the specific focus of the Forum was on food security, in strict connection with the IFAD mandate, reference was made in the different sessions to issues related to the broader concept of security. Aspects related to the barriers undermining food security, sovereignty and the ability to address global challenges such as poverty, environmental sustainability and climate change were extensively discussed, including the fact that Indigenous Peoples' efforts to assert their rights related to climate justice often result in violence, persecution and other human rights abuse.

Other significant threats to Indigenous food sovereignty include deforestation, pollution, the expansion of commercial agribusiness, land-grabbing and the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples' resources and ecosystems, along with the criminalization of Indigenous environmental defenders.

The Forum discussions underscored the fact that Indigenous governance institutions, rooted in customary laws and collective decision-making over lands, territories and resources, are essential for exercising the right to self-determination. IFAD's support to these governance systems, together with capacity-building and participatory planning, helps reinforce accountable local institutions and contributes to reduced inequalities.

Around 43% of IFAD's current portfolio supports initiatives that target rural Indigenous Peoples' communities (a total of 91 projects in 45 countries). Over the course of 2025, IFAD's Executive Board approved 14 new projects (loans and country grants) including Indigenous Peoples as part of the projects' target groups in 13 countries in Asia and the Pacific region (APR), East and Southern Africa region (ESA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and West and Central Africa (WCA) region, representing around 74% of all projects approved during 2025.

Synthesis of Deliberations³

Based on the discussions and contributions from the debates, the Synthesis of Deliberations of the 2025 Global Meeting of the IFPI was adopted. It concluded with 15 recommendations addressed to IFAD, governments and to Indigenous Peoples themselves as commitments.

In relation to *Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Security* the following important recommendations were made:

- To IFAD: Ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of IFAD strategies and programmes to support the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. Enhance country and regional platforms for dialogue to enable continuous and constructive dialogue among Indigenous Peoples' representatives, governments and development partners. Raise awareness and build the capacity of IFAD staff in the field and at headquarters on Indigenous Peoples' rights and issues and the IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, including FPIC. Strengthen the engagement of IFAD country teams in the regional action plans through more regular meetings with regional and country Indigenous Peoples' representatives. Support country-level policy dialogue and ensure an enabling environment for the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples by providing necessary logistical support, such as interpretation and translation of documents into Indigenous/national languages.
- To IFAD: Strengthen feedback mechanisms and participatory monitoring associated with the implementation of FPIC and the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures. This includes enhancing monitoring mechanisms to verify compliance and to evaluate the social, gender, environmental and economic impacts of IFAD-funded projects in which Indigenous Peoples must be effectively and actively involved to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.
- To governments: Implement their commitment to recognize, respect and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as affirmed by the UNDRIP and other international human rights

instruments, in laws and practices. Build the capacity of relevant government staff to implement FPIC.

- To governments: Recognize and protect Indigenous Peoples' and traditional knowledge and practices, sciences and technologies, and ensure the protection of knowledge holders as critical elements of the food sovereignty and security of Indigenous Peoples in laws, policy frameworks and practices.
- To governments: Recognize that peace is critical to Indigenous Peoples' food sovereignty and security. Therefore, prevent and end violence and armed conflicts affecting Indigenous Peoples and ensure the protection of Indigenous Peoples' environmental and human rights defenders from criminalization and prosecution.

As a result of these recommendations, and of the reporting of a security incident by a member of the Steering Committee (SC) during the regular IFAD – SC meeting in November 2025, it was agreed to include a discussion about violent incidents affecting Indigenous Peoples across the regions on future meetings' agendas, and also to assess the possibility of collective responses from the SC and IFAD.

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Just Transition and Indigenous Peoples: From a Green Transition to a Security Imperative

The moment we're in

The global green transition has entered a new and far more dangerous phase. What was once framed as a response to climate change is now being driven by geopolitical rivalry and national security imperatives. Over the last two years, critical minerals have been reclassified from environmental resources into strategic assets, and governments increasingly justify extraction in the language of resilience, defense supply chains, and strategic autonomy.

In this shift, Indigenous rights are being quietly weakened and procedurally narrowed; Indigenous lands are transformed into corridors for minerals, energy, and logistics; participation is increasingly reduced to consultation, and consent is compressed into accelerated timelines. Even more concerning, engagement with international institutions, once encouraged as a peaceful and legitimate means of advocacy, is increasingly viewed as a security liability.

What is unfolding is the result of a security-driven political economy in which priorities shift, and urgency overrides climate. When confrontation escalates, rights protections weaken first. This regression is documented across major economies and confirms that, without clear rules and legal safeguards, the green transition is extremely vulnerable to geopolitical reversal.

And once again, the Arctic is the testing ground.

Its strategic visibility, geopolitical relevance, and concentration of critical resources make it an early warning where patterns now visible are already replicating globally.

This moment is not defined by the erosion of Indigenous rights but by a far more consequential shift: who decides when those rights

matter. While the global transition is being reorganized around geopolitical planning and competition, Indigenous Peoples are increasingly positioned not as political actors but as variables to be managed within strategies defined elsewhere.

This report documents what has changed since the 2024 Indigenous Peoples' Summit on a Just Transition, what Indigenous Peoples are losing, and why the current trajectory threatens not only Indigenous rights but the legitimacy of the green transition itself.

Introduction

In October 2024, the first Indigenous Peoples' Summit on a Just Transition was held in Geneva. Indigenous Peoples once again voiced concerns that were already familiar: that the green economy was advancing at a pace that outstripped the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights; that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was being reduced to a formality; and that extractive projects branded as “green” were reproducing old patterns of dispossession under a new name. These concerns were not new. Indigenous Peoples have raised them for more than a decade.

What is new is the political environment in which these concerns now unfold.

Since the Summit, the global context has moved from one of contested sustainability to one of open geopolitical confrontation. The green transition is no longer negotiated as a normative project—grounded in multilateral commitments, climate justice and international law—but as a strategic necessity shaped by security competition and power realignment.

Justified by war and geopolitical rivalry, the security turn has changed the “operating system” of governance.

The war in Ukraine has transformed energy, infrastructure, and critical minerals into instruments of geopolitical survival. Governments no longer speak primarily of decarbonization timelines but of strategic autonomy, national interests, and resilience against hostile actors. In this environment, urgency has become the dominant political currency.

At the same time, the multilateral system that Indigenous Peoples

have relied on for visibility and protection has weakened. The return of the Trump administration to the center of U.S. politics—and its explicit hostility toward multilateral institutions—has accelerated this erosion.

Cuts to UN funding in January 2026, withdrawal from 31 UN entities, open skepticism toward international law, and the prioritization of transactional bilateralism have reduced both the authority and the protective capacity of UN mechanisms. This is significant for Indigenous Peoples because, when multilateralism weakens, so does one of the few platforms where Indigenous voices can challenge state power.

Parallel to this, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion and heightened military posturing have further securitized vast territories, particularly in the Arctic and sub-Arctic. What was once framed as a fragile ecological space and a site of cooperation has quietly receded from policy memory. The region is now governed as strategic infrastructure machinery where minerals, shipping routes, ports, and military mobility are considered together, and Indigenous homelands have conveniently been folded into security maps.

This is where the shift becomes decisive.

Two years that changed everything: geopolitics, war, and the green economy

Shift 1 — Minerals have become security assets

The period from 2022 to 2025 has fundamentally reshaped the political environment guiding the green transition. First, the securitization of critical minerals has accelerated. The war in Ukraine did not just disrupt energy markets—it reordered global priorities. Climate commitments did not disappear, rather they were incorporated into a broader framework of power competition and strategic planning.

The war and its prolonged impact on global supply chains has highlighted that access to critical minerals is a matter of national and allied security. Governments race to secure supplies of lithium, nickel, cobalt, rare earths—not as inputs for renewable energy but as essential elements of defense industries, digital infrastructure, and geopolitical preparedness. “Secure supply chains”, “strategic reserves”, “friend-shoring”, and “national interest” are now increasingly referenced in the strategies to address economic security concerns.

Across the Arctic, renewed resource nationalism and skepticism toward multilateral dependency have re-emerged as central narratives, reinforced by NATO's post-2022 security framing, which increasingly links Arctic infrastructure, mobility, and resource access to alliance readiness and deterrence.

In March 2023, the European Commission presented the Critical Raw Materials Act, explicitly classifying lithium, rare earths, cobalt, and nickel as “strategic” for Europe's economic security and defense industries.

In 2024, the U.S. Department of Defense expanded funding under the Defense Production Act for domestic processing of critical minerals, explicitly citing risks posed by dependence on foreign suppliers in a context of “great power competition”.

Greenland has moved to the center of the Arctic security discourse, not only because of its resources but because of its strategic position linking North America, Europe, and the Arctic. Renewed U.S. interest in the country's geopolitical role, and Chinese and European interest in its reserves has intensified pressure to align resource development with security priorities.

Russia, under conditions of sanctions, has increasingly pursued Arctic development via bilateral and security-oriented channels, often in alignment with Asian partners.

These shifts have been further reinforced by the erosion of climate commitments at the highest political level. The withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement in 2020 and 2026, and the subsequent uncertainty surrounding U.S. re-engagement, sent a clear signal that climate obligations remain politically reversible when security priorities intervene.

In this environment, the green economy is no longer just about decarbonization. It is about control, speed, and geopolitical positioning. As minerals become strategic assets, governance shifts away from deliberation toward execution. Rights remain referenced but their practical weight diminishes under the pressure of urgency.

Shift 2 — Fossil fuels return as security tools

In securitized realities, the green transition does not replace extraction—it layers it. Over the past four years, oil, gas, and coal—previously

considered as industries in managed decline—have been reclassified once more as tools of geopolitical leverage alongside critical minerals and renewable infrastructure. In the name of energy independence and military readiness governments have reopened plants, expanded oil and gas leasing, and justified new extraction.

What was presented as a temporary adjustment today resembles a structural step backward. The return of fossil fuels as strategic assets since 2022 demonstrates how quickly climate commitments become negotiable when security pressures rise.

In Germany, coal-fired power plants scheduled for decommissioning were reactivated in 2022–2024 under emergency energy security measures following the war in Ukraine.

Norway has expanded oil and gas licensing rounds in the Barents Sea while publicly maintaining its leadership role in the green transition.

The U.S. has approved new oil and gas leasing sales off the coasts of California, the Gulf of Mexico, parts of Florida, and large areas of Alaska.

Shift 3 — As minerals go strategic, rights become negotiable

For much of the past decade, Indigenous Peoples were sidelined by development agendas justified in the language of sustainability and growth. These challenges were familiar, and were contested through established tools: law, consultation, participation, and international advocacy.

What has changed is how those rights are treated, weighed, and operationalized. In the current security-driven environment, Indigenous rights increasingly function within compressed timelines and narrowed political space, where any disagreement becomes an obstruction. Projects linked to critical minerals, infrastructure, and energy security are framed as urgent, strategic, and time sensitive. Decisions are justified as necessary responses to external threats, supply disruptions, or geopolitical uncertainty. The formal language of FPIC remains intact but its practical meaning shifts. Within this framing, consent is not removed—it is accelerated. When urgency drives decisions, Indigenous rights become more a procedural obstacle than a substantive condition. This subtle shift transforms participation into risk management. In this context, Indigenous rights are not just inconvenient—they are increasingly incompatible with speed and national interests.

The layering of old and new extractive pressures compounds this effect. When a just transition is being pursued as a strategy instead of a commitment, it will always keep fossil options open. In the end, Indigenous lands carry the cost of the old extractive economy and this new one. This dual burden exposes something far more profound: without binding governance and rights protections, the green transition is not self-enforcing. It can stall, retreat, or be repurposed entirely.

The risks extend beyond domestic governance. For decades, participation in UN mechanisms provided Indigenous Peoples with a crucial platform to raise concerns beyond national constraints. Now that space is growing tighter. As geopolitical tensions sharpen, some states increasingly view international Indigenous advocacy, won through decades of struggle, through a security lens and are tempted to use Indigenous participation in multilateral forums strategically, making international engagement more politically fraught.

Indigenous representatives, particularly those operating in highly restrictive political environments, now face a greater risk. Indigenous leaders who speak openly face intimidation, surveillance, and criminalization. International engagement is no longer viewed as routine cooperation but as potential interference. As a result, Indigenous representation and Indigenous advocacy remain legally possible, yet politically unsafe.

In December 2025, Indigenous leaders in the Russian Federation who had participated in UN mechanisms—including climate and Indigenous rights forums—were subjected to house searches, confiscation of electronic devices, arrests, and terrorism-related charges. These measures followed engagement with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), and UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) processes and effectively transformed international participation from a protected right into a high-risk act.

This report argues that the decisive change is not the loss of Indigenous rights but their growing conditionality under security-driven governance. The legal recognition persists but the practical significance of Indigenous protections becomes secondary to strategic and security considerations and is thus being administratively neutralized. It is precisely for that reason that it is difficult to contest—and dangerous to ignore.

Why the Arctic matters: what happens in the Arctic today signals what will become normalized globally tomorrow

No place showcases this transformation better than the Arctic. The Arctic is no longer “securitized”—it is security-governed.

Over the last four years, the region has moved from being discussed as a potential hotspot of strategic competition to being actively governed as one.

Greenland’s mineral reserves, Russia’s Arctic infrastructure, and the opening of northern shipping routes are no longer discussed separately but as interconnected elements of a broader security landscape. Military exercises and infrastructure planning in the Arctic have expanded significantly, with ports, airstrips, and transport corridors increasingly discussed alongside mineral extraction and energy infrastructure.

The question has quietly changed from whether development should proceed to how quickly it can be aligned with security priorities. In a climate of competition among Arctic states over minerals, shipping routes, and infrastructure, governments increasingly treat Indigenous involvement as risk management, sidelining shared decision-making and governance.

Multilateral Arctic governance frameworks—most notably the Arctic Council and its system of Permanent Participants—have historically provided Indigenous Peoples with structured, institutionalized access to decision-making processes. However imperfect, these mechanisms provided at least some institutional protection for Indigenous participation. And yet, in a context of sustained geopolitical confrontation, these institutions were structurally unprepared for a security rupture and were quickly outpaced—with Indigenous participation among the first casualties.

As cooperation fractures, decision-making becomes more centralized, transparency is reduced, and Indigenous input is less systematically integrated. Indigenous voices become easier to bypass, easier to reframe, and easier to defer. As a result, rights are deprioritized, and shared governance—already fragile—has been dramatically weakened.

The same dynamics are unfolding across Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where critical minerals and geopolitical interests intersect.

What is being tested in the Arctic is not only infrastructure or military readiness but a model of governance under pressure. The region reveals the future early because the Arctic is where these narratives—resource competition, strategic visibility, and geopolitical rivalry—collide in one place, with fewer institutional buffers to slow the shift. It is not exceptional. It is predictive.

Conclusion: why this is a global Indigenous rights crisis and what is being decided now

The global green transition has not stalled. It has been reoriented.

Since the Summit on a Just Transition, just one year ago, the world has moved decisively away from the green transition narrative to a security-driven resource frontier. This shift has not eliminated Indigenous rights but it has altered the conditions under which they are exercised and, critically, who determines when they apply.

Security is no longer one policy sector among others, it becomes the organizing principle that quietly overrides environmental, social, and Indigenous governance. When rivalry dominates, speed outranks deliberation. In the end, rights logic becomes increasingly trumped by security logic in political decision-making.

If rights are treated as variables, the transition becomes another extractive project: strategic, and ultimately unsustainable.

And if the green economy can be set aside when security demands it, then its legitimacy (and its claim to justice) erodes. The return of fossil fuels, the rollback of environmental safeguards, and the withdrawal from international climate commitments together have revealed a structural weakness at the heart of the green transition, demonstrating that the transition itself is not only extremely fragile but remains conditional on political stability, security calculations, and power. Across the Arctic and beyond, the new phase of green transition can now easily replicate the injustices of the past at greater speed and scale.

When security pressures rise, whether due to war, energy shortages, or strategic rivalry, long-term commitments yield first. Indigenous rights are experiencing the same pattern.

When consent is compressed, participation is instrumentalized, and international engagement becomes dangerous. Indigenous

self-determination is undermined through implementation rather than weakened by law. This does not eliminate rights but it narrows their practical scope. These changes rarely announce themselves as violations. Framed as minor adjustments, emergency measures, or strategic necessities, these changes will accumulate over time, reshaping governance while preserving the language of inclusion. Security achieved at the expense of rights does not produce stability. It produces resistance, fragility, and long-term failure.

The greatest risk of the current trajectory is not confrontation but normalization. When we advance transition by limiting Indigenous consent, tolerating participation only when it is consistent with strategic priorities and treating Indigenous governance as negotiable, Indigenous rights become roadblocks rather than accelerators, and institutions meant to secure order become battlegrounds.

The main question now is who decides when those rights matter.

In an increasingly securitized world, great powers are no longer asking how to uphold Indigenous rights but how much Indigenous presence they can tolerate without slowing their strategic ambitions. This shift—from rights as foundations to rights as variables, or worse, risk factors—is bound to undermine not only Indigenous rights but also the very legitimacy of a just transition.

The lesson is not that the green economy has failed but that it has no future in the absence of binding governance and enforceable rights.

Indigenous Peoples are not asking the world to slow down. They are asking it to remain accountable while it moves.

A transition that cannot survive rights is not a transition—it is a takeover.

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The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) is a subsidiary body of the Human Rights Council composed of seven independent members, one from each of the seven Indigenous sociocultural regions: Africa; Asia; the Arctic; Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; North America; and the Pacific. Human Rights Council Resolution 33/25 (2016), amended EMRIP's mandate to provide the Council with expertise and advice on the rights of Indigenous Peoples as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and to assist Member States, upon request, in achieving the ends of the UNDRIP through technical assistance, dialogue facilitation and the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. To that end, EMRIP undertakes regular thematic studies on specific rights enshrined in UNDRIP and conducts country engagement, which may include, *inter alia*: country missions; training activities for State institutions, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, national human rights institutions and other stakeholders; virtual and in-person meetings in Geneva or in other locations; email exchanges; and formal communication through diplomatic channels.

EMRIP's activities in 2025

In 2025, EMRIP continued its work through its annual session, inter-sessional meetings, expert seminars, and coordination with other Indigenous mechanisms. These activities enabled sustained dialogue

with Indigenous Peoples, Member States, civil society, academics, national human rights institutions and UN entities, ensuring that EMRIP's work remained grounded in the lived experiences of Indigenous communities. The expert seminar, held in early December facilitated the collection of evidence-based information, country-specific examples, and normative perspectives, and provided substantive inputs into EMRIP's ongoing studies and reports.

EMRIP held its 18th annual session from 14-18 July 2025 featuring three panel discussions, among other items on the agenda: i) International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032; ii) The role of national and regional human rights institutions in achieving the ends of the UNDRIP; and iii) Enhancing the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the UN. Participation reached a record high of over 680 registered participants. In addition to the formal agenda, the session included 33 side events organized by Indigenous organizations, civil society, Member States, and other stakeholders, addressing a wide range of Indigenous rights issues. During the session, EMRIP received in-session and written contributions for two major outputs: the thematic study on *"The right of Indigenous Peoples to data, including with regard to data collection and disaggregation"* and the report on *"The rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional economies"*, enriching both with diverse regional perspectives and practical examples.

Beyond its own sessions, EMRIP continued to cooperate with other mechanisms to advance Indigenous Peoples' rights in line with UNDRIP. It participated in the 24th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (21 April - 2 May 2025), contributed to human rights dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the annual review of progress on the implementation of CEDAW's general recommendation no. 39.¹ EMRIP also held an interactive dialogue with the Human Rights Council at its 60th session in September 2025² and took part in the Council's annual panel discussion on Indigenous Peoples' rights, which focused on rights in relation to a just transition to sustainable energy systems, including critical minerals.³ At EMRIP's proposal,⁴ the next annual panel discussion of the Council, at its 63rd session in September 2026, will focus on Indigenous Peoples' rights and engagement in the context of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention.

As a Steering Committee member, EMRIP participated in meetings of the Global Task Force for establishing an International Decade for Indigenous Languages in March, July, and November 2025.⁵ EMRIP also took part in key high-level and thematic events, including the UN Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, Asia Pacific; a panel convened by the Intergovernmental Working Group the Right to Development on “the collective dimension of the right to development”;⁶ a panel on “Harmony with Nature” at the Fifth Session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law;⁷ and a high-level panel marking the 60th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).⁸ In addition, the Chair attended the 3rd Global-Hub Meeting of the World Food Forum in Rome. She also contributed to a workshop on the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, focusing on the protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact.

Thematic study and report adopted

At its 18th session, EMRIP adopted its thematic study entitled “*The right of Indigenous Peoples to data, including with regard to data collection and disaggregation*” (A/HRC/60/66).⁹ The study analysed the fundamental human right of Indigenous Peoples to data, highlighting its legal significance as a cultural, strategic, and economic resource intrinsically linked to Indigenous Peoples’ rights to sovereignty and self-determination. It emphasized Indigenous data sovereignty and data governance, recognizing that data relating to Indigenous Peoples, their territories, cultures, resources, and ways of life must be subject to their control and decision-making authority. The study examined how international legal frameworks implicitly recognize Indigenous Peoples’ rights to access, control, and manage data about their communities and lands. UNDRIP was identified as affirming an inherent right to data autonomy in multiple areas, including the dissemination of information, research, and the collection of data aimed at improving social and economic conditions.

The study concluded with Expert Mechanism Advice No. 18, proposing actions for States, Indigenous Peoples and key stakeholders on the collection, disaggregation, use, protection, and ownership of data,

with particular attention to Indigenous women at every stage of the data process. It underscored respect for self-determination, and the integration of cultural protocols and knowledge systems into data frameworks.

EMRIP also adopted its report entitled *“Efforts to implement the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples: the rights of Indigenous Peoples and their traditional economies”* (A/HRC/60/67).¹⁰ The report examined traditional economies through the lens of key principles, including legal protections, recognition of Indigenous governance systems, tenure rights, and the effective implementation of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). It highlighted the role of traditional economies in promoting food sovereignty, preserving traditional knowledge, conserving biodiversity, and enhancing climate resilience. It affirmed that the continuation of traditional economies is a right, grounded in international and regional frameworks, including UNDRIP. The report concluded with recommendations for legal recognition of Indigenous economic systems, inclusive and gender-responsive governance, public investment in Indigenous livelihoods, and integration of Indigenous economic models into national and global sustainability frameworks.

EMRIP’s country engagement mandate

Throughout 2025, EMRIP advanced its country engagement mandate through continued dialogue with Indigenous Peoples, Member States, and other stakeholders. Following its 2024 mission to Norway, EMRIP issued a technical advisory note, in March 2025, on strengthening the rights of the Indigenous Sami people.¹¹ The note addressed interrelated rights, particularly lands, territories and resources, and culture, and provided guidance to Sami organizations, representative institutions, and the Government of Norway on implementing domestic legislation, policies, and court decisions in line with international human rights standards, including free, prior and informed consent while emphasizing protection of lands, livelihoods, cultural practices, and the environment.

A dedicated panel at EMRIP’s 18th session reviewed the missions to Australia (2023) and Norway (2024). On Australia, the Noongar Fam-

ily Safety and Wellbeing Council acknowledged progress, including the increased roles of Aboriginal community-controlled organizations in child protection but raised concerns about the limited implementation of EMRIP's technical advisory note and called for greater international attention to Indigenous children's rights, including support for engagement with the Committee on the Elimination under its early warning urgent action procedures. The Australian government outlined measures underway, including appointing a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, strengthening the child protection workforce, enhancing cultural capability, promoting self-determination and increasing investment in Aboriginal community-controlled organizations.

Regarding Norway, the Sami Council welcomed EMRIP's technical advisory note but expressed concerns over industrial development on Sami lands, including the Fosen case, and the need to strengthen legislation on land encroachment and FPIC. The President of the Sami Parliament acknowledged the advisory note and supported continued dialogue on ratifying the Nordic Sami Convention. The Government of Norway noted areas of disagreement in the advisory note, and maintained that domestic legislation, including the Human Rights Act and the Sami Act, complies with international law, and stated that Sami rights holders are consulted in the early stages of land-use decision-making.

EMRIP also continued its dialogue with New Zealand, which accepted a follow-up to the 2019 visit, scheduled for 2027. A planned 2025 visit to Brazil was postponed due to UN financial constraints. Several new requests for country engagement from Indigenous Peoples' organizations were under review at the end of the year, reflecting continued demand for EMRIP's advisory and facilitative role.

Building relationships with other mechanisms

In accordance with paragraph 10 of Human Rights Council resolution 33/25, EMRIP coordinated its work and strengthened its participation, engagement, and cooperation, as appropriate, with other Indigenous rights mechanisms.¹² During its 18th session, EMRIP held both an inter-

active dialogue and a closed coordination meeting with the Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and a representative of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples. These exchanges aimed to enhance coherence, avoid duplication, and identify opportunities for joint advocacy and follow-up recommendations.

International Decade of Indigenous Languages

During its 18th session, EMRIP dedicated an agenda item to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032). EMRIP reiterated the importance of national and local action plans developed in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples and grounded in a rights-based approach. It emphasized that language revitalization is inseparable from cultural identity, self-determination, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

EMRIP called on the Human Rights Council to support the development of Indigenous-language friendly artificial intelligence-based interpretation tools for UN events and to promote artificial intelligence-based language revitalization initiatives with full respect for FPIC. It further proposed that the Council should encourage States and UNESCO to allocate adequate funding to implement the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages,¹³ including support for Indigenous-led media, relevant language technologies, and the use of Indigenous languages in public services. Notably, EMRIP proposed that the Human Rights Council initiate deliberations aimed at developing a convention on Indigenous Peoples' language rights.¹⁴

Role of national and regional human rights institutions

EMRIP's panel on the role of national and regional human rights institutions in achieving the aims of the UNDRIP featured contributions from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the Cameroon Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Commission of

New Zealand, the Commissioner for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Krasnoyarsk Territory, and the Chair of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

The discussion highlighted the central role of national and regional human rights institutions in bridging international standards and practical implementation, particularly through monitoring, accountability, and support for Indigenous rights. EMRIP welcomed existing co-operation between national human rights institutions and Indigenous Peoples, commended those institutions with dedicated Indigenous rights mandates, and called on the Human Rights Council to encourage States to establish such mechanisms, develop national action plans, legislation, and independent monitoring frameworks, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples. EMRIP further urged the Council to encourage States to mainstream the UNDRIP into national and regional human rights policies, including business and human rights frameworks.¹⁵

Enhancing the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the UN

The panel on enhancing the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the UN reviewed outcomes from the two intersessional meetings and identified concrete steps to address participation barriers. Contributors advocated for a distinct, Indigenous-specific status within the UN system, separate from NGO or civil society modalities, and affirmed Indigenous Peoples' right to determine their own representatives in accordance with self-determination, customary governance, and cultural practices. Australia and Canada supported an Indigenous-led, flexible, and transparent accreditation mechanism, with equal representation across the seven sociocultural regions, and strong protections from reprisals. Guatemala stressed the importance of not conflating Indigenous Peoples with "local communities" and identified limited financial resources as a major barrier. Indigenous representatives emphasized that meaningful participation requires not only access but also recognition, dignity, and equal status as rights holders.

EMRIP welcomed the joint report of the co-facilitators and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on en-

hancing Indigenous Peoples' participation in the Human Rights Council and endorsed its recommendations. It noted the historic participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Council as peoples and recognized the desire for clarity on the roadmap and timeline ahead. EMRIP urged the Council to build on the progress achieved so far in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, and to accelerate efforts to resource, facilitate, and maximize the participation of Indigenous Peoples' political institutions and organizations in future dialogues.¹⁶

Prospects for EMRIP's future and continuing work

As mandated by the Human Rights Council,¹⁷ EMRIP decided to prepare a 2026 study on the status of Indigenous Peoples' rights worldwide in achieving the ends of the UNDRIP, focusing on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in conflict and post-conflict situations in line with UNDRIP. To that end, the study will contribute to ongoing efforts related to Indigenous Peoples, peace and security.

The issue of intimidation and reprisals against Indigenous human rights defenders remains an area of concern for EMRIP, including during its 18th session. EMRIP has strongly condemned any form of intimidation or reprisals against individuals and groups who participate in the session or cooperate with the UN in the field of human rights. EMRIP is committed to maintaining an environment of respect, dialogue, and understanding. EMRIP aimed to strengthen its work in this regard, providing more information and developing some guidance.

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Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has established several funds commonly known as climate funds to support so-called developing countries to mitigate climate change, adapt to its effects, and transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient economies. Despite these objectives, Indigenous Peoples often experience negative impact from the projects and encounter many barriers to accessing those funds. They therefore advocate to ensure direct access and better implementation of the projects.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF), established under the UNFCCC in 2010 and operational since 2015, is the world's largest climate fund. It supports developing countries to achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and pursue low-emission climate-resilient pathways.¹ The GCF's primary mandate is supporting the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature goal. The GCF receives financial contributions from so-called developed countries (UNFCCC Annex-1) as well as from public, non-public and alternative sources.²

The GCF's Initial Resource Mobilization (2014) raised USD 10.3 billion in pledges, with USD 7.2 billion available for commitments. The first replenishment (GCF-1, 2020-2023) raised USD 10 billion, with USD 9.9 billion received and invested across 100+ countries.³ The second replenishment (GCF-2, 2024-2027), launched in July 2022, had received USD 10.64 billion in pledges as of December 2025.⁴

The GCF operates through a network of over 200 Accredited Entities (AEs) and delivery partners to deliver funding to

developing countries for project design and implementation. Its Board consists of 24 members equally representing Annex-1 and Non-Annex 1 Countries, with four Active Observers (AOs) from civil society and private sector organizations (PSOs) serving two-year terms (maximum two consecutive terms).

Regardless of consistent advocacy, the GCF does not have an AO seat for Indigenous Peoples despite this being an established UNFCCC practice. Nonetheless, the Indigenous Peoples' Policy adopted in 2018 and the Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Group (IPAG) established by the Policy in 2022 are remarkable achievements of Indigenous Peoples and their allies in the GCF. Besides engaging in the CSO Network, Indigenous Peoples advocate through the Indigenous Peoples' Advocacy Team (IPAT).

The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) was formally launched at the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the UNFCCC in 2022 and further operationalized at COP28 in 2023. It aims to support developing countries to address the irreversible impacts of climate change, particularly those that exceed the scope of adaptation efforts, such as extreme weather events, desertification, and rising sea levels.

While the FRLD marks a significant milestone in global climate finance, ensuring direct access for Indigenous Peoples remains a major challenge. The FRLD Board has adopted the "access modality" "decision-making structure" and conducts discussions about its policies. It is no different from existing climate funds, which have complex eligibility requirements and government-controlled funding channels. The FRLD provides financial support through grants and concessional financing, with the World Bank serving as its interim Secretariat and host for the first four years. Indigenous Peoples and many other actors are, however, advocating for a fully independent secretariat and governance structure to ensure equitable and effective fund distribution.

The FRLD is still establishing its full Secretariat and operational structures. However, it has yet to develop its comprehensive social and environmental policies and long-term fund mo-

bilization strategies. The projected economic cost of loss and damage by 2030 alone has been estimated at between USD 290 and 580 billion⁵ just in developing countries. By 2050, the economic cost of loss and damage in developing countries is estimated to be between USD 1 to 1.8 trillion.⁶ This data shows the urgent need for increased funding commitments and clearer implementation frameworks. According to its report '*Status of Resources-2025*',⁷ the FRLD had received pledges and contributions totalling USD 788.68 million from 27 contributors.

Overview

As of 31 December 2025, the GCF Board had approved a total of 336 projects, with project investment commitments amounting to USD 19.3 billion and projects under implementation of USD 16.7 billion. Projects are considered under implementation once the Funded Activity Agreement (FAA) with the Accredited Entity (AE) becomes effective. It has disbursed USD 6.3 billion and estimates that these projects will help 1.6 billion people and will contribute to preventing the emission of 3.2 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent.⁸

In terms of project scales, micro- and small-scale projects constitute less than half of the portfolio (10% and 37%), while medium and large-scale projects account for 35% and 18%, respectively. Notably, the micro-scale projects decreased by 1% from 2024-2025 and the large-scale projects remain in the same percentage of the projects' portfolio. The size of a project is important, given that larger projects pose a higher risk of negative impacts on nature and human rights.

In terms of financial instruments, the project investment amount comprises 45% grants, 38% loans, 12% equity, 3% results-based payment, and 2% guarantees.⁹ Between 2024 and 2025, grants and equity increased by 3% and 1% respectively, while loans still hold a significant portion of the portfolio. The high proportion of loan-based investments in the GCF portfolio raises concerns, as it contradicts Paragraph 9.4 of

the Paris Agreement,¹⁰ which emphasizes the need for scaled-up financial resources that are primarily grant-based, for developing countries.

A significant amount is being invested in the “livelihood of people and communities”. However, there is no data available on how these investments benefited Indigenous Peoples. This is followed by investments in “health, food and water security”, “ecosystem and ecosystem services”, “infrastructure and built environment”, “energy generation and access”, and “forest and land use”. Notably, most interventions on forest and land use, as well as energy generation across the world, have had negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples. Among the eight GCF result areas, the lowest investment is directed to “transport” and “building, cities, industries and appliances”.¹¹

By investment theme, 59% of funding goes towards adaptation and 41% towards mitigation in grant-equivalent terms. In nominal terms, adaptation constitutes 50% and mitigation 50% of the portfolio. Between 2024 and 2025, the GCF have had a better balance between mitigation and adaptation funding by increasing the adaptation portfolio by 4% in nominal terms. In terms of access modality, 74% of funds are still accessed by international AEs, 16% by national Direct Access Entities (DAEs), and 10% by regional DAEs. This data indicates a 1% increase in both national and regional DAEs between 2024-2025.¹²

These figures show the GCF’s emphasis on quantifiable project impacts, primarily measured in terms of tonnes of CO² equivalent mitigated and the number of people increasing their resilience. The data also shows the Fund remains heavily accessed by international AEs, limiting opportunities for direct access by national and regional entities. A 1% increase was recorded in the access of both national DAEs and regional DAEs between 2024-2025. Beyond these quantitative metrics, it is equally important to enhance direct access and ensure available data on the projects’ social, cultural, economic, and ecological impacts, with special emphasis on the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities. The Strategic Plan for the GCF (2024-2027) provides a foundation for maximizing positive social and cultural outcomes, including for Indigenous Peoples. In addition, the REDD+ policy approved in 2024 provides some provisions for safeguarding Indigenous Peoples’ rights in REDD+ result-based payments funded by the GCF. Those elements need to be strengthened in the Fund’s activities.

Independent Evaluation of the GCF's Approach to Indigenous Peoples

Following the Board's decision, the GCF's Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) carried out an evaluation of "The GCF's Approach to Indigenous Peoples".¹³ By applying mixed methods of data-collection, including literature review, the evaluation team conducted interviews with more than 300 stakeholders, and five case studies came up with key findings,¹⁴ which can be summarized as follows.

1. The GCF's approach towards Indigenous Peoples is defined primarily by the Indigenous Peoples' Policy.
2. The Policy is consistent with the UNFCCC's guidance to the GCF but needs better alignment with operational details.
3. Some inconsistent terms and concepts, and also the gap in integrating the Indigenous Peoples' Policy with the safeguarding policies, may lead to inconsistent application.
4. The IPAG holds promise for implementing the Policy effectively although it is still establishing its institutional linkages and resources.
5. GCF lacks a clearly defined commitment to providing Indigenous Peoples with specific access to resources or benefits.
6. GCF represents a systematic challenge to Indigenous Peoples in accessing GCF resources directly.
7. GCF is the only major multilateral climate fund without a specific mechanism to support Indigenous Peoples.
8. The GCF's approach to Indigenous Peoples is perceived primarily as a compliance exercise rather than an opportunity to harness the contribution of Indigenous Peoples in implementing climate actions and achieving meaningful results.
9. Alternative access modalities such as the simplified approval process (SAP) and project specific assessment approach (PSAA), and technical assistance modalities such as the Project Preparation Facility (PPF), have not sufficiently incorporated Indigenous Peoples' considerations.
10. The Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme (RPSP) can be a crucial modality for integrating Indigenous Peoples' considerations into GCF programming.

11. Promotion of the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples into projects remains conditional upon availability of time and resources.
12. The GCF lacks portfolio-level commitments focusing on Indigenous Peoples and its monitoring and results measurement systems do not thus track specific Indigenous Peoples-related indicators, making it impossible to assess Fund-wide results regarding Indigenous Peoples.
13. The GCF's monitoring framework does not mandate tracking or reporting co-benefits related to Indigenous Peoples.
14. Indigenous Peoples face general issues in accessing redress using the GCF's architecture.
15. There is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) at the project level. In some cases, the GCF's Independent Redress Mechanism (IRM) has addressed grievances, including those related to project closure.
16. The GCF does not play a proactive role in implementing the Indigenous Peoples' Policy, and the Policy's implementation is highly variable and falls outside of the GCF's direct sphere of influence.

Based on these findings, the IEU has made following recommendations.

1. In the short term, the GCF should continue to reinforce the Indigenous Peoples' Policy and Operational Guidelines while calibrating its operational tools to fully implement the intended objectives of the Policy.
2. In the short to medium term, the GCF Secretariat should establish mechanisms and provide resources, including technical and financial support, for the effective implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Policy, in line with its aspirations.
3. The GCF should urgently address the limitations in its planned oversight of compliance, ensuring sufficient flexibility to adapt the Indigenous Peoples' Policy to a diversity of contexts and non-compliance risks.
4. In the medium to long-term, the GCF must address fundamental systemic barriers within the business model that limit

the extent to which Indigenous Peoples can access the GCF. The GCF should consider an Indigenous Peoples-specific window or program.

5. The GCF must further clarify its strategic position on Indigenous Peoples beyond seeking inputs before projects. As the GCF articulates its position/stance through ongoing restructuring and strategic decisions, providing clear direction on its approach to Indigenous Peoples is essential.

The evaluation report was presented to the Board at its 41st meeting, where the IPAG addressed the Board in support of the conclusions of the report and reiterated the need to operationalize an Indigenous Peoples-specific window, developing targets, indicators and monitoring systems, disaggregated data and promoting Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, among other points.

GCF Independent Redress Mechanism (IRM)

The Independent Redress Mechanism (IRM) is one of the three independent integrity units independent of the Secretariat, which reports directly to the Board. IRM plays an important role in overseeing the Fund's investments and management. It addresses complaints by people who believe they are negatively affected or may be affected by the GCF projects or programs.

As of December 2025, 17 cases had been registered with the IRM.¹⁵ Of those 17 cases, 11 have been closed and the rest are in different stages of compliance investigation, problem solving and monitoring. The first GCF-funded project, FP001 in Peru,¹⁶ had to go through the recourse after an IRM self-initiated investigation in 2019. If the IRM receives information from a credible source that a GCF project or program has or may negatively impact a community or person, it may initiate investigation. The key harms raised of FP001 were related to land ownership and land possession, Indigenous Peoples' rights including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), project due diligence, environmental and social impact assessment, and project categorization. When the case was registered, the Secretariat agreed to provide remedial actions to those risks. Such actions included: i) FPIC, ii) risk categorization vis-a-

vis involving Indigenous Peoples, iii) completion of a legal assessment/opinion examining the potential impacts of the creation of the *Áreas de Conservación Ambiental* (ACA) on the collective land rights of Indigenous Peoples, and iv) consent documentation submitted by Profonanpe (Accredited Entity - AE). IRM monitored the implementation of those remedial actions provided by the Secretariat. Upon receipt of the final progress report from the Secretariat stating that AE's actions were compliant with the guidance, the IRM decided not to initiate proceedings and to close the case in January 2023.¹⁷ In this case, significant institutional and project-level improvements were made based on the recommendations of the IRM.

A complaint to FP146 Nicaragua was received in June 2021 alleging the harming of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities, increased environmental degradation and attacks by armed non-indigenous settlers, and the non-compliance or inability of the AE and Executing Entity to comply with GCF Policies and Procedures and the Conditions placed by the Board during approval of this project. After concluding its investigation, the IRM submitted the final compliance report to the Board in 2022. The Board considered the IRM Compliance Review Report during its meetings held in October 2022 (B.34), March 2023 (B.35), and July 2023 (B.36). The Secretariat released a summary of the final Board decision on C-0006 Nicaragua, the reasons for the decision and the management response to the report, and FP146 was terminated in July 2023.¹⁸ In 2025, the IRM had six registered cases.

Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)

Overview

The FRLD is accountable to and functions under the guidance of both the UNFCCC COP and the CMA.¹⁹ For key decision-making, the FRLD has a Board of 26 members comprising 12 from UNFCCC Annex-1 Countries and another 14 from Non-Annex Countries.²⁰ In 2025, it held three board meeting (B.5, April 8-10 in Bridgetown, Barbados. B.6, July 9-11 in Cebu, Philippines. B.7, October 7-9 in Manila, Philippines).²¹

The B.5 adopted a decision to establish the "*Barbados Implementation Modalities (BIM)*" as the start-up phase of the Fund, "consisting of a first set of interventions, for the calendar years of 2025 and 2026 for

an amount of USD 250 million”.²² The BIM decision took time to discuss two key issues: the “scale” and the “minimum allocation floor” for the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The B.5 also decided the following principles of BIM:

1. Support bottom-up, country-led and country-owned approaches.
2. Implement in parallel with the development of the longer-term operational policies and procedures of the Fund.
3. Finance a set of activities, projects and programs that is representative of the full scope of the Fund.
4. Explore engagement with the private sector, where relevant.
5. Finance the BIM through grants.

The B5 decided that “an amount in the range of USD 5-20 million may be allocated to each of the activities, projects and programs to be approved during the start-up phase, subject to funding criteria to be approved by the Board”.

The B.6 focused on advancing key elements of operationalizing the BIM, including funding criteria, project cycle, and interim guidance on the role of National Designated Authority (NDA). The Board reinforced its decision to consider “blanket” accreditation of observers for an interim period, under which observer organizations already accredited to the UNFCCC may ask to be considered as an accredited observer organization of the Fund.

Building on B.6 discussions, the B.7 concluded with the operationalization of the BIM with decisions on the following elements:

1. Funding criteria.
2. Funding cycle.
3. Access modalities.
4. List of implementing entities that are accredited to the GCF, Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Adaptation Fund (AF) based on the modalities agreed under the decision on access. These implementing entities will be eligible to implement projects and programs for countries and enable direct budget support.

Following adoption of these key decisions, the Secretariat of the FRLD is mandated to develop the guidebook, Terms of Reference (ToR) and template for the call for proposals for the BIM. Civil society called for the BIM to demonstrate small grants and direct access to communities, including of Indigenous Peoples. The long-term resource mobilization strategy for the FRLD still has divergent views between developing countries, who have sought to fill the Fund in line with the scale of their needs, and developed countries, who wish to expand sources in order to diminish their responsibility for filling the Fund. The concerns of CSOs and Indigenous Peoples about the World Bank as a trustee and the host of the Secretariat are growing as it is increasingly clear that World Bank policies and processes are impeding the potential for the FRLD to be an innovative and different Fund that can ensure equitable and effective distribution of funds.

Going forward

Establishing dedicated arrangements for Indigenous Peoples' access and their organizations is crucial in both funds as steps forward, and efforts to achieve this are already underway. For the past few years, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), in partnership with the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba Foundation), the Centre for the Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (CADPI), the Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (PINGO's Forum), IPAG and the GCF CSO Network, has consistently advocated for placing human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights at the heart of GCF policies and operations. Maintaining this momentum is key as the GCF embarks on its 2024-2027 strategic plan.

In the context of the FRLD, NEFIN and other Indigenous Peoples' organizations, as well as IWGIA and other NGOs, have long advocated for placing Indigenous rights at the heart of climate finance, including within the FRLD, even before its establishment. Their efforts have been fundamental in promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to climate finance, ensuring that Indigenous Peoples – who suffer irre-

versible tangible and intangible losses and damages – have direct access to funding and decision-making processes. As the FRLD moves towards full operationalization in the coming years, continued advocacy is essential in shaping its governance, ensuring a dedicated seat as an active observer, full and effective participation in Board meetings and related proceedings, development of an Indigenous Peoples' Policy and other safeguard measures, and broader participation in activities on the ground.

Sustained advocacy, strong partnerships, and active engagement, alongside the effective implementation of Indigenous Peoples' policies and safeguards, are essential to ensure that funding is distributed fairly and appropriately. Without these efforts, these climate funds risk replicating existing barriers in climate finance, limiting Indigenous participation and, therefore, failing to meet their objectives.

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Indigenous Navigator: Self-Determined Development

The Indigenous Navigator¹ is an online portal providing access to a set of tools developed by and for Indigenous Peoples. By using the Indigenous Navigator, Indigenous organisations and communities, duty bearers, NGOs, journalists and others can access the national and community surveys that are used to collect data on the situation of Indigenous Peoples. The data collected in the surveys can be used to advocate for Indigenous Peoples' rights and to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of these rights. By documenting and reporting their own situations, Indigenous Peoples can enhance their access to justice and development.

The Indigenous Navigator framework encompasses over 150 structure, process, and outcome indicators that monitor central aspects of Indigenous Peoples' civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169 (ILO 169) and other relevant human rights instruments. In addition, the framework enables monitoring of the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Three new thematic modules² on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence have been developed³ and will be available for public use on the Indigenous Navigator portal in 2026. The surveys are developed in close consultation with Indigenous Peoples and their representatives and thus informed by the experiences of Indigenous Peoples. The new modules continue to use the Office of the High Commissioner for Hu-

man Rights' (OHCHR) human rights indicator methodology to facilitate a human rights-based monitoring.

The Indigenous Navigator, initiated in 2014, has been developed and carried forward by a consortium consisting of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Tebtebba – Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba), the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This consortium currently works in partnership with the European Commission.

Collecting disaggregated data about the situation of Indigenous Peoples

Throughout 2025, and with financial support from the European Commission and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Indigenous Navigator partners have continued to collect data from across Asia, Africa and Latin America.⁴ In 2025, a total of five community surveys and four national surveys were completed and published.⁵ This brings the total number of published, public, community surveys to 325 and national surveys to 37 covering 30 countries.^{7, 8}

The Indigenous Navigator not only serves as a tool to collect disaggregated data; it also makes it possible to compare the data from the national and community surveys to identify implementation gaps between the Indigenous rights a country has committed to uphold and how effectively these commitments are being met in practice. As the comparable data across countries and regions are gathered through the Indigenous Navigator, the global situation of Indigenous Peoples is documented and used to advocate for respect of their rights.

In 2025, the Indigenous Navigator tools have been expanded and diversified with new modules to cover specific details on critical emerging thematic domains identified as priorities within the international

Indigenous Peoples movement. The three new modules focus on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Human Rights, and Environmental Due Diligence.

In addition to the data collection using the primary surveys, the new modules on Climate Change and Biodiversity were piloted at national and community levels. The Climate Change survey was piloted in Nepal and Bangladesh and the Biodiversity survey was piloted in Colombia, Peru and Indonesia.⁹ The experiences from the pilot processes provided critical Indigenous-led field testing, significantly strengthening the usability, contextual relevance, and practical application of the survey tools. The new modules will be implemented by allied organisations and Indigenous communities from 2026 onwards.

International advocacy through the Indigenous Navigator

In 2025, the Indigenous Navigator organised a series of side events where partners and Indigenous Peoples representatives presented project outcomes as well as their perspective on the use of the Indigenous Navigator's tools on the ground. As part of this, Indigenous representatives engaged in key fora and conversations concerning the role of data generation in the context of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

The Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development (IPMG).¹⁰ member of the Indigenous Navigator Steering Committee, has continued to advance recognition of community-based data initiatives, including the Indigenous Navigator, as key mechanisms for generating rights-based and community-owned data. IPMG actively engaged with the UN Collaborative on Citizen Data,¹¹ contributing substantive inputs to the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data,¹² adopted in 2025. Their engagement stressed the importance of Indigenous data sovereignty (Principle 8), the right of Indigenous Peoples to control their own data (Principle 7), and the need to uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in all data related processes. IPMG also called for the creation of a technical working group focused specifically on improving data disaggregation by ethnicity, a longstanding gap in global and national statistical systems. This momentum has contributed to a broader and

growing movement among Indigenous Peoples working to strengthen Indigenous led approaches to data governance and sovereignty.

IPMG attended and presented the Indigenous Navigator at the 2025 Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference, held in Canberra, Australia, from 31 March to 3 April 2025.¹³ The conference brought together a diverse community of Indigenous data practitioners and experts who shared initiatives aimed at reclaiming control over data related to their peoples, territories, and governance systems. The Indigenous Navigator presentation highlighted tools, community experiences, and lessons learned on Indigenous driven data collection, management, and use in global advocacy processes.

The 24th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)¹⁴ convened experts, advocates, and Indigenous leaders at the UN Headquarters in New York from 21 April to 2 May 2025. On 21 April, the Indigenous Navigator side event “Monitoring the implementation of the UNDRIP: experiences, reflections and challenges using the Indigenous Navigator tools and framework” was held. Through the panel discussion, speakers from the Philippines, Kenya, Bangladesh, Suriname, and Sápmi presented firsthand accounts of using the Indigenous Navigator to document and drive local initiatives. The discussions provided a critical platform for sharing lived experiences, data-driven insights, and reflections on the challenges Indigenous Peoples face in asserting their rights. Further, the event underscored the role of the Indigenous Navigator tools and framework in gathering disaggregated data, empowering communities, and advancing evidence-based advocacy for Indigenous rights. During her closing remarks, Tove Søvndahl Gant, member of the UNPFII, emphasised that the Indigenous Navigator empowers communities by identifying priority issues, addressing climate change impacts, facilitating government dialogue, and highlighting gaps in national data to advocate for state accountability on fundamental human rights.

Following the invitation to the Indigenous Navigator during the 23rd session,¹⁵ the global coordinator of IPMG delivered a statement on behalf of the Indigenous Navigator during Agenda Item 3 of the 24th session on the theme “Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within United Nations Member States and the United Nations system, including identifying good practices and

addressing challenges”. She presented the Indigenous Navigator and highlighted that the data collection process, coupled with discussions and reflection within the communities, had become an eye opener on the history and struggles of their community. Further, she highlighted that analysis of the data from community surveys indicates a lack of recognition of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples to their lands, territories and resources, a lack of access to basic services as well as a lack of FPIC on matters that affect Indigenous Peoples. She emphasised that the Indigenous Navigator is an Indigenous-led initiative to advance not only data governance and sovereignty but also Indigenous self-determined development.¹⁶

The Global Land Forum 2025 (GLF) took place in Bogotá, Colombia from 15-20 June 2025.¹⁷ It was preceded by the inaugural Global Indigenous Land Forum (GLF-IP) held in Kwet Kina, Cauca, Colombia from 13-15 June 2025. During the GLF-IP and GLF, the Indigenous Navigator provided support to Indigenous partners, input towards the Indigenous Declaration adopted by the GLF-IP and later the GLF within the Bogotá declaration, and organised a breakout session entitled “Indigenous Navigator: A Tool to Monitor the Implementation of Indigenous Peoples rights” as a Lab during the GLF. The Lab attracted a full room and developed into a broader discussion about the use of data in advocacy, and particularly in relation to the lands, territories and resources of Indigenous Peoples. The GLF adopted the Kwet Kina Declaration,¹⁸ a powerful rights-based manifesto demanding full recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ land rights and autonomy.

The UN Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, Asia-Pacific was held on 15-19 September 2025, in Bangkok, Thailand.¹⁹ Approximately 40 Indigenous delegates participated in the Forum. On 18 September, in collaboration with Tebtebba and DIHR, AIPP convened a spotlight session entitled “Indigenous Navigator: Environmental and Human Rights Due Diligence with a Focus on Indigenous Peoples”.²⁰ The session, attended by approx. 100 persons, aimed to raise awareness of the importance of Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) in the context of business activities affecting Indigenous Peoples and their territories while promoting the use of Indigenous-led data in environmental and human rights due diligence processes. Speakers from the consortium partners—AIPP, DIHR, and Tebtebba—introduced

the new HREDD module and explained how this module can be used alongside community-based tools to monitor due diligence processes at the local level. The event generated significant interest among participants. Many expressed their interest in conducting due diligence surveys in their communities, and several Indigenous Peoples' representatives showed enthusiasm for learning how to implement the Indigenous Navigator survey.

The 4th Asia Environmental Human Rights Defenders' (EHRD) Forum, themed "Conservation, Biodiversity and Human Rights", took place from 27-29 October 2025, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.²¹ The Forum was convened by the OHCHR, UN Environment Programme, and UN Women, together with co-organising partners, among others AIPP. A parallel Indigenous Navigator session on "Legal Frameworks and Grievance Mechanisms for Access to Justice" took place on 28 October. The session explored the legal frameworks and grievance mechanisms that protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and their EHRDs. It also introduced the Indigenous Navigator framework. The session was co-organised by Indigenous Navigator partners—AIPP, The Inter-Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS), IWGIA, and the Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Asia Network. IWGIA presented how the Indigenous Navigator supports advocacy for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and how it advances access to justice, and discussed ongoing support for the initiative, emphasising the Indigenous Navigator's role in promoting the recognition and implementation of Indigenous Peoples' rights and ensuring access to justice. Moreover, an engagement space was organised in the afternoon session on 28 October for participating organisations. AIPP and its partner organisations shared the background and activities of the Indigenous Navigator with the audience.

The side event entitled "Data by and for Indigenous Peoples: Community-Based Monitoring and the Global Review of KMGBF Implementation"²² was held on 23 October 2025 during the 27th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-27)²³ in Panama City. Hosted by the Indigenous Navigator consortium, the event took place in the Indigenous Peoples and Local

Communities Group meeting room and was attended by approximately 150 participants. The purpose was to demonstrate how Indigenous-led data frameworks such as the Indigenous Navigator and other Community-Based Monitoring and Information Systems (CBMIS) contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), particularly headline indicator 22.1 and complementary indicators under Targets 1, 3, 21, and 22. Speakers included representatives from FPP, *Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas* (CNTI), International Land Coalition (ILC), Tebtebba and IWGIA, with opening remarks by a representative from the European Commission. The event highlighted the role of Indigenous data in global biodiversity reporting, the importance of equitable data partnerships, and the need for Indigenous Peoples' full participation in the global review process.

Further, the side event entitled "Community-Based Monitoring of Biodiversity and Human Rights: The Indigenous Navigator's Biodiversity Module"²⁴ was held on 28 October 2025, during the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (SB8(j)-1), also in Panama City. The event was organised by FPP and IWGIA in collaboration with CNTI, PINGO's Forum, IMPECT, AIPP and Tebtebba. The event focused on the Indigenous Navigator's Biodiversity Module and its application in community-based monitoring. During the panel discussion, a representative from CNTI shared their experience of piloting the Biodiversity Module in Colombia, emphasising how Indigenous-led data collection informs national biodiversity strategies and strengthens territorial governance. The session highlighted the role of Indigenous Peoples in monitoring biodiversity and human rights, and how their data can inform KMGBF implementation. The event also addressed the conditions enabling equitable data partnerships, integration of traditional knowledge indicators, and the importance of safeguarding Indigenous data sovereignty.

The conference "Standing up for Democracy & Rights: Working together to turn hope into action" took place in Copenhagen on 6 and 7 November 2025.²⁵ In collaboration with the International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) and IWGIA, DIHR organised a Skill and Capacity Lab workshop on the "Use of citizen-generated data for more inclusive decision-making". The workshop's purpose was to present the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data (recently endorsed by the UN Sta-

tistical Commission, and a process in which the Indigenous Navigator has been involved since 2019) and showcase best practice examples of collecting citizen data. The conference was organised by *Nyt Europa* and co-organisers in the context of the Danish EU Presidency, aiming to examine how rights, civil society, and the rule of law can defend democratic governance.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – Conference of the Parties (COP) 30, was held in Belém, Brazil in November 2025.²⁶ The Indigenous Navigator side event “How Indigenous Communities Use Data, Technology, and Human Rights Analysis to Advance Indigenous Environmental Stewardship and Apply the Indigenous Navigator Climate Change Module” took place at the Indigenous Peoples’ Pavilion on 12 November.²⁷ The event introduced the newly developed Climate Change Survey, which is designed to assess how national frameworks uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples in climate responses, including state obligations to prevent foreseeable harm in line with international human rights standards. The session highlighted insights from recent surveys piloted in Bangladesh and Nepal—and demonstrated how community-generated data can strengthen rights-based advocacy and promote sustainable climate solutions.

Community-led projects, fostering sustainable and self-determined growth

The Indigenous Navigator’s small grants facility provides target Indigenous communities with financial support to define and design projects addressing concrete needs identified through the analysis of the data from the community surveys. These projects are based on the Indigenous communities’ own cultural values, traditional knowledge, and their visions for their own self-determined development, providing support for their own solutions to the most pressing issues. Between 2023 and 2025, 38 community-led projects were developed and implemented by Indigenous communities.²⁸

In December 2025, the Indigenous Navigator consortium signed an agreement with the European Commission to support implementation in 25 countries from 2026 to 2028.²⁹

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6. Surveys go through a thorough review process, including uploading, review, revision, approval and publishing. This process is separate from the determination made by the communities with their FPIC on whether the surveys should be public.
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Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in relation to the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is a principal and autonomous body of the Organization of American States (OAS) responsible for promoting and protecting human rights in the Americas. It has created thematic rapporteurships with the aim of providing attention to certain groups, communities and peoples who are particularly exposed to human rights violations due to their vulnerable situation and the historical discrimination they have suffered. In 1990, it created the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with the aim of addressing the situation of Indigenous Peoples and strengthening the work in defence of their rights within the Inter-American system.

Since the 1980s, the Commission has systematically addressed Indigenous rights through reports, precautionary measures and cases before the Inter-American Court. It has emphasized the importance of protecting their territories, as their relationship with the land is fundamental to their economic, social and cultural development. In addition, human rights protection bodies have made progress in recognizing the collective rights of these peoples through progressive jurisprudence.

During 2025, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) continued its work to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas. Through press releases, precautionary measures, public hearings and visits, as well as constant monitoring of the human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples, the IACHR took note of and documented advances in, and violations of, their rights and urged States to comply with their international obligations.

Press releases

Guatemala:¹ the IACHR rejected the criminal proceedings brought by the Guatemalan Public Prosecutor's Office against the Indigenous authorities who peacefully led the 2023 demonstration in defence of the election results, following the arrest of Luis Haroldo Pacheco and Héctor Manuel Chaclán and the issuing of other arrest warrants. The Commission warned that these actions form part of a pattern of instrumentalizing criminal law for political purposes, characterized by the use of ambiguous criminal charges, court secrecy and the abuse of preventive detention, thus demonstrating the lack of independence of the Public Prosecutor's Office and deepening the institutional crisis. The IACHR recalled that the Indigenous protests were decisive in preserving democracy, stressed that the right to protest and peaceful assembly is essential in a democratic State, and called on the State to ensure the accountability of the Public Prosecutor's Office and respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including their right to self-determination without fear of criminalization.

Colombia:² the IACHR welcomed the enactment of Decree 488 of 05 May 2025 in Colombia, which regulates the functioning of Indigenous territories and creates Indigenous Territorial Entities (ETI) as their own political-administrative structures, with powers in health, education, Indigenous justice, territorial and environmental management, as well as mechanisms for autonomous financing and planning. The Commission highlighted that the decree constitutes significant progress in guaranteeing the right to self-determination, recognized in Inter-American standards, by strengthening self-government and the protection of cultural identity, including cultural objections to projects that affect

their ways of life. It also urged the State to ensure effective implementation, with adequate resources and safeguards against possible setbacks.

Panama:³ the Commission expressed concern at the social unrest in Panama in the context of the protests against Law 462 and the declaration of a state of emergency in Bocas del Toro, urging the State to guarantee judicial safeguards, proportionality in the use of force and respect for rights such as freedom of expression and access to information, including during states of emergency. With regard to Indigenous Peoples, the IACHR highlighted that communities such as the Ngäbe-Buglé, Guna Yala and Arimae have suffered different impacts, including reported evictions, arbitrary detentions, excessive use of force and stigmatization of Indigenous leaders, in a context of complaints also linked to the lack of free, prior and informed consultation on extractive projects in their territories. The Commission called for the strengthening of a genuine, inclusive and culturally-appropriate dialogue that recognizes the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and their own forms of representation, and reiterated that social protest must be guaranteed in accordance with Inter-American standards.

In the context of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,⁴ the IACHR and the Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights issued an urgent call to the continent's States to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples from the impacts of extractive industries, including projects linked to the energy transition. The Commission warned of the expansion of initiatives declared to be in the "public interest" or "national interest" that limit debate on their real effects on Indigenous territories, as well as patterns of criminalization, misuse of criminal law, and violence against human rights and territorial defenders. In particular, it highlighted that these measures are often accompanied by the intervention of security forces, forced evictions and episodes of social conflict, in which forms of gender-based violence affecting women, adolescents and girls in particular, are intensified. It recalled that States must guarantee self-determination, collective ownership, consultation and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), conduct independent impact assessments, ensure benefit-sharing and adequately supervise companies in accordance

with Inter-American standards and the UN Guiding Principles. It reiterated that development cannot be justified at the expense of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and reaffirmed its willingness to support States and communities in fulfilling their international obligations.

In commemoration of the International Day of Indigenous Women,⁵ the IACHR urged States to adopt urgent measures to prevent maternal mortality among Indigenous women, who face up to three times the risk of dying during childbirth due to structural inequalities in access to education, information, and sexual and reproductive health services. The Commission emphasized that these gaps are exacerbated by factors such as language, age, disability, socioeconomic status and mobility, or geographic location, and warned of risks such as sexually-transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, obstetric violence and forced sterilizations. It recalled that, in accordance with the Convention of Belém do Pará and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, States must guarantee access to information and services, and this must incorporate intercultural and gender approaches, ensure consultation processes with Indigenous women, and respect traditions and beliefs.

Precautionary measures

During 2025, the IACHR granted precautionary measures⁶ related to the rights of the Colombia's Indigenous Peoples in favour of members of the Governing Board of CONPAZCOL (Afro-descendant, Indigenous and Peasant Communities Building Peace in Colombia). The IACHR considered that they were facing a serious and urgent situation, with irreparable risk to their lives and personal integrity due to their work as human rights defenders in contexts affected by the armed conflict. In 2025, they were reportedly subjected to persistent threats, surveillance, harassment and armed violence. Although the State reported on preventive actions, the Commission determined that these were insufficient, and requested that it adopt effective and concerted measures to protect them, ensure that they can carry on their work without violence, and advance the investigation of the facts to prevent their recurrence.

Public hearings during periods of sessions

In 2025, the Commission held three sessions during which it conducted 11 public hearings related to protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples on the continent.

During its 192nd Period of Sessions,⁷ the IACHR learned about the impact on the rights of Indigenous Peoples due to the activities of extractive industries in Peru, as well as the barriers that persist in the exercise of Indigenous jurisdiction in that country. With regard to Bolivia, it held a hearing with civil society on the criminalization of environmental defenders, with particular reference to members of Indigenous Peoples.

It also held two *ex officio* hearings, one on Suriname and the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the face of extractive projects, and the other on Colombia in relation to the follow-up on precautionary measures for ethnic communities in the context of armed conflict.

During its 193rd Session,⁸ the IACHR received information about policies on memory, truth and justice in relation to crimes committed against Indigenous Peoples during the dictatorship in Brazil. It also held a regional hearing to receive information provided by civil society regarding the impact of extractive industries on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in countries throughout the region.

At its 194th Period of Sessions,⁹ the IACHR held hearings related to the situation of LGBTI Indigenous persons in Brazil, the situation of Indigenous territories in Panama, particularly in light of the social unrest and the state of emergency during the protests that occurred during the year, and on progress in and barriers to the implementation of the right to self-determination of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican Peoples in Mexico, based on their constitutional recognition. It also held a regional *ex officio* hearing on the recruitment of children and adolescents in contexts of violence.

Reports

Violence against Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of the Caribbean Coast in Nicaragua¹⁰

In October 2025, the IACHR published the report “Violence against Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of the Caribbean Coast in

Nicaragua". Taking an historical perspective dating back to the 1980s, this examines a sustained pattern of territorial dispossession, armed violence, cultural assimilation and structural discrimination that has intensified under Daniel Ortega's regime. The report documents attacks perpetrated by settlers and criminal groups with State tolerance, murders, criminalization of traditional authorities and defenders, forced displacements and serious acts of violence, in a context of militarization, impunity and dismantling of the autonomous regime. The suspension of the land regularization process since 2014 and the absolute concentration of power have exacerbated the vulnerability of these peoples, putting their physical and cultural existence at risk.

The IACHR concludes that the dispossession and violent occupation of ancestral territories directly affect the right to collective property, cultural identity and self-determination of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples, whose survival depends on their spiritual, social and economic relationship with their lands. The report recalls that Nicaragua has binding international obligations –including those derived from ILO Convention 169 and Inter-American and universal instruments on the rights of Indigenous Peoples– that require it to guarantee the safe return of displaced communities, combat impunity and restore the rule of law. It also makes recommendations to the State and calls on the international community and business actors to exercise oversight and make funding conditional in order to prevent a continuation of the violations.

The impacts of violence on the human rights situation in Colombia¹¹

In April 2024, the IACHR conducted an *in loco* visit to Colombia to directly observe the human rights situation in the country, with a special emphasis on citizen security, the differentiated impacts of violence and the implementation of the Peace Agreement. It held 50 meetings with government representatives and 45 meetings with civil society organizations and community leaders in the territories of Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, La Guajira, Magdalena, Nariño, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca.

Taking a racial-ethnic approach, which runs through the entire report, the Commission offers a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of violence in Colombia from an historical, territorial and intersectional perspective, examining the persistence of the armed conflict, the ex-

pansion of illicit economies, institutional violence and the serious barriers to accessing justice, along with the structural crisis in the prison system. It highlights how inequalities rooted in colonial, racist, patriarchal and class inequalities have a differentiated impact on Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and peasant communities, women, LGBTI persons, children, older persons, people with disabilities and victims of forced displacement. The report documents homicides, massacres, forced recruitment, displacement and gender-based violence, as well as territorial control exercised by armed actors, pointing to institutional weaknesses in the State's response.

It also evaluates public peace policies, including the 2016 Peace Agreement and the Total Peace policy, identifying progress and limitations in the implementation of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, the Comprehensive Rural Reform and guarantees of participation and rights for victims. The report concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening State capacity, combating impunity, reducing structural gaps and consolidating sustainable peace with a territorial, ethnic, differential and gender-based approach, based on Inter-American standards and effective participation and accountability.

Infographics on Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination

Based on the Commission's thematic report "The Right to Self-determination of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples" (2021), three infographics were developed to facilitate the dissemination of and access to its content, with the aim of making it a useful working tool for defenders and leaders of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and territories. Infographic No. 1¹² develops general concepts related to the right to self-determination, including experiences and good practices taking place in different regions. Infographic No. 2¹³ is aimed at clarifying information on the collective ownership of Indigenous Peoples, their lands, territories and natural resources, in accordance with the Inter-American standards developed on the subject. Finally, Infographic No. 3¹⁴ develops the concepts of prior, free and informed consultation and consent, what each of these means and when they should be required. These infographics include regulatory and jurisprudential grounds in support of their content.

Events and visits

In 2025, the Commission carried out promotional and academic activities in fulfilment of the mandate of the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. First, in May, co-organized with IWGIA, the International Seminar on Forced Displacement of Indigenous Communities in Latin America was held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. The objective of the seminar was to analyse the causes and consequences of the forced displacement of Indigenous communities in Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua, the current international standards on the subject, and policies developed in the region. It consisted of a space for dialogue and discussion aimed at achieving proposals for practical solutions that could be implemented at the local and regional level. The meeting was attended by leaders of Indigenous organizations from the aforementioned countries, think tanks and human rights defenders. The Commission was represented by First Vice-President, Commissioner Andrea Pochak, and the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights, Javier Palummo.

In August, Commissioner Arif Bulkan, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, made a promotional visit to the states of Sao Paulo and Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil where he gave lectures at universities on the international protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous students and held dialogues and meetings with community leaders and defenders of human rights and territory. He also visited communities in their territory to learn first-hand about their situation.

In August and September, the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples conducted training sessions in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, including the IV REPAM Human Rights School, and meetings with organizations of different Indigenous Peoples, as well as with Indigenous women's organizations, with content related to the Inter-American system for the protection of human rights in general, its objectives, tools for accessing it and the standards developed.

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples have been engaging in relevant processes on sustainable development since the Earth Summit (Rio Conference) in 1992. The main advocacy issues for Indigenous Peoples in these processes are respect for, protection and fulfilment of the rights of Indigenous Peoples as affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),¹ as well as the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the development, implementation, monitoring and review of action plans and programmes on sustainable development at all levels.

The main coordination mechanism of Indigenous Peoples in the sustainable development process is the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group for Sustainable Development (IPMG),² which is currently coordinated by Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education)³ and the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC),⁴ both of which also act as the facilitators/co-convenors and Organizing Partners (OPs) accredited by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)⁵ as part of the nine recognized Major Groups that can officially participate in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) processes at the global level.

The Indigenous Peoples' Major Group for Sustainable Development (IPMG) continues to strengthen its role in not only in facilitating and coordinating the full and effective engagement of Indigenous Peoples in relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) processes but also in ensuring that Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and initia-

tives in relation to development are mainstreamed. For 2025, the IPMG continued its support in coordinating the Indigenous Peoples' constituency of the Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) alongside supporting Indigenous Peoples' engagement in relevant global SDG processes.

High-Level Political Forum 2025

The theme of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2025 was *"Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind"*.⁶ The HLPF 2025 conducted in-depth reviews of the following goals:

- **SDG 3** - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- **SDG 5** - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- **SDG 8** - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- **SDG 14** - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- **SDG 17** - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Thirty-five countries⁷ presented their **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**, sharing their progress on the 2030 Agenda: Angola, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Micronesia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sudan, Suriname, and Thailand.

The IPMG played a central role in facilitating Indigenous Peoples' engagement, ensuring that they were able to deliver statements in plenary sessions and thematic reviews.⁸ Speaking on behalf of their own

communities and organizations were Indigenous Peoples' representatives from Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, and South Africa, including one Indigenous youth from the Philippines — all of which are VNR reporting countries. These interventions highlighted the persistent gap between the reports submitted by governments and the realities experienced on the ground. While governments often referenced Indigenous Peoples in their VNRs, these mentions were frequently tokenistic, and lacking in substantive commitments to rights, resources, or accountability.

In the session: *Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level*, Uzzal Azim from Bangladesh highlighted that *“The implementation of the SDGs needs to be strongly anchored to the realization of human rights and for Indigenous Peoples, the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),”* and *“SDG localization efforts should be inclusive and responsive with adequate financial and technical support through direct financing and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples.”*

The **2025 VNR Synthesis Report**⁹ provides a clear picture of this gap. A number of countries mentioned Indigenous Peoples in their VNR reports:

- In **Guatemala**, Indigenous and ancestral authorities called for the enforcement of existing laws protecting Indigenous women's rights and for strengthened institutional support through dedicated budgets, including budget allocations for the Vice-Ministry of Interculturality within the Ministry of Culture and Sports.
- In **Malaysia**, Comprehensive Special Model Schools are integrating primary and secondary education into a single institution to reduce dropout rates in remote and Indigenous communities.
- **Suriname's** SURGE programme aims to strengthen micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), with a focus on women and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.
- Several countries noted collaboration with academia and the scientific community for SDG implementation and additional sectors and stakeholder groups highlighted persons with

disabilities, Indigenous Peoples (**Bangladesh, Finland, Guatemala, and Suriname**), traditional leaders, and actors in rural areas in the VNRs.

At the regional level, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) should have been a critical space in which to ensure the visibility of Indigenous Peoples, particularly since many VNR countries in 2025 came from the Asia-Pacific region. Asia is home to one-third of the world's Indigenous Peoples, yet Indigenous Peoples often encounter barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in the APFSD and related SDG processes at the country level. These barriers include: limited opportunities, where Indigenous organizations struggle to gain recognition as official participants; a lack of financial resources, which restricts their ability to travel and attend meetings; and language barriers, as many sessions are conducted in English without adequate interpretation for Indigenous languages. Furthermore, state-centric reporting frameworks often exclude Indigenous perspectives, meaning that even when Indigenous Peoples are present, their contributions are sidelined in official reports. While countries may mention Indigenous Peoples in their VNRs, these references are often superficial, failing to reflect the actual challenges Indigenous Peoples face, such as land dispossession, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. Indigenous Peoples have repeatedly pointed out that their lived experiences are not adequately represented in official UN documents, creating a gap between rhetoric and reality, hence the call for more support not only for the localization of the SDGs but also the SDG reporting process.

At the international level, similar challenges persist at the HLPF. Indigenous Peoples have consistently raised concerns about shrinking civic spaces. Discrimination and marginalization also play a role, as Indigenous Peoples are frequently treated as “stakeholders” rather than rights-holders, undermining their ability to assert their collective rights under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In addition, challenging visa processing and funding constraints remain a major obstacle, with Indigenous Peoples often lacking direct access to financial support for participation. This was highlighted in discussions at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where Indigenous Peoples stressed the need for direct funding mechanisms

to enable their full and effective engagement in climate, biodiversity, and SDG processes.

Engagement of the IPMG in the Second World Summit for Social Development

The Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2) was held in Doha, Qatar, from 4-6 November 2025. This summit revisited commitments made during the first historic summit in Copenhagen in 1995, focusing on poverty eradication, social integration, and decent work. The outcome document, the Doha Political Declaration,¹⁰ reaffirmed global pledges to advance social justice and equality.

Indigenous Peoples were explicitly mentioned in the Declaration, which stated:

“Creating inclusive societies that enable full, equal and meaningful participation as well as leadership opportunities for all, including but not limited to, women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living with rare diseases and people living with HIV/AIDS, Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, people living in poverty and in rural and remote areas, as well as people in vulnerable situations, fostering social connection and reduce loneliness and isolation, and integrating their needs and perspectives into social and economic policy frameworks.”

Another section emphasized:

“Recognizing and supporting Indigenous Peoples in their pursuit of economic and social development, with full respect for their identity, traditions, forms of social organization and cultural values and the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights in accordance with their procedures.”

While these references were welcomed, Indigenous Peoples noted that the pledges lacked clear mechanisms for implementation. Gov-

ernments have committed to strengthening civic participation and addressing inequalities but Indigenous representatives stressed that, without concrete measures, these commitments risk remaining purely rhetorical.

IPMG at the UN Ocean Conference

The Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) was held in Nice, France, from 9-13 June 2025, focusing on SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. IPMG mobilized Indigenous Peoples' participation in this conference, including from North America and two Indigenous youths from Asia and the Caribbean.

The outcome document,¹¹ "Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action" stressed the urgency of ocean protection and the need for global cooperation.

Indigenous Peoples were referenced many times in the document:

- **Paragraph 3:** *"We must act with urgency to face this challenge with bold, ambitious, just and transformative action, and ensure that all people, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, youth, people in vulnerable situations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, are fully and meaningfully empowered and included in ocean-related decision-making as appropriate."*
- **Paragraph 10:** *"...recognize and respect the integral role and rights of Indigenous Peoples, as established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, including over their Indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, in line with section C of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework."*
- **Paragraph 30:** *"Ocean action must be based on the best available science and knowledge, including, where available, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and*

local knowledge systems, while recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, in conserving, restoring and sustainably using the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.”

- **Paragraph 30.a:** *“Affirm the value of strengthening sharing of knowledge and expertise, including, where there is free, prior and informed consent, the knowledges, innovations, practices and technologies of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, traditional knowledge and local knowledge systems.”*
- **Paragraph 31.f:** *“Underline the need to support coastal communities, in particular small scale and artisanal fisheries and sustainable aquaculture producers, women and girls, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in developing and implementing locally driven adaptation measures, and stress the importance of enhancing their capacity to effectively engage, advocate and manage marine resources in a sustainable manner.”*

However, Indigenous representatives noted that while references to Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge were frequent, the conference lacked strong human rights language. The reality on the ground is that Indigenous Peoples continue to face exclusion from decision-making processes and resource allocation. Indigenous Peoples called for references to be matched with policy action, stressing that recognition must go hand in hand with implementation.

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ own initiatives in data sovereignty

In several global discussions on data and data sovereignty, the IPMG has consistently advanced the generation, management, use, and control of data, particularly those pertaining to Indigenous Peoples, their communities, and their territories. Indigenous Peoples have long been implementing their own data-gathering initiatives not merely for information gathering but as a means to counter colonial narratives and his-

torical misinformation. These initiatives, such as the Indigenous Navigator,¹² are essential for the substantive recognition of their collective rights and contributions to society. Too often, data on land and natural resources within Indigenous territories are treated solely as economic goods, disregarding the communities who sustain and protect them for cultural, spiritual, and ecological reasons.

Indigenous-led monitoring of the SDGs has emerged as a direct response to extractive data practices that marginalize Indigenous voices. By generating their own data, Indigenous Peoples can ensure that monitoring frameworks and results reflect their lived realities, priorities, and aspirations. This approach challenges the dominant tendency to reduce Indigenous territories to commodities, instead affirming their role as custodians of biodiversity, climate resilience, and cultural heritage.

The IPMG, working in solidarity with the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) and wider civil society organizations, has called for the recognition of community-generated data as a legitimate and essential component of global monitoring frameworks. Indigenous Peoples assert their right to data sovereignty and governance, emphasizing that Indigenous data are not foreign concepts but are deeply embedded in cultural practices, governance systems, and traditional knowledge. These efforts highlight that Indigenous Peoples' control over their own data is fundamental to ensuring accountability in the SDGs.

Indigenous-led data initiatives demonstrate that sovereignty over information is inseparable from sovereignty over land, resources, and identity. By resisting extractive data practices and advancing community-driven monitoring, Indigenous Peoples are not only safeguarding their rights but also contributing to more accurate, inclusive, and just global development processes. Recognition of these initiatives is therefore critical, as it ensures that Indigenous Peoples are not passive subjects of data collection but active agents shaping the narratives and policies that affect their lives.

The UN Collaborative on Citizen Data¹³ and the adoption of the Copenhagen Framework are a step in the right direction in the recognition of data generated by Indigenous Peoples but it is more important that states have the political will to implement the UNDRIP and put in place mechanisms whereby Indigenous Peoples can effectively contribute their own data and contributions to sustainable development.

High-Level Political Forum 2026

Looking ahead, the HLPF 2026 will be held from 6-15 July in New York with full appreciation for the integrated, indivisible, and interlinked nature of the SDGs. It will conduct in-depth reviews of:

- **SDG 6** - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- **SDG 7** - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- **SDG 9** - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- **SDG 11** - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- **SDG 17** - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Thirty-six countries will present their VNRs: Albania, Algeria, Bahrain, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Estonia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kiribati, Liberia, Malawi, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Mozambique, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Switzerland, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, and Uruguay.

Despite political and resource challenges, the IPMG will continue to ensure that sustainable development is anchored in human rights and that Indigenous Peoples are able to advance a truly just and sustainable development aligned with their development aspirations.

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Work of the UN Treaty Bodies and Indigenous Peoples' Rights

The Treaty Bodies¹ are committees of independent experts that monitor the implementation of rights protected under international human rights treaties by States parties. There are nine core international human rights treaties that address: civil and political rights; economic, social, and cultural rights; racial discrimination; torture; discrimination against women; children's rights; migrant workers' rights; the rights of persons with disabilities; and enforced disappearances. The main functions of the treaty bodies are to examine periodic reports submitted by States parties and consider individual complaints. Concluding observations review both positive and negative aspects of a State's implementation of treaty provisions and include recommendations for improvement. Treaty Bodies also adopt general comments or recommendations, which interpret treaty provisions to guide States parties in their obligations. To date, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) have adopted general comments, also called recommendations, that specifically address the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This article provides an overview of references made by Treaty Bodies to Indigenous Peoples and to groups that self-identify as such in their concluding observations, general comments and decisions or views over the year, with a focus on five Treaty Bodies: CERD; the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR); the Human Rights Committee (CCPR); CEDAW; and the CRC.² During the year 2025, the

Treaty Bodies adopted 103 concluding observations, 124 lists of issues and lists of issues prior to reporting, three new general comments and recommendations and 276 decisions or views, including four concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples and individuals. Under its early warning measures and urgent procedures, CERD adopted one decision and sent eight communications related to Indigenous rights.

Summary of concluding observations addressed to the States parties under review

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

CERD underlined multiple forms of discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples and other groups who self-identify as such in Gabon,³ Ukraine,⁴ Burundi,⁵ Guatemala,⁶ New Zealand,⁷ Sweden,⁸ and Tunisia,⁹ hate crimes and hate speech targeting Indigenous Peoples in New Zealand, Guatemala, and Sweden; and racially motivated physical attacks targeting Indigenous Peoples in New Zealand and Sami children in Swedish schools. CERD highlighted the difficulties Indigenous Peoples face in accessing education, healthcare services, employment (Gabon, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, Sweden, and Tunisia), adequate housing (New Zealand, Sweden, and Ukraine), and food in New Zealand and Guatemala, and emphasised high rates of poverty (Gabon, Burundi, Guatemala, and New Zealand) and social exclusion (Gabon and Guatemala). The Committee also highlighted a lack of access to education in Indigenous languages (Ukraine, Sweden, New Zealand, and Tunisia), a lack of protection of intellectual and cultural property rights in New Zealand and Guatemala and barriers to the birth registration of newborns with Amazigh names in Tunisia and to the free broadcasting of Indigenous radio stations in Guatemala.

CERD emphasised the underrepresentation and lack of participation of Indigenous Peoples in political and public life (Gabon, Ukraine, Burundi, and Guatemala), the overrepresentation of Māori in the criminal justice system and foster/residential care in New Zealand and difficulties in accessing justice in Gabon, Guatemala, and Burundi, par-

ticularly for victims of the armed conflict in Guatemala and atrocities in Burundi. CERD also noted limited progress in implementing the Peace Agreements in Guatemala and the limited scope of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Burundi as well as the disproportionate impact of the armed conflict on Indigenous Peoples in Ukraine. CERD also noted the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials and the misuse of the criminal justice system to criminalise Indigenous leaders and human rights defenders in Guatemala, and acts of violence, threats and reprisals against human rights and environmental defenders in Gabon, Guatemala, and New Zealand, violence against Indigenous spiritual leaders in Guatemala and sexual and gender-based violence (Guatemala, New Zealand, and Sweden).

CERD expressed concerns about the weakening of the institutional framework protecting Māori in New Zealand, the lack of a legislative framework recognising and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Gabon and Burundi, and discrepancies in Ukraine's legislative framework relating to recognised and non-recognised Indigenous Peoples. The Committee emphasised the negative impact of environmental degradation, extractive industries, energy projects, agro-industrial projects, and climate change on the health, livelihoods, and lands of Indigenous Peoples (Gabon, New Zealand, Guatemala, and Sweden). The Committee also highlighted the impact of recent legislative developments on the right of Māori to self-determination over lands, territories, and resources in New Zealand; the lack of protection of collective and communal property in Gabon and Guatemala; discrimination in women's inheritance matters in Burundi; barriers to land restitution in New Zealand; forced evictions in Guatemala; and displacements in Gabon. CERD also highlighted violations relating to the right to consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (Gabon, Guatemala, New Zealand, and Sweden), the non-compliance of legislation related to consultation and FPIC with international standards in Sweden, and the lack of mechanisms to ensure consultation and FPIC in Guatemala.

The Committee recommended that States parties adopt policies and measures to combat and eliminate structural or racial discrimination against Indigenous Peoples (Gabon, Ukraine, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, Sweden, and Tunisia), as well as racist hate crimes and hate speech (New Zealand, Burundi, Gabon, Guatemala, and Sweden), to protect Saami children from harassment and bullying in Sweden, to

ensure access to culturally appropriate health services (Gabon, Sweden, New Zealand, Burundi, and Guatemala), food and water in New Zealand and Guatemala, employment (Gabon, Guatemala, New Zealand, and Tunisia) and housing in New Zealand and Tunisia, and to reduce poverty or improve living standards (Gabon, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, and Mexico). CERD recommended that States parties ensure access to quality education (Gabon, Ukraine, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, Tunisia, and Sweden) in mother tongues and Indigenous languages (Gabon, Ukraine, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, Tunisia, and Sweden), and integrate Indigenous history, cultural heritage, legacies of colonialism, ethnic and cultural diversity into school curricula and educational programmes (Gabon, Burundi, New Zealand, Guatemala, and Tunisia). New Zealand, Ukraine, and Sweden were recommended to revitalise or protect Indigenous languages; Tunisia was recommended to ensure the registration of newborns with Amazigh names; and New Zealand and Guatemala were recommended to protect the intellectual and cultural property rights of Indigenous Peoples. Guatemala was also recommended to adopt a legal framework for recognising Indigenous community radio stations.

The Committee advised Ukraine, Gabon, Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, and Tunisia to ensure the participation and representation of Indigenous Peoples in public and political life, and in decision-making positions. It also advised Ukraine to consolidate the legal status of the representative bodies of all Indigenous Peoples. Gabon, Burundi, and Guatemala were recommended to ensure access to justice and Guatemala to incorporate an intercultural perspective into the justice system. Burundi was recommended to ensure that its transitional justice process addresses violations and atrocities committed against all communities. Sweden and Guatemala were recommended to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset, and the Peace Agreements, respectively. Ukraine was recommended to adopt mitigation measures to address the impacts of the ongoing war on all Crimean Tatars. New Zealand was also recommended to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and to reduce the number of Indigenous children in State care. CERD recommended that Gabon and Guatemala adopt measures to ensure that Indigenous human rights defenders are able to carry out their work effectively, prevent institu-

tional violence and end the misuse of the criminal justice system to criminalise Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala. CERD also recommended preventing gender-based violence and protecting Indigenous women (Burundi, Guatemala, New Zealand, and Sweden).

CERD recommended promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples through the institutionalisation and implementation of the legislature's policy on Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala and through the adoption of a dedicated law in Gabon and Burundi. The Committee further recommended that New Zealand reinstate and strengthen statutory protections for Māori, uphold its commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi, adopt a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and that Ukraine review its legislative framework to recognise all Indigenous Peoples in accordance with the principle of self-identification. Drawing on its General Recommendation XXIII on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (1997), CERD recommended that Guatemala adopt measures to ensure the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights to own, use, develop, and exercise full control over their lands, territories, and resources and that Gabon and Burundi revise their legislative framework for land ownership to ensure the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights to own, use, develop, and control their lands, territories, and resources. The Committee also recommended that New Zealand respect Māori rights to self-determination and to the ownership, use, development, and control of their traditional lands and resources. Guatemala was recommended to establish effective mechanisms for the delimitation, demarcation, recognition, and titling of Indigenous lands, while New Zealand was recommended to remove barriers to land restitution and ensure the restoration of Māori lands. Guatemala and Burundi were urged to ensure protection against forced displacement or eviction, including through a moratorium on evictions in Guatemala. CERD recommended that Gabon develop a law and that Sweden review its legislative framework on consultation and FPIC. CERD also recommended that Burundi, Guatemala, and New Zealand adopt measures to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are consulted on any legislative or administrative decisions or infrastructure projects that may affect their rights or lands with a view to obtaining their FPIC. Gabon, Burundi, and Guatemala were requested to ensure remedies and compensation for land used, confiscated or occupied without their FPIC. Sweden, New Zealand, and Guatemala were

recommended to conduct environmental and human rights impact assessments/studies before economic, infrastructure, natural resource exploitation or any projects that may affect Indigenous Peoples or their lands. Sweden and Guatemala were advised to adopt measures to mitigate the negative impact of development projects and New Zealand to protect Indigenous Peoples from the impact of environmental degradation and climate change.

Human Rights Committee (CCPR)

In 2025, the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) issued several recommendations addressing the civil and political rights of Indigenous Peoples and other groups who identify as such in Vietnam,¹⁰ Burkina Faso,¹¹ and Zimbabwe.¹² Regarding Vietnam, the CCPR raised concerns about the failure to recognise Indigenous Peoples and their right to consultation and FPIC; reports of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, and harassment; a lack of due process; restrictions on freedom of movement and expression; and obstacles to participation in decision-making processes, access to public services and the practice of cultural traditions. The CCPR also highlighted reports of hate speech, violence, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings against certain communities, including the Fulani in Burkina Faso, as well as the barriers rural communities in Zimbabwe face in accessing justice.

The Committee called upon Vietnam to establish a legislative framework that recognises and protects the status and rights of communities that self-identify as Indigenous Peoples, including the right to consultation to obtain their FPIC in relation to all decisions affecting them. The Committee also called upon Vietnam to guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities to access public services; to freedom of expression, religion, and belief; free movement; fair trial; privacy; representation in decision-making positions and access to public services and education in their own language. The CCPR also recommended that Vietnam investigate allegations of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment and ensure that perpetrators are punished and victims are provided with redress. The CCPR recommended that Burkina Faso ensure the protection of the Fulani people, investigate cases of intimidation and violence, and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted

and victims are provided with reparation and protection. Zimbabwe was recommended to ensure access to justice for Indigenous communities.

Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR)

In 2025, CESCR reviewed Chile,¹³ Colombia,¹⁴ the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos),¹⁵ the Russian Federation,¹⁶ Zimbabwe,¹⁷ Peru,¹⁸ the Philippines,¹⁹ and Rwanda²⁰ and expressed concerns about the lack of constitutional recognition of Indigenous Peoples (Chile, Laos, and Zimbabwe), difficulties accessing healthcare services (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe), high rates of infant or maternal mortality in Rwanda and Peru, mental health conditions in Colombia, HIV in Peru, food insecurity and malnutrition in Chile and Rwanda, limited access to water in Colombia and Chile, high rates of poverty and extreme poverty (Chile, Colombia, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda,) unemployment in Chile and Peru; child marriage in Laos; sexual abuse in Peru; the use of children by armed groups and the trafficking of women and girls in Colombia. CESCR also highlighted barriers to accessing education (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda) particularly with regard to Indigenous languages (Zimbabwe, Laos, and Chile), the risk of Indigenous languages disappearing (Chile, the Russian Federation, and Peru), the lack of protection for Indigenous Peoples' cultural rights in Colombia, restrictions on traditional subsistence activities in the Russian Federation, the lack of regulation of the use and cultivation of the coca leaf in Colombia, and underrepresentation in decision-making bodies in the Russian Federation and the Philippines.

The Committee expressed concerns over the impact of armed conflicts in Colombia and the Philippines, and of states of emergency on Indigenous women and children in Chile. The Committee also expressed concern over threats, attacks and/or acts of violence, repression, harassment and reprisals against Indigenous Peoples' human rights and land rights defenders (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, and Peru), as well as over arbitrary arrest, detention and enforced disappearance in the Russian Federation and Laos, and extrajudicial killings in Peru and Laos.

CESCR noted issues related to land access in Chile and Colombia, land demarcation, titling, and registration in the Philippines and Rwanda, and land restitution in Chile and Colombia, as well as patterns of forced relocation, displacement and land grabbing (Laos, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, and Rwanda). CESCR also highlighted the negative impact of the initiative to amend Act No. 20,249 on the establishment of marine and coastal areas for Indigenous Peoples and of Act No. 31973 on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Chile and Peru. The Committee emphasised the absence of mechanisms to guarantee the right to consultation and FPIC in Chile and Colombia, the failure to respect the right to consultation and/or FPIC (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda) and delays in implementing judicial decisions to safeguard the rights of the Wayúu in La Guajira in Colombia. The Committee also raised issues related to the lack of reparative mechanisms for victims of violations in business settings in the Russian Federation, the lack of clear and enforceable due diligence obligations to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples from high-risk sectors such as mining, energy, agriculture, and ranching in Colombia, and non-compliance with agreements concluded with Indigenous Peoples in Chile. Finally, CESCR underlined the disproportionate effects of climate change on Indigenous Peoples (Chile, Laos, the Russian Federation, and Peru), as well as the negative impacts of mercury pollution, and of renewable energy, water, agriculture, forestry and mining projects on Indigenous Peoples in Peru.

The Committee formulated a number of recommendations covering the economic, social and cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples and called upon Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Laos, and Peru to prevent and combat discrimination, Zimbabwe and Laos to recognise and protect the rights of communities to choose their identities, including the right to self-identify as Indigenous Peoples and Chile to ensure the constitutional recognition and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. States parties were recommended to ensure access to health care services (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe), in particular sexual and reproductive health services (Chile, Laos, the Russian Federation, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda), mental health care in Colombia, culturally-sensitive health services in Indigenous languages in Chile, food and/or water (Colombia, Chile, and Rwanda), employment (the Philippines, Rwanda, and Chile),

and housing in Chile and Rwanda and to combat or reduce poverty (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, and the Philippines). CESCR also recommended to combat child marriage in Laos, to protect Indigenous children at risk of forced recruitment by armed groups in Colombia and to address sexual violence against Indigenous children in Peru. States parties were recommended to ensure access to education (Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda) particularly through culturally appropriate or intercultural curricula (Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Chile) in Indigenous languages (Zimbabwe, Laos, and Chile) and to phase out the practice of boarding schools in Laos. States parties were also recommended to protect and preserve Indigenous languages (Russian Federation, Chile, and Peru), cultural rights and the diversity of Indigenous Peoples (Chile, Peru, Colombia, Laos, and Zimbabwe) particularly their traditional and culturally-rooted subsistence activities in the Russian Federation and Peru, to ensure that regulations for the use and cultivation of coca leaf benefit Indigenous culture in Colombia, and to guarantee access to sacred, religious and cultural sites and allow Indigenous persons deprived of their liberty to practice their spiritual and religious customs and ceremonies in Chile.

The Philippines was asked to mitigate the impacts of armed conflicts, Colombia to implement the territorial development plans of the Peace Agreement and Chile to ensure that criminal law is not used to criminalise Indigenous rights defenders and that human rights violations committed during states of emergency are prevented and investigated. Colombia, Chile, Laos, the Russian Federation, and Peru were asked to establish or strengthen norms or policies to protect Indigenous human rights defenders, investigate violations against them, prosecute perpetrators, and ensure reparations. Colombia was recommended to develop a policy on collective protection, taking into account ethnic perspectives, while Peru was advised to guarantee access to justice in Indigenous languages.

The Committee recommended that the Russian Federation, Chile, Rwanda, Colombia, Laos, Zimbabwe, and the Philippines recognise and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to own, use, control, and develop their lands; that Peru guarantee the protection of reserves oc-

cupied by Indigenous Peoples living in situations of isolation and initial contact; that Chile guarantee Indigenous Peoples' access to their marine resources and means of subsistence, including fishing; that Colombia and Peru address land dispossession and land grabbing. Colombia, Chile, and Rwanda were recommended to ensure land titling, registration, and demarcation; the Philippines was requested to repeal or amend legislation that undermines the right of Indigenous Peoples to land use; and Chile and Colombia were advised to expedite the restitution of Indigenous lands, particularly for Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation or initial contact. Chile, Colombia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda were advised to establish mechanisms and or adapt legislation to guarantee the right to consultation and FPIC, including the right to grant or withhold FPIC in Chile and Colombia, regarding legislative or administrative measures and projects that may affect the rights or territories of Indigenous Peoples.

Colombia, Peru, the Russian Federation, the Philippines, and Chile were recommended to ensure that companies exercise human rights due diligence and/or are held accountable for violations of the economic, social, and cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples and to ensure access to remedies and reparations for victims. Colombia was recommended to adopt legislation providing for the suspension of permits for businesses that promote or facilitate human rights violations, and to prohibit their activities. Chile, Laos, and Peru were invited to draft guidelines and rules for evaluating the impact of natural resource exploitation on Indigenous territories. Colombia was encouraged to fully implement the judgment regarding the rights of the Wayúu Indigenous Peoples, and Peru was recommended to ensure that environmental and human rights impact assessments are carried out, and that action is taken against environmental pollution. The Russian Federation was recommended to phase out carbon emissions from fossil fuels, and Chile to introduce substantive guarantees for communities and the environment in the implementation of the Framework Act on Climate Change (Act No. 21,455). Chile, Laos, the Russian Federation, Peru, and the Philippines were recommended to develop plans and take measures to address and mitigate the effects of climate change and/or natural disasters, taking into account the needs of Indigenous communities.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW made several references to intersectional discrimination faced by Indigenous women and girls in Botswana,²¹ Fiji,²² Mexico,²³ the Solomon Islands,²⁴ Thailand,²⁵ Tuvalu,²⁶ Belize,²⁷ Congo,²⁸ Sri Lanka,²⁹ the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),³⁰ and Nepal³¹ in relation to access to health services (Botswana, Belize, Tuvalu, Nepal, Thailand, and Mexico), including sexual and reproductive health services (Mexico, Thailand, Belize, Nepal, and Congo) and to birth registrations in Thailand, Mexico, and Congo. CEDAW also expressed concerns about high rates of obstetric violence in Mexico and Nepal, maternal mortality in Mexico and Belize, and child marriage in Botswana, poverty (Mexico, Congo, and Thailand), and limited access to food and water in Congo, formal employment in Thailand, Nepal, and Mexico, and education (Congo, Belize, Fiji, Tuvalu, Nepal, Thailand, and Mexico). CEDAW expressed concerns about the institutionalisation of Indigenous girls in Botswana, gender-based violence (Congo, Nepal, and Thailand), violence, threats, reprisals, and criminalisation faced by Indigenous women human rights defenders in Thailand and Congo, and the lack of protection for Indigenous women exposed to conflict in DRC. Barriers to access to justice and/or legal aid were also raised, as were the exclusion or underrepresentation of Indigenous women in public and political life, and in decision-making positions (Mexico, Thailand, Congo, Nepal, Belize, and Solomon Islands).

CEDAW expressed concerns about the lack of recognition of Indigenous women's collective rights to self-determination in the Nepalese Constitution, limited land ownership and control in Mexico, Nepal, and Botswana and forced evictions in Thailand. CEDAW also highlighted delays in implementing two land rights decisions in Belize and Botswana, as well as the lack of Indigenous women's involvement, consultation, and participation (Nepal, Belize, and Thailand) and of a mechanism to ensure their FPIC in Thailand in relation to projects developed on their lands or decision-making procedures. CEDAW underscored the adverse impact of extractive industries in Congo, climate change and environmental degradation (Mexico, Nepal, Tuvalu, and Congo) on Indigenous women.

Drawing on its general recommendation No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, CEDAW emphasised the need for measures, including temporary special measures, to eliminate discrimination against Indigenous women in most of the States reviewed. CEDAW notably recommended strengthening legislative protections against intersecting discrimination (Belize, Nepal, and Mexico), promoting economic empowerment (Mexico and Nepal) and ensuring equal access to employment (Tuvalu, Mexico, Botswana, and Thailand), and health care services (Mexico, Botswana, and Nepal), including sexual and reproductive health services (Thailand, Belize, Nepal, and Congo) through the provision of interpretation in Indigenous languages and mobile services in remote areas in Mexico. CEDAW also recommended ensuring access to birth registration (Thailand, Mexico, and Congo) and eliminating or punishing obstetric violence in Nepal and Mexico, forced sterilisation in Mexico and maternal mortality in Mexico and Belize, as well as preventing and addressing early and forced marriages in Botswana and Mexico. CEDAW recommended ensuring access to education (Nepal, Congo, Tuvalu, Botswana, Thailand, and Fiji), providing bilingual education (Mexico, Nepal, and Botswana), developing curricula that reflect Indigenous cultures, histories, and knowledge systems, and discontinuing the institutionalisation of Indigenous girls in Botswana. States parties were also recommended to increase the representation and participation of Indigenous women in decision-making positions and in political and public life (Fiji, Tuvalu, Botswana, Mexico, Belize, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), and to improve and remove barriers to accessing justice and legal services (DRC, Congo, Nepal, Belize, Thailand, and the Solomon Islands), particularly by providing culturally appropriate interpretation services (Nepal, Belize, and Mexico). The DRC was urged to adopt a law to protect women human rights defenders, while Thailand and Nepal were urged to ensure that women human rights defenders can carry out their advocacy work freely. Thailand, Nepal, and the DRC were also recommended to investigate and prosecute all acts of harassment, violence, and reprisals perpetrated against women human rights defenders.

CEDAW recommended that Nepal amend the constitution to recognise the right to self-determination of Indigenous women; that Thailand ensure that the draft Act on the Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups protects Indigenous women's rights to self-identify as Indigenous Peoples, to collective land ownership, and

to FPIC; and that Botswana and Belize implement the decisions: *Roy Sesana and Others v. The Attorney General and the Maya Leaders Alliance et al. v. The Attorney General of Belize* and adopt laws and policies to recognise the collective and customary rights of Indigenous women to their traditional lands in Botswana and Belize and of the Maya people as a collective legal subject in Belize. It was recommended that Mexico, Belize, Nepal, and Thailand ensure the participation of, and respect for, the right of Indigenous women to FPIC in all economic projects, climate change programmes and decision-making processes regarding the use of their traditional lands.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC expressed concerns about the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by Indigenous children in Ecuador,³² Honduras,³³ Peru,³⁴ Brazil,³⁵ Indonesia, particularly in Papua province,³⁶ and Norway³⁷ in relation to access to basic services in Ecuador, water and food in Honduras and Ecuador, education (Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, and Norway), including in Sami languages in Norway; health care and social protection (Honduras, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, and Norway) and birth registrations (Peru and Indonesia). The CRC underlined high levels of poverty (Indonesia, Honduras, Ecuador, and Brazil), child and maternal mortality in Brazil and in Papua province of Indonesia), child marriage in Honduras and Indonesia, as well as the impact of militarisation in Ecuador, and violence in Peru and Brazil on the rights of Indigenous children, including killings of Indigenous children in the context of forced evictions and extractive activities in Brazil. The CRC also highlighted the adverse impact of climate change on Indigenous children in Brazil.

The CRC called upon States parties to increase efforts or adopt policies and measures to combat and eliminate discrimination against Indigenous children (Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Norway, and Brazil), address child poverty (Honduras, Brazil, and Indonesia); child marriage (Honduras and Peru); child labour (Ecuador) and ensure access to wa-

ter and food (Honduras, Ecuador, and Peru); healthcare services (Honduras, Peru, Ecuador, and Indonesia), in particular culturally-sensitive health services in Indigenous languages (Peru, Brazil, and Ecuador); reduce child mortality rates in Honduras and Brazil; and ensure birth registration (Brazil, Peru, and Indonesia). The CRC also recommended that Norway, Honduras, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador and Indonesia ensure equal educational opportunities, including free access to primary and secondary education, teaching of Indigenous history and culture in Brazil, bilingual education in Ecuador and Norway, and the availability of teachers who speak Indigenous languages in Peru.

Both Peru and Brazil were requested to prevent and address violence against Indigenous children. Recalling its general comment No. 11 (2009) on Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention, the CRC recommended that Brazil and Norway prevent forced evictions; that Brazil, Ecuador, and Norway put in place measures for the detection of and intervention in cases of conflict in areas occupied by Indigenous Peoples and undertake peaceful dispute resolution. The Committee requested that Brazil complete the demarcation process and titling of Indigenous lands and territories and end the application of the *marco temporal* (temporal landmark) doctrine. Brazil, Ecuador, and Norway were recommended to obtain the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples including children, before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them. The CRC requested that Brazil address environmental degradation, illegal mining, and land exploitation, which cause irreparable harm to Indigenous children's health, and that Honduras protect the environment and address land degradation and air pollution taking into account their effects on Indigenous children. Brazil was recommended to ensure that Indigenous children's special needs and views are considered in developing policies to address climate change while Honduras was advised to take measures to adapt to climate change taking into account its effects on Indigenous children. Peru was recommended to involve Indigenous children and take their views into account in consultation processes with the business sector and Ecuador to require companies to undertake assessments of and consultations on the impact of their business activities on the rights of Indigenous children.

Other general activities of the Treaty Bodies relevant to the rights of Indigenous Peoples

General Comments and General Recommendations

The CESCR adopted general comment No. 27 (2025) on economic, social, and cultural rights and the environmental dimension of sustainable development.³⁸ CERD and the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) issued joint general recommendation No. 38 (2025) of the CERD and general comment No. 7 (2025) of the CMW on general guidelines for eradicating xenophobia toward migrants and others perceived as such.³⁹

Individual complaints

CERD adopted a decision under its individual communications procedure in a case submitted against Norway concerning the Sami people.⁴⁰ The CCPR adopted three decisions concerning the K'iche', Ixil, and Kaqchikel Mayan peoples in Guatemala;⁴¹ the situation of Norfolk Island in Australia;⁴² and the Sami in Finland.⁴³

Early Warning Measures and Urgent Action Procedures

Under its early warning and urgent action procedure, CERD sent letters to Australia,⁴⁴ France,⁴⁵ India,⁴⁶ Jamaica,⁴⁷ Japan,⁴⁸ the United States of America,⁴⁹ and the United Republic of Tanzania.⁵⁰ CERD also adopted a landmark decision regarding the rights of the Chagossian people and notably urged Mauritius and the United Kingdom to respect and guarantee the rights of the Chagossian people "to return to their ancestral lands in Diego Garcia Island"; "to self-determination while ensuring their full and meaningful participation in all decision-making processes impacting them and their land"; and "to effective remedies and full repatriation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition".

Notes and reference

1. For more information on the treaty bodies and their work: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/Overview.aspx>
2. Due to word limits, the activities of the Committee against Torture (CAT), Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT), Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) were not included.
3. CERD/C/GAB/CO/10, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FGAB%2FCO%2F10&Lang=en
4. CERD/C/UKR/CO/24-26, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FUKR%2FCO%2F24-26&Lang=en
5. CERD/BDI/CO/11-19, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FBDI%2FCO%2F11-19&Lang=en
6. CERD/C/GTM/CO18-20, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FGTM%2FCO%2F18-20&Lang=en
7. CERD/C/New ZealandL/CO/23-24, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FNew ZealandL%2FCO%2F23-24&Lang=en
8. CERD/C/SWE/CO/24-25, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FSWE%2FCO%2F24-25&Lang=en
9. CERD/C/TUN/CO/20-22, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FTUN%2FCO%2F20-22&Lang=en
10. CCPR/C/VNM/CO/4, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FVNM%2FCO%2F4&Lang=en
11. CCPR/C/BFA/CO/2, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FBFA%2FCO%2F2&Lang=en
12. PR/C/ZWE/CO/2, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FZWE%2FCO%2F2&Lang=en
13. E/C.12/CHL/CO/5, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCHL%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en
14. E/C.12/COL/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCOL%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en
15. E/C.12/LAO/CwordO/1, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FLAO%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en
16. E/C.12/RUS/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FRUS%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en
17. E/C.12/ZWE/CO/2, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FZWE%2FCO%2F2&Lang=en
18. E/C.12/PER/CO/5, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FPER%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en
19. E/C.12/PHL/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/

- Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC12%2FPHL%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en
20. E/C12/RWA/CO/5, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC12%2FRWA%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en
 21. CEDAW/C/BWA/CO/5, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FBWA%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en
 22. CEDAW/C/FJI/CO/6, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FFJI%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en
 23. CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/10, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FMEX%2FCO%2F10&Lang=en
 24. CEDAW/C/SLB/CO/4-5, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FSLB%2FCO%2F4-5&Lang=en
 25. CEDAW/C/THA/CO/8, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FTHA%2FCO%2F8&Lang=en
 26. CEDAW/C/TUV/5-6, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FTUV%2FCO%2F5-6&Lang=en
 27. CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/5-9, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FBLZ%2FCO%2F5-9&Lang=en
 28. CEDAW/C/COG/CO/8, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FCOG%2FCO%2F8&Lang=en
 29. CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/9, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F9&Lang=en
 30. CEDAW /C/COD/EP/CO/1, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FCOD%2FEP%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en
 31. CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FNPL%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en
 32. CRC/C/ECU/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FECU%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en
 33. CRC/C/HND/CO/6-7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FHND%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en
 34. CRC/C/PER/CO/6-7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FPER%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en
 35. CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FBRA%2FCO%2F5-7&Lang=en
 36. CRC/C/IDN/CO/5-6, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FIDN%2FCO%2F5-6&Lang=en
 37. CRC/C/NOR/CO/7, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/

- Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FNOR%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en E/C.12/GC/27, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/ec12gc27-general-comment-no-27-2025-economic-social>. The general comment notably recognizes that “Indigenous Peoples are among the most affected by climate change, deforestation, pollution and biodiversity loss, particularly in relation to their livelihoods, health and cultural identity” and calls upon States parties to “recognize the inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples to their ancestral lands and territories and their natural resources”, and “fully respect their right to free, prior and informed consent in all matters affecting their rights”. (paras 80 and 83).
39. CERD/C/GC/390-CMW/C/GC/8, <https://docs.un.org/CMW/C/GC/7>. The joint document notably recognizes that “the root causes of migration by members of Indigenous communities include systemic discrimination, lack of basic opportunities, violation of their right to enjoy their land and ancestral territories, including by extractive industries, structural and institutionalized violence and the specific impact of climate change” and calls upon States parties to “make the appropriate reforms to policies in order to respect the land rights of Indigenous Peoples, including measures aimed at supporting culturally appropriate reintegration, access to justice, and reparations in cases of forced displacement, with particular attention paid to land restitution and community rebuilding” and to incorporate the rights of Indigenous communities into policies for the eradication of xenophobia. “Policies and measures should be rooted in intercultural approaches and developed in close consultation with Indigenous Peoples, respecting the principle of free, prior and informed consent” (paras 57 and 58).
40. *L.J. et. al. v. Norway* CERD/C/115/D/67/2018, 5 May 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4087631?ln=en&v=pdf> concerned the construction of a power station on Sami lands that the Supreme Court of Norway determined violated Sami rights under its domestic law three years after the filing of the communication. Since the Committee found the Court’s decision inferred a violation of the Covenant and there was a subsequent settlement with the government, the complainants withdrew the communication.
41. *269 members of the K’iche’, Ixil and Kaqchiquel Maya Indigenous Peoples v. Guatemala* CCPR/C/143/D/4023/2021-4032/2021, 7 May 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4091787?ln=en&v=pdf>. The complainants were family members of Indigenous persons executed or disappeared during the internal armed conflict who remained subjected to extreme poverty and displacement. The Committee found that the continued forced displacement and its impacts on bodily integrity and health, family unity, cultural life, privacy, and children’s rights violated the Covenant. Its recommendations included providing monetary compensation, housing assistance, healthcare assistance, and a formal apology as well as greater efforts to search and recover disappeared family members.
42. *A.B. v. Australia*, CCPR/C/144/D/3274/2018, 8 October 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4090283?ln=en&v=pdf>. The complaint alleged that Australia violated the rights of the Indigenous inhabitants to free passage with the adoption of Norfolk Island Amendment Act of 2015 abolishing the island’s legislative body and reducing its autonomy. The Committee found that the complainant had failed to substantiate his claims and, therefore, the communication was found inadmissible.
43. *A.P., T.K., A.M., J.A. and TV v. Finland*, CCPR/C/144/D/3696/2020, 10 October

2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4090523?ln=en&v=pdf> was filed by five self-identified Sami who were denied inclusion on the electoral rolls of the Sami Parliament, alleging it had relied on an improper review of their ancestry. The Committee found the complaint to be inadmissible due to the complainants' failure to show that their electoral roll application review was "clearly arbitrary or amounted to a manifest error or denial of justice".

44. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-australia.pdf>. The letter relates to the situation of Indigenous children in the Australian criminal justice system.
45. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/CS/ks 12 May 2025. The letter concerns the Western Guiana Power Plant project on the Kali'na Indigenous Peoples lands in French Guiana. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-france.pdf>
46. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks 12 May 2025. The letter addresses the National Tiger Conservation Authority's plans to displace tribal and forest-dwelling Indigenous Peoples in 18 states. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-india-2.pdf>
47. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025. The letter involves the situation of the Maroon Indigenous Peoples and threats to their communal forest known as Quick Step. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-jamaica.pdf>
48. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025. The letter addresses the construction of a new U.S. military base on the island of Okinawa and its impact on the Indigenous people of Ryukyu/Okinawa. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-japan2.pdf>
49. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025. The letter concerns the impact of a proposed mining operation on the religious rights of the San Carlos Apache Tribe. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-usa2.pdf> CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025. The letter concerns the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), on the Mauna Kea Mountain in the State of Hawai'i of the United States of America, and its impact on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Native Hawaiians. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-usa3.pdf>
50. CERD/EWUAP/115thsession/2025/CS/BJ/ks, 12 May 2025. The letter relates the situation of the Maasai Indigenous People in Ngorongoro and Loliondo areas. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-tanzania.pdf>
51. Decision I(2025) 2 December 2025, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCERD%2FEWU%2F11263&Lang=en

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UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ("World Heritage Convention") was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 1972. With 196 States Parties, it is today one of the most widely ratified multilateral treaties. Its main purpose is the identification and collective protection of cultural and natural heritage sites of "Outstanding Universal Value" (OUV). The Convention embodies the idea that some places are so special and important that their protection is not only the responsibility of the states in which they are located but also a duty of the international community as a whole.

The implementation of the Convention is governed by the World Heritage Committee (WHC), consisting of 21 States Parties. The WHC keeps a list of the sites it considers to be of OUV ("World Heritage List") and monitors the conservation of these sites to ensure that they are adequately protected and safeguarded for future generations. Sites can only be listed following a formal nomination by the State Party in whose territory they are situated, and are classified as either "natural", "cultural", or "mixed" World Heritage sites.

Well over a hundred World Heritage sites overlap with Indigenous Peoples' territories. Although most of these are classified as purely "natural sites", without recognition of Indigenous cultural aspects, there are also some that are listed for their Indigenous cultural values or interlinkages between nature and Indigenous culture.

The WHC is supported by a secretariat (the UNESCO World Heritage Centre) and three Advisory Bodies that provide technical evaluations of World Heritage nominations and help monitor the state of conservation of World Heritage sites: the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

In 2017, Indigenous delegates attending the 41st session of the WHC created the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage (IIPFWH) as a platform dedicated to strategizing and advocating for full respect for Indigenous Peoples' rights within World Heritage processes.¹ While the IIPFWH does not fulfil any official functions, the WHC has recognized it as an "important reflection platform on the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in the identification, conservation and management of World Heritage properties".²

47th Session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC), Paris, July 2025

The WHC's 47th session at UNESCO headquarters in Paris (47COM) began with a scandal. At the request of Türkiye, the Dutch NGO "Save the Tigris Foundation", which has campaigned against hydrological projects in the Kurdish region of Türkiye, was excluded from the meeting based on unsubstantiated allegations that it was politicizing technical issues and following a separatist agenda. Türkiye's request was made just minutes before the WHC's decision on the admission of observers and was approved by the WHC without verification of the allegations.³ The effect of this precedent could have immense consequences for civil society participation in the World Heritage Convention.

47COM was attended by significantly more Indigenous participants than most previous sessions, in large part because the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples for the first time supported the participation of Indigenous representatives in the WHC.⁴ In total, six Indigenous

participants were supported by the Fund. Ahead of the WHC session, an online training session was organized by the UN Voluntary Fund, Nia Tero, Docip, and IWGIA, aimed at increasing knowledge of the World Heritage Convention and strengthening the meaningful engagement and participation of Indigenous Peoples in World Heritage processes.⁵

The effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the sessions of the WHC continues to be obstructed by the fact that Indigenous Peoples' organizations and NGOs are normally only allowed to speak on an agenda item after the decision on the item has already been adopted by the WHC. This practice continues despite a 2021 "Declaration of Principles" by the General Assembly of States Parties, which commits the WHC to encouraging interventions from observers, including Indigenous Peoples' representatives, before decisions are made.⁶ Only during the discussion on some of the general items, at the beginning of 47COM, were Indigenous representatives able to speak *before* decisions were adopted. This included agenda item 5D ("Progress report on World Heritage Convention and Sustainable Development"), where the Chair of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage (IIPFWH) was invited to present a six-minute report from the podium,⁷ and agenda item 5A ("Report of the World Heritage Centre"), where the IIPFWH was allowed to make a statement from the floor before the adoption of the decision.

In the statement on item 5A, the IIPFWH welcomed the World Heritage Centre's emphasis on the need for a consistent human rights-based approach, and its recognition that "capacity-building, benefit-sharing, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) must become standard practice in nomination processes, governance structures and monitoring mechanisms".⁸ The IIPFWH underlined that further revisions to the World Heritage Convention's Operational Guidelines are crucially needed to ensure the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and respect for their internationally recognized rights in World Heritage sites and processes. In this regard, the IIPFWH drew attention to the Outcome Document of the "International Expert Workshop on Recognizing and Respecting Indigenous Peoples' Heritage Values in World Heritage Sites" (Geneva, January 2024), which outlines Indigenous Peoples' priorities, concerns, vision, and recommendations regarding the implementation of the Convention based on a comprehensive as-

essment. The IIPFWH informed the WHC that the Outcome Document had been submitted to UNESCO and posted on the IIPFWH's website.⁹

Noteworthy WHC decisions on the state of conservation of World Heritage sites

As every year, the WHC adopted many decisions on the state of conservation (SOC) of World Heritage sites in Indigenous Peoples' territories. Several of these directly address questions regarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For instance, the WHC's Decision on Chitwan National Park (Nepal)¹⁰ recalls concerns of alleged human rights abuses raised, among others, by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, notes with significant concern that past relocations of people from the park have not been undertaken in line with international standards, and requests that Nepal engage with the affected communities to ensure that any remaining grievances are appropriately documented and redressed in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The decision encourages Nepal to engage with the Special Rapporteur in this matter.

The decision on the Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex (Thailand)¹¹ requests the State Party to continue enhancing participatory management and governance arrangements, welcomes its focus on engagement with the Karen community in Ban Bang Kloy and the efforts to resolve conflicts, and requests that Thailand continue working closely with the affected communities to address the longstanding conflicts following a rights-based approach. The human rights situation of the Karen in the KKFC has been the subject of multiple communications by UN human rights mechanisms to the Government of Thailand, UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).¹² The decision also reiterates the WHC's concern about the potential impacts of the proposed Nong Ta Dang dam/reservoir on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property and the already difficult relationship with the local communities.

The decision on Kahuzi-Biega National Park (KBNP) (Democratic Republic of the Congo)¹³ expresses concern about the involvement of

eco-guards in the commission of conservation crimes and urges the DRC to take specific measures to put an end to these acts. It welcomes the progress made in implementing measures to strengthen the rights of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with the recommendations of the 2019 Bukavu Dialogue in favour of the Batwa and the 2022 report of a commission of inquiry on alleged violations by park staff in KBNP, and urges the DRC to continue to fully implement these recommendations, while ensuring that its progress is fully integrated into park management policies. It also recalls the 2022 decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) regarding KBNP¹⁴ and urges the DRC to implement all the measures requested in this decision, noting that they are essential not only to ensure respect for the rights of the Batwa but also for the preservation of Kahuzi-Biega's OUV.

The decision on Salonga National Park (DRC)¹⁵ welcomes the State Party's efforts to promote conservation while respecting the rights of local communities and improve the relationship between the populations and the park, takes note with satisfaction of a reduction in alleged violations of the communities' rights, and encourages the DRC to guarantee the full functioning of a recently established complaints and appeals mechanism. It also "encourages the State Party to finalize the Yaelima and Kitawala communities' supervision programme to limit the negative impacts on the park's resources... and insists that any future relocation be voluntary and in line with the principles of the Convention and relevant international standards."

The decision on Virunga National Park (DRC)¹⁶ notes with appreciation the "establishment of a bilingual complaint management mechanism, contributing to better governance of the property while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples..." Additionally, a general decision on the World Heritage properties in the DRC¹⁷ encourages the DRC "to continue, at the level of all World Heritage properties in the DRC, ongoing actions to train all staff on human rights issues and to involve IPLCs in property management processes, in accordance with international standards and the 2015 Policy on World Heritage and Sustainable Development."

The WHC's decision on the Sangha Trinational (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo)¹⁸ welcomes the sustained efforts of the States Parties to promote, engage and guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peo-

ples. It calls on them to ensure the comprehensive implementation of the recommendations of the 2020 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International independent review of allegations raised in the media regarding human rights violations in the context of WWF's conservation work.¹⁹

The decision on the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) (Tanzania)²⁰ states that the involvement of stakeholders and rightsholders remains essential in the implementation and review of the Multiple Land Use Model (MLUM) and reiterates the WHC's view "that the continued implementation of a MLUM... which ensures a clear human rights-based approach, is appropriate in principle." It stresses the importance of full and effective engagement and consultation with all stakeholders and rightsholders, "including those who oppose relocation", and asserts that further on-site engagement with UNESCO, IUCN and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is required to ensure that the views of local communities on the MLUM review and the voluntary resettlement scheme are heard, requesting a new Reactive Monitoring mission. The "voluntary resettlement scheme" has been the subject of multiple communications by UN human rights mechanisms to Tanzania as well as the WHC and the Advisory Bodies.²¹ Representatives of the NCA's Indigenous communities underlined in a statement at 47COM that "the so-called 'voluntary relocation program'... is far from voluntary. Our communities have faced coercion, denial of services, and restriction of traditional practices. The human cost of these relocations is devastating, particularly for women and children."²²

The decision on the Laponian Area (Sweden)²³ expresses significant concern that the proposed Kallak mining project near the property poses a significant threat to the cultural and natural values of Lapponia, in particular in relation to the Sámi reindeer transhumance system, a key attribute of the OUV of the property, and urges Sweden not to grant an Environmental Permit for the project. The threats posed by the project were the subject of a 2022 joint communication of UN human rights mandate-holders to Sweden.²⁴ The decision also expresses concern over the numerous past and new development projects within the setting of the property and encourages Sweden to develop a Sustainable Development Strategy for the area, in full consultation with the Sámi, in order to better align heritage conservation and management

with sustainable development goals. It reiterates an earlier request to the State Party to ensure that any further consideration of mining permits guarantees the FPIC of the Sámi, and to integrate FPIC procedures into decision-making processes concerning all future major infrastructure and industrial projects.

The decision on Wood Buffalo National Park (Canada)²⁵ takes note with concern of reports from First Nations and Métis regarding ongoing challenges in the involvement of Indigenous rightsholders and encourages Canada to align future strategic planning with emerging co-governance frameworks and the priorities of Indigenous Peoples during revisions of the property's management plan and to incorporate Indigenous Peoples' perspectives into future state of conservation reports. The decision also urges Canada to urgently complete an independent risk assessment of the oil sands tailings ponds upstream of the park, highlighting concerns raised by Indigenous rightsholders in this regard.

The WHC's decision on Angkor (Cambodia)²⁶ notes the conclusions of a 2024 Reactive Monitoring mission regarding the ongoing relocation of residents from areas inside the property to new townships. The decision requests that Cambodia "continue providing incentives to legal residents and illegal occupants to accept voluntary relocation", "enhance the living conditions of people who have been resettled in relocation towns", and "continue to adhere strictly to international human rights standards for the relocation process... while also strengthening formal conflict resolution mechanisms". The relocation programme was the subject of a 2024 joint communication of UN human rights experts to Cambodia and UNESCO, expressing concern about reports of "forced eviction and resettlement of at least 40,000 people, including Indigenous Peoples, from their homes and lands in Angkor."²⁷ The communication to UNESCO noted that concerns had been raised over the role assumed by the World Heritage Centre in the context of the evictions.²⁸

Noteworthy WHC decisions on nominations

The WHC considered several nominations affecting Indigenous Peoples' lands, territories or resources in 2025, approving almost all of them, al-

though the Advisory Bodies (IUCN and ICOMOS) had, in several cases, recommended a referral or deferral. This was in line with the general trend towards the WHC's complete disregard of Advisory Body advice when it comes to assessing nominations. Out of 32 sites under consideration at the Paris session, 28 were approved by the WHC even though the Advisory Bodies had only recommended 17 for inscription, once again illustrating the politicized nature of the WHC's decision-making.²⁹

The Peruaçu River Canyon (Brazil) was inscribed as a natural site although IUCN had recommended a referral in order to enable all questions regarding Indigenous Peoples' FPIC to be resolved. While an area subject to a pending land claim by the Indigenous Xakriabá people was excluded from the nominated area because the Xakriabá had emphasized that they would not grant their approval for the nomination before the recognition of their pending land claim, IUCN noted that no evidence had been provided on whether the Xakriabá people agreed with the reduced area being nominated, which is also of historical, cultural, and spiritual importance to them.³⁰ IUCN also highlighted that the Xakriabá representatives had called for the inclusion of cultural heritage in the candidacy as a World Heritage site, as a focus only on natural heritage would render the culture and practices of the Xakriabá invisible. IUCN further noted that the representatives of the Xakriabá people expressed concern that they had only been consulted after the preparation of the nomination dossier and had been asked to legitimize pre-established decisions, stressing that the consultation process should not have been limited in time.³¹ The Government of Brazil committed to proposing the addition of the now excluded area to the World Heritage site should a solution to the judicial dispute be found and the consent of the Xakriabá be obtained in the future.³²

The Murujuga Cultural Landscape (Australia) was listed as a cultural World Heritage site that bears testimony to the living cultural traditions of the Ngarda-Ngarli people and the spiritual relationship between people and landscape. The OUV of the site lies in the traditional system governing it, which manifests in unified tangible and intangible attributes that attest to at least 50,000 years of Ngarda-Ngarli using and caring for the land and seascape.³³ The Murujuga nomination process was Indigenous people-led and the management of Murujuga is

characterized by a collaborative, Indigenous-led approach. In inscribing the site, the WHC ignored the advice of ICOMOS to refer the nomination back to the State Party in order to allow it to address concerns regarding the impacts of industrial development in the vicinity of the property.³⁴

The Wixárika Route (Mexico), a serial property of 20 sites in north-central Mexico that connects sacred landscapes central to the spiritual and cultural practices of the Wixárika Indigenous people, was listed as a cultural World Heritage site. The nomination was a community-led initiative of the Wixárika people and collaboration with the Wixárika communities is at the heart of the management of the property. Evidence of the FPIC of the Wixárika communities was submitted as part of the nomination.³⁵

Hin Nam No National Park (Laos) was listed under natural criteria as a transboundary extension to the Phong Nha-Ke Bang World Heritage site (Vietnam), in line with the advice provided by IUCN. IUCN's evaluation³⁶ notes that Hin Nam No has a collaborative management system enabling strong community participation across various management levels, and both IUCN and the WHC commended Laos "for the thorough participatory approach in developing this nomination and in obtaining the FPIC, in addition to efforts to engage and include local communities in the governance and management of the property".³⁷ According to the nomination submitted by Laos, the FPIC approach in Hin Nam No was "not a one-off process to secure validation of an existing design" but rather an ongoing consultation process resulting in an "FPIC Action Plan" aimed at strengthening co-management mechanisms, promoting community benefits, protecting rights, and supporting livelihood security.³⁸ The FPIC Action Plan officially submitted by Lao authorities represents a commitment to use the World Heritage process to respond to the concerns of "ethnic groups and local communities" and includes a strong commitment to respect and respond to the needs and rights of the area's Indigenous Peoples (various groups of hunter-gatherers and shifting cultivators). However, given that the concept of Indigenous Peoples is not recognized by the Lao government and no Indigenous Peoples' rights framework exists within the country, the nomination does not contain clear evidence that the Indigenous groups of the area approved of the nomination.

Other noteworthy WHC decisions

Perhaps the most significant decision for Indigenous Peoples was Decision 47 COM 11, which recognizes “the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples when navigating the World Heritage system” and requests that the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and States Parties “work together with Indigenous Peoples to identify opportunities to better reflect their heritage values, including reflecting the narratives of Indigenous Peoples in the statements of OUV, and enhance their participation under the Convention and present a proposal to [the WHC’s] 48th session”. This decision provides an important opportunity for the IIPFWH and other Indigenous organizations to engage with the Convention bodies on these crucial issues.

Another significant decision was Decision 47 COM 5C, by which the WHC adopted the “Nairobi Outcome Document on Heritage and Authenticity”,³⁹ which identifies and explains what constitutes authenticity and integrity in an African context and similar contexts globally. The document moves the understanding of authenticity closer to Indigenous Peoples’ understandings by underscoring that “considering authenticity must include understanding the continuity of heritage values upheld by communities, who are the owners or custodians of this heritage” and that “communities define the values which determine the authenticity of heritage”. The document emphasizes: “Heritage is community-centred, pluralistic, dynamic, and evolves over time and goes beyond the tangible. Thus, its significance cannot be fossilised.” The WHC requested that the secretariat include agenda items related to the concept of authenticity at the next sessions of both the General Assembly of States Parties and the WHC.

Also noteworthy is the WHC’s adoption of a new World Heritage Capacity-Building Strategy (2025–2035).⁴⁰ The Strategy identifies a set of capacity-building priorities that provide the basis for coordinated action over the next decade. One of those priorities is “Fostering People-Centred Approaches”, which entails “promoting the full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation of Indigenous Peoples... in heritage management and capacity-building programmes”.⁴¹

Finally, Decision 47 COM 8A takes note of the updated Tentative Lists⁴² submitted by States Parties as of April 2025. Tentative Lists

are inventories of the sites that States Parties consider suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List and intend to nominate during the following five to 10 years. Many sites on the Tentative Lists are within Indigenous Peoples' territories. Most of these sites have been included on the Tentative Lists without the FPIC of the Indigenous Peoples concerned and, in most cases, Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and cultural values are not adequately reflected in the statement of potential OUV.⁴³

Of great concern to many Indigenous representatives at 47COM was the conflation of Indigenous Peoples with local communities in some of the WHC's decisions and working documents, a practice that creates confusion in legal and policy frameworks and may have the effect of undermining the distinct status and rights of Indigenous Peoples under international law.⁴⁴ The language used in some documents even appeared to subsume Indigenous Peoples under local communities as a broader category.⁴⁵

18th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), Geneva, July 2025

The Expert Mechanism adopted a proposal that the Human Rights Council hold a panel discussion on recognizing and respecting the rights and values of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.⁴⁶ The Expert Mechanism proposed that the panel discussion be organized under the title "The World Heritage Convention: Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Engagement" during the Council's 63rd session in September 2026. The proposal was made in recognition of the Outcome Document of the International Expert Workshop on Recognizing and Respecting Indigenous Peoples' Heritage Values in World Heritage Sites (Geneva 2024).

60th Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, September/October 2025

In accordance with the proposal from EMRIP, the Human Rights Council decided that the theme of its annual panel discussion on the rights

of Indigenous Peoples, to be held during its 63rd session in September 2026, would be “The World Heritage Convention: Indigenous Peoples’ rights and engagement”.⁴⁷

25th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, Paris, November 2025

Regarding the concept of authenticity, the General Assembly adopted a resolution “acknowledging the need to ensure pluralism in World Heritage processes and practices” and welcoming the “Nairobi Outcome Document on Heritage and Authenticity... [as] an important addition to the understanding of the concept, by emphasizing community-centred, community-driven custodianship, articulating tangible and intangible aspects, in the nomination and evaluation of nominations, and in the management of World Heritage properties”.⁴⁸ Authenticity in the context of the World Heritage Convention is a condition that all cultural properties must meet in order to be deemed of OUV. The concept is therefore of fundamental importance in the implementation of the Convention.

Another resolution expresses serious concern that the resources available to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies are no longer sufficient to carry out the statutory activities required in the implementation of the Convention. It calls on States Parties to pay outstanding contributions and make voluntary contributions, and underlines that a definitive solution must be identified to continue to fully meet the objectives of the Convention.⁴⁹

Developments within the IIPFWH

As a result of the relatively limited and fluctuating participation of Indigenous Peoples’ organizations in the sessions of the WHC to date, the IIPFWH continues to be in the process of strengthening its internal organization. During the Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus meetings at 47COM, it was decided that the IIPFWH Steering Committee would henceforth operate through a governance structure composed of two Co-Chairs

rather than a single chairperson. The Co-Chairs of the IIPFWH are selected from among the Steering Committee's seven members, each of whom represents one of the seven socio-cultural regions recognized for Indigenous Peoples within the UN system. In October 2025, with the appointment of the regional representative for the North America region, the IIPFWH Steering Committee became representative of all seven regions for the first time.

Subsequently, the Steering Committee began with the finalization of terms of reference for the IIPFWH (including Steering Committee and Secretariat), a task that the Indigenous caucuses at the Geneva expert workshop, 46COM, and 47COM had all identified as a priority. At the time of writing, the terms of reference are still being finalized.

Notes and references

1. See *The Indigenous World 2019*, p. 662-664.
2. Decision 41 COM 7, para. 41. Available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6940/>.
3. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf-DejJkbZ8&t=2689s>.
4. See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/funding-budget/indigenous-peoples-fund> and <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2758>.
5. In addition, the UN Indigenous Fellowship Program included a dedicated session on the World Heritage Convention and Indigenous Peoples, for all Indigenous Fellows, in its annual training program in Geneva.
6. Doc. WHC/21/23.GA/INF.10, para. 9.
7. See: https://youtu.be/uv_j8CRgGhg?t=7967.
8. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv_j8CRgGhg&t=2261s.
9. The Outcome Document is available at <https://iipfwh.org/international-expert-workshop-on-recognizing-and-respecting-indigenous-peoples-heritage-values-in-world-heritage-sites/>.
10. Decision 47 COM 7B.12.
11. 47 COM 7B.15.
12. See, e.g., communications OTH 7/2019, OTH 8/2019, THA 2/2019; OTH 22/2020, OTH 23/2020, THA 4/2020; OTH 209/2021, THA 4/2021. Available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.
13. 47 COM 7A.10.
14. ACHPR, Decision on Communication 588/15, available at <https://achpr.au.int/en/decisions-communications/58815-minority-rights-group-v-v-democratic-republic-congo-drc>.
15. 47 COM 7B.46.
16. 47 COM 7A.12.
17. 47 COM 7A.8.
18. 47 COM 7B.45.
19. "Embedding human rights into nature conservation: from intention to action", available at https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/wwf_independent_review_.

20. 47 COM 7B.60.
21. See, e.g., communications TZA 3/2021, OTH 262/2021, OTH 263/2021, OTH 264/2021; TZA 2/2023, all available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.
22. See <https://youtu.be/yomnrc30V68?t=11444>.
23. 47 COM 7B.55.
24. Communication SWE 2/2022. See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=27057>.
25. 47 COM 7B.21.
26. 47 COM 7B.63.
27. Communications KHM1/2024 and OTH 136/2024, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.
28. See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=29451>. UNESCO's reply is available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gld=38805>.
29. Patry, Marc and Jiayao Jiang, "Measuring Divergence: The Concordance Factor for World Heritage Committee Decisions", PARKS 31.1 (May 2025), <https://parksjournal.com/2025/05/30/latest-issue/>.
30. IUCN World Heritage Evaluations 2025, Doc. WHC/25/47.COM/INF.8B2, pp. 87-98.
31. See *ibid.* and the records of the FPIC consultations with the Xakriabá contained in the supplementary information to the nomination submitted by Brazil in February 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/document/220509>, pp. 80-104 and 178-204.
32. See *ibid.* and WHC Decision 47 COM 8B.8, para. 6.
33. WHC Decision 47 COM 8B.13.
34. ICOMOS World Heritage Evaluations 2025, Doc. WHC/25/47.COM/INF.8B1, pp. 54-68.
35. See *ibid.*, pp. 295-297; and Mexico's supplementary information of 24 October, <https://whc.unesco.org/document/219023>.
36. IUCN World Heritage Evaluations 2025, pp. 45-54.
37. WHC Decision 47 COM 8B.6.
38. The nomination documents are available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/951/documents/>.
39. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393789>.
40. Decision 47 COM 6A.
41. See Doc. WHC/25/47.COM/6A.
42. The Tentative Lists are presented in Doc. WHC/25/47.COM/8A.
43. See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/culturalrights/sr/outcome-document-iipfwh-expert-workshop-.pdf>.
44. See the July 2023 joint statement on this matter by the three UN mechanisms on Indigenous Peoples, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/news/joint-statement-by-the-un-mechanisms-of-indigenous-peoples>.
45. See Decision 47 COM 5C, para. 9 and Doc. WHC/25/47.COM/5D, Section VIII.
46. See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/indigenouspeoples/emrip/activities/emrip-2025-proposals.pdf>.
47. Resolution A/HRC/RES/60/13, Human rights and Indigenous Peoples, para. 16.
48. Resolution 25 GA 9.
49. Resolution 25 GA 8.

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UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is a specialized advisory body operating under the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its mandate encompasses providing guidance to ECOSOC and UN entities on matters concerning Indigenous Peoples, fostering awareness of these issues, coordinating related efforts across the UN system, and advancing the implementation and effectiveness of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Established in 2000, the UNPFII consists of 16 independent experts who serve three-year terms, with the option for one renewal. Eight members are nominated by governments and elected by ECOSOC according to the UN's regional groupings, while the remaining eight are nominated by Indigenous Peoples' organizations and appointed by the ECOSOC President. These members represent the seven global socio-cultural regions,¹ with one seat rotating among Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

The UNPFII addresses a broad range of thematic areas affecting Indigenous Peoples, including culture, education, health, environment, human rights, and economic and social development. It meets annually for 10 working days, providing a space for direct dialogue among Indigenous Peoples, UNPFII members, Member States, UN agencies, academics, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Following its sessions, the UNPFII issues a report with recommendations and draft decisions for submission to ECOSOC.²

Twenty-Fourth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The twenty-fourth session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), held from 21 April to 2 May 2025 at UN Headquarters in New York under the theme of “Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within UN Member States and the UN system, including identifying good practices and addressing challenges”, was particularly timely as the UNDRIP approaches its 20th anniversary. Discussions underscored the need to translate global commitments into tangible actions and highlighted the role of multilateralism in advancing the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The discussions emphasized that achieving peace and security for Indigenous Peoples is inseparable from the full implementation of the UNDRIP, which guarantees rights to self-determination, land, culture, and participation in decision-making. The UNPFII stressed that peace cannot be sustained without justice, equality, and respect for Indigenous governance systems.

Impact of armed conflict and colonial legacies

The UNPFII highlighted findings from the study *“Impact of colonization and armed conflicts on Indigenous Peoples’ rights: the imperative of peacebuilding”*, which revealed ongoing displacement, loss of life, and intergenerational trauma caused by wars and colonial structures. Indigenous Peoples often remain invisible in peace processes, despite being among the most affected. The UNPFII called for States and international actors to integrate Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives into peacebuilding strategies and ensure compliance with the UNDRIP.

Calls for immediate action in conflict zones

In reviewing ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples, the UNPFII highlighted regions where conflict, instability, and human rights con-

cerns persist, emphasizing the importance of protecting Indigenous Peoples and their territories. It provided specific recommendations for countries experiencing persistent violence. India was urged to restore peace in Manipur and address decades of displacement and trauma. The UNPFII demanded an end to militarization and criminalization in Nicaragua's Moskitia region and called for the release of arbitrarily detained Indigenous leaders. In Myanmar, ongoing airstrikes and instability following the coup were condemned, with appeals for robust human rights monitoring. Similarly, the UNPFII expressed concern over violence in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Sudan, urging inclusive peace processes that involve Indigenous Peoples.

Truth, reconciliation, and justice

Truth-telling was identified as a prerequisite for reconciliation and sustainable peace. The UNPFII highlighted with particular concern the disproportionately high incarceration rates of Indigenous children and the violations of international conventions against torture, emphasizing the urgent need for culturally appropriate access to justice. It also encouraged States to document cases of internal colonialism and dismantle structures that perpetuate inequality.

Women and youth in peacebuilding

Indigenous women's role in peace negotiations was strongly emphasized. Despite being adversely affected by armed conflict and gender-based violence, their contributions to conflict resolution remain overlooked. The UNPFII urged States to ensure Indigenous women's participation in peace processes and reaffirmed previous calls for the implementation of agreements such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in Bangladesh. Indigenous youth engagement was also highlighted as critical for shaping sustainable futures and fostering intergenerational leadership.

Global and regional security concerns

The UNPFII highlighted the unique vulnerabilities of Indigenous Peoples in contexts of armed conflict and regional instability, emphasizing the need for rights-based and inclusive approaches to peace and security. It drew attention to the serious consequences of the Russian aggression in Ukraine on Indigenous Peoples, including conscription and persecution in Crimea, and called for constructive negotiations to achieve a just and durable peace. Additionally, the UNPFII urged States to halt extractive projects that are fuelling conflict and environmental harm, stressing that resource exploitation without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) undermines peace and security.

The UNPFII reaffirmed that achieving sustainable peace for Indigenous Peoples goes beyond ending hostilities. It requires formal recognition of their rights, inclusion in decision-making, and the dismantling of systemic discrimination. Integrating Indigenous knowledge and leadership into peacebuilding is essential for achieving justice, equity, and lasting stability.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2025

On 8 August 2025, the UN commemorated the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples³ under the theme "Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures". The virtual event explored how artificial intelligence (AI) intersects with Indigenous rights, emphasizing both opportunities and risks. AI can support language revitalization, cultural preservation, and climate adaptation; however, without safeguards, it risks reinforcing colonial legacies, misappropriating Indigenous knowledge, and deepening digital divides.

Speakers highlighted that decisions on AI are often made without Indigenous Peoples' participation, raising concerns about data sovereignty and free, prior, and informed consent. Exclusion from governance processes threatens self-determination and justice, while AI-driven extractive industries and data centres near Indigenous lands exacerbate

environmental degradation and resource conflicts—issues directly linked to peace and security.

The discussion stressed that technology is never neutral: it can either empower historically marginalized communities or perpetuate inequality. Ensuring Indigenous Peoples' leadership in AI governance and ethical frameworks is critical to prevent harm and promote inclusive innovation. By embedding Indigenous Peoples' voices in global technology debates, the event underscored that peace, security, and sustainable futures depend on rights-based approaches to emerging technologies.

International Expert Group Meeting

From 1-3 December 2025, the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch organized a virtual Expert Group Meeting on a theme recommended by the UNPFII and endorsed by ECOSOC: "Recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights in the context of the climate crisis, biodiversity governance and territorial integrity: focusing on nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, including pastoralists and shifting cultivators".⁴

The meeting examined the intersecting dynamics of climate change, biodiversity governance and territorial integrity as they affect Indigenous Peoples, including mobile Indigenous Peoples, and looked at pathways for the recognition and protection of their rights within international legal frameworks, as well as biodiversity and climate change governance, ensuring that Indigenous Peoples' voices, knowledge, and lifeways are respected and actively integrated into global solutions.

UNPFII Members – 2023-2025

The members of the UNPFII from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025 were as follows: Mr. Vital Bambanze (Burundi), Ms. Tove Søvndahl Gant (Denmark), Mr. Ali Hajilari (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Keith M. Harper (United States of America), Ms. Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim (Chad), Ms. Aluki Kotierk (Canada), Ms. Li Nan (China), Mr. Suleiman Mamutov (Ukraine), Mr. Bornface Museke Mate (Namibia), Ms. Hannah McGlade

(Australia), Mr. Darío José Mejía Montalvo (Colombia), Ms. Naw Ei Ei Min (Myanmar), Ms. Hanieh Moghani (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Rodrigo Eduardo Paillalef Monnard (Chile), Mr. Geoffrey Roth (United States), Ms. Valentina Vyacheslavovna Sovkina (Russian Federation). More details on the members can be found online.⁵

Notes and references

1. Africa; the Arctic; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific.
2. See more at: United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)
3. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2025. Accessed 17 November 2025. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/events/IDWIP-2025>
4. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights in the context of the climate crisis, biodiversity governance and territorial integrity: focusing on nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, including pastoralists and shifting cultivators. Accessed 5 December 2025. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/events/egm2025>
5. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Membership of Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Accessed November 17, 2025. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii/current-unpfii-members>

*This article was written by the **Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch/Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (IPDB/SPFII).***



UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders is established under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).¹ The Aarhus Convention is an international instrument on environmental democracy, open for accession to any UN Member State. There are currently 48 Parties, including 47 States and the European Union.²

In October 2021, the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention adopted, by consensus, decision VII/9³ establishing a rapid response mechanism in the form of a Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders to deal with cases related to article 3(8) of the Convention. Article 3(8) imposes a legally binding obligation on Aarhus Parties to ensure that environmental defenders are not penalized, persecuted or harassed for exercising their rights under the Convention.

The role of the Special Rapporteur is to take measures to protect environmental defenders experiencing (or at imminent threat of experiencing) such penalization, persecution or harassment. It is the first mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders to be established within a legally binding framework either under the UN system or other inter-governmental structure.

The definition of environmental defenders is broad and inclusive. It covers anyone who seeks to protect the right to live in an environment adequate to their health and well-being. This

includes Indigenous environmental defenders, who are particularly exposed to threats and attacks.

Within the territory of Aarhus Parties, the Special Rapporteur can deal with cases of penalization, persecution or harassment by any public or private actor. Outside this territory (for instance, in Africa, Asia-Pacific, or Latin America), the Special Rapporteur can deal with cases of penalization, persecution or harassment by a State entity or a State-owned company of an Aarhus Party; or by private companies headquartered in an Aarhus Party.

Anyone can submit a complaint to the Special Rapporteur, either on their own behalf or on behalf of a victim. There is a complaint form available on the Special Rapporteur's webpage, which must be submitted, together with any supporting evidence, to bring it to the attention of the mandate.⁴

The Special Rapporteur is elected for a term of four years, spanning the inter-sessional period between two sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, and is eligible for one re-election.

On 24 June 2022, Michel Forst was elected, by consensus, as the first Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders (hereinafter, Special Rapporteur) at the third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. On 21 November 2025, he was re-elected for a further four-year term by the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session. His current mandate runs until the next Meeting of the Parties, scheduled to take place in fall 2029.

In 2025, the Special Rapporteur conducted various activities aimed at strengthening the protection of environmental defenders, with particular attention paid to those most at risk, including Indigenous Peoples. He engaged in numerous protection and prevention activities, including: dealing with complaints; conducting thematic work on peaceful environmental protests and civil disobedience; organizing consultations with environmental defenders; undertaking visits to several Aarhus Parties; participating in international events; and issuing public statements and contributions to relevant policy frameworks.

Complaints

The Special Rapporteur can receive complaints on alleged violations of article 3(8) of the Aarhus Convention. Any member of the public can submit a complaint to the Special Rapporteur, either on their own behalf, or on behalf of a victim with their consent. The submission of a complaint is confidential, and complainants are not required to have exhausted domestic remedies before submitting a complaint. Dealing with these complaints constitutes the core work of the rapid response mechanism and therefore of the Special Rapporteur's mandate.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2025, the Special Rapporteur received 28 complaints. As of 31 December 2025, 24 of the 103 complaints that the Special Rapporteur had received since his first election in June 2022 were publicly accessible on his webpage.⁵

The Special Rapporteur has identified the following key trends and threats⁶ in this regard:

- Profiles of perpetrators: State bodies and public officials (72% of complaints); private companies (28%); private individuals (4%); the media (2%); and professional regulators (2%).
- Main form of threats: criminal investigations and prosecutions (55% of complaints); verbal and physical threats and attacks (27%); Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) (20%); police brutality or abuse (15%); sanctions in professional life (6%); measures affecting immigration status (4%); administrative harassment of environmental organizations (3%). 60% of the complaints involved multiple forms of harassment.

The Special Rapporteur has various diplomatic, legal, and media tools at his disposal to deal with the complaints he receives. Each complaint is considered on a case-by-case basis. However, as a general rule, the first step in dealing with a complaint is for the Special Rapporteur to send a letter of allegation to the government and/or company concerned by the allegations.

In 2025, in addition to dealing with new complaints received, the Special Rapporteur paid particular attention to following up on complaints, including through country visits. These visits included:

- Sweden, 3 – 5 March 2025: travel to Stockholm to follow up on two complaints.⁷
- Norway, 5 – 7 March 2025: travel to Oslo to follow up on two complaints.⁸
- United Kingdom, 1 – 4 April 2025: travel to London to follow up on three complaints.⁹ The Special Rapporteur also visited an environmental defender,¹⁰ Dr. Patrick Hart, in prison where he was serving a 12-month prison sentence for participating in a peaceful environmental protest.¹¹

During these visits, the Special Rapporteur met with the authorities, complainants and victims. He also participated in various meetings with other institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental defenders, specifically to discuss the general situation of environmental defenders in the countries.

Guidelines on the Right to Peaceful Environmental Protest and Civil Disobedience

In October 2025, the Special Rapporteur published his *Guidelines on the Right to Peaceful Environmental Protest and Civil Disobedience*.¹² These Guidelines draw on the Aarhus Convention as well as on international human rights treaties and standards. They set out Guiding Principles and Operational Principles to support the implementation of the Special Rapporteur's calls to action in relation to States' responses to peaceful environmental protest and civil disobedience.¹³ Their purpose is to assist Aarhus Parties, as well as other UN Member States, to ensure the effective protection of environmental defenders who engage in peaceful environmental protest, including civil disobedience.

Consultations

In 2025, the Special Rapporteur held five consultations with environmental defenders as part of a series of consultations he has conducted in various regions since November 2023. The objectives of these con-

sultations were to raise awareness of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and ensure that the mandate is known by those who may need its protection; to inform the work of the Special Rapporteur by identifying and discussing key threats, challenges and priority protection concerns for environmental defenders; and to enhance the dialogue between the Special Rapporteur and environmental defenders. In 2025, these consultations took place in:

- Nairobi, with environmental defenders from Eastern and Southern Africa (April 2025);
- Online, with environmental defenders from Croatia and Slovenia (April 2025);
- Bangkok, with environmental defenders from Asia-Pacific (May 2025);
- Budapest, with environmental defenders from Hungary (May 2025); and
- Prague, with environmental defenders from Czech Republic (May 2025).

The consultations in Nairobi and Bangkok included significant representation of Indigenous environmental defenders. They reported serious concerns regarding the harmful impacts of large-scale projects in their territories, especially in the context of the so-called “green transition”. Many projects related to the “green transition” (e.g. mining, renewable energy, carbon markets and conservation) are located on Indigenous lands in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Indigenous environmental defenders emphasized that this has resulted in an increase in environmental and human rights violations, including land grabbing and forceful evictions, insecurity resulting from the militarization of companies’ operation sites as well as threats to their lives and cultures due to restricted access to their ancestral lands and resources.

In September 2025, the Special Rapporteur released his report on regional consultations with environmental defenders,¹⁴ which further details the main challenges, threats and attacks faced by Indigenous Peoples for protecting the environment. The report also reflects testimonies shared by Indigenous environmental defenders from the Arctic (i.e. Sami and Inuit peoples) during the first consultation organized by the Special Rapporteur in November 2023 in Oslo.

Visits to Aarhus Parties and participation in online events

In 2025, the Special Rapporteur travelled to several countries that are party to the Aarhus Convention, at the invitation of institutions, NGOs, universities and other civil society actors, to meet with environmental defenders. This included Denmark, France, Guinea Bissau, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. On these occasions, and whenever possible, he also met with government representatives of these countries to raise awareness of his mandate and to discuss the challenges faced by environmental defenders.

In order to reach out to the maximum number of environmental defenders, the Special Rapporteur participated in several dozen online events whenever travel was not possible, thereby maintaining dialogue with defenders who may not have had the opportunity to engage with him in person. This included, for instance, online events organized by, for and/or with environmental defenders in Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, and Spain.

International events

In addition to his visits, the Special Rapporteur participated in several international forums in 2025, including online for RightsCon, in February; in Espoo for the Conference on Climate and Security, in June; in New York for the New York Climate Week, in September; in Vienna for the 2025 Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting, in October; online for the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) in November; in Belém (Brazil) for the 30th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 30), in November; and in Brussels for the 12th Inter-Mechanisms Meeting on Arbitrary Detention of Human Rights Defenders, in November.

The Special Rapporteur also played an active role in the Leaders Platform for Environmental Activists and Defenders (LEAD), a multi-stakeholder initiative launched at COP30 in November 2025. This initiative aims to ensure that environmental defenders — including specifically Indigenous Peoples and communities — are recognized, protected, and can meaningfully and safely participate in environmental decision-making, including in international forums such as the COPs.

Public statements and contributions to relevant policy frameworks

As part of the prevention component of his mandate, and with a view to contributing to strengthening the protection of environmental defenders, the Special Rapporteur issued several public statements and contributions to relevant policy frameworks in 2025.

In February, the Special Rapporteur issued a letter¹⁵ on the European Commission's proposal for an "Omnibus simplification package", expressing his great concern that the political compromise reached in the Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDDD), the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Taxonomy Regulation may be deprived, by this Omnibus simplification package, of important safeguards for the protection of environmental defenders, including Indigenous Peoples.

In May, on the occasion of TotalEnergies' Annual Shareholders' Meeting, the Special Rapporteur released a statement entitled "Urgent call: TotalEnergies and its shareholders must take immediate action to protect environmental defenders in Uganda in the context of the Tilenga/Kingfisher and EACOP projects"¹⁶ following reports of grave human rights violations against those opposing the projects and local communities.

In July, the Special Rapporteur commended, through a statement, the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on States' Climate Change Obligations. He stressed the critical role played by environmental defenders across the world who brought this case forward, highlighting that of Indigenous communities in particular.¹⁷

In October, the Special Rapporteur provided comments, in a statement, on the revisions to the Independent Complaints Mechanism Policy,¹⁸ a joint initiative by three European Development Finance Institutions.¹⁹

In November, following a protest led by Indigenous Peoples during COP30, the Special Rapporteur, along with other UN Human Rights experts, issued a joint statement on civic participation at COP30²⁰ calling on States — particularly Brazil as host country — and the UNFCCC Secretariat to respect and protect human rights throughout the process and substance of the COP30 negotiations, in accordance with their international obligations. The statement emphasizes that Indigenous

Peoples must be meaningfully heard and that any solutions affecting them must be co developed with them, noting that protecting their rights also advances everyone's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

8th Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

From 17 to 21 November, the Special Rapporteur participated in the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Geneva.

In preparation for this meeting, he released three reports, in addition to the Guidelines on the Right to Peaceful Environmental Protest and Civil Disobedience, that reflect on the work conducted during his first term as Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders (2022-2025):

- Report on complaints received and activities undertaken;²¹
- Report on regional consultations with environmental defenders;²²
- Report on key trends and threats regarding environmental defenders.²³

During the 8th Meeting of the Parties, the Special Rapporteur also addressed Aarhus Parties and observers in a public statement at the plenary session to provide an overview of his work and share his main concerns; conducted an open dialogue session; and participated in multiple side-events organized by civil society in Geneva.

Finally, the Special Rapporteur is looking ahead to a new term (2025-2029). He will strive to continue working to protect environmental defenders, including Indigenous Peoples, who are increasingly facing repression for their efforts to protect the environment and defend the lives and rights of present and future generations.

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UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples is part of the Human Rights Council's system of Special Procedures. These are independent human rights experts with mandates to assess, report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, celebrating its 25th year of existence this year, monitors situations of Indigenous Peoples' rights worldwide, addresses individual allegations through communications, undertakes country visits, issues thematic and country reports and promotes good practices. It was last renewed by the Council in September 2025 (HRC res. 60/4¹).

The current Special Rapporteur, Dr. Albert K. Barume, was appointed by the Human Rights Council in December 2024 and took office on 1 January 2025. Dr. Barume is an expert in international human rights law from the Democratic Republic of Congo and a former Chairperson of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as former Expert on Indigenous Peoples' issues for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. He is the first person from Africa to hold this mandate.

He is assuming his mandate in a highly challenging global environment marked by unprecedented challenges to human rights as universal values, the questioning of multilateralism, a new scramble for strategic or transition mineral, and defunding of the UN – particularly programmes focussed on human rights, equality, and social inclusion.

2025 Thematic Studies

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/60/29²)

The Special Rapporteur dedicated his first report to the Human Rights Council to States' obligations to recognise Indigenous Peoples as distinct rights-holders under international law. This choice was informed by ongoing challenges experienced by numerous States, particularly within Asia and Africa, in effectively implementing the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The report recommends that States implement three cumulative sequential steps to fully recognise Indigenous Peoples in accordance with international law.

First, a State must acknowledge the specific historical injustices experienced by Indigenous Peoples as the foundation for their rights protected under the UNDRIP, which aims to promote equality and inclusive societies. By doing so, a State ensures that Indigenous Peoples enjoy all rights on an equal footing with other citizens. This is not about putting Indigenous Peoples into a privileged position. In taking this action, the Special Rapporteur emphasises that the State would be endorsing the term "Indigenous Peoples" as a human rights concept. When a community self-identify as Indigenous Peoples, it is essentially seeking remedies for historical injustices grounded in racial discrimination, including the loss of ancestral lands and dangers to their cultural identity.

Secondly, a State should enact formal constitutional or legal provisions that explicitly incorporate international standards concerning Indigenous Peoples' rights into its domestic legal system. Some countries have met this objective through constitutional amendments, while others have enacted specific Acts of Parliament in conjunction with national policies or directives. The Special Rapporteur clarified that Indigenous Peoples' rights are inherent, originate from international law, and are binding on States; recognition does not establish these rights.

Finally, a State should take legal or administrative steps to clearly identify or distinguish Indigenous Peoples from other social groups. Indigenous Peoples should not be regarded simply as minorities, economically disadvantaged/poor groups, or marginalised communities. They constitute distinct groups who have experienced, or continue to experience, particular human rights violations that have profound dehumanising effects and result in intergenerational trauma. This is

precisely why the Special Rapporteur advised against conflating Indigenous Peoples with local communities. It is important to recognise that not all local communities have experienced these specific human rights violations. To that end, the Special Rapporteur recommends that “States [and all stakeholders] should refrain from conflating Indigenous Peoples with local communities. When both terms are used in documents, a footnote should be included to clarify that the use of the term ‘Indigenous Peoples’ next to the term ‘local communities’ does not imply that the two groups enjoy the same rights under international law.”

Indigenous Peoples’ lands, territories and resources: interim report (A/80/181³)

This interim report submitted by the Special Rapporteur to the 80th session of the General Assembly, focuses on Indigenous Peoples’ rights to their lands, territories, and resources. It affirms that Indigenous Peoples’ land, territory and resource rights are inherent, derive from self-determination and non-discrimination, include full property rights, and are permanent, and therefore not subject to temporal limitations. These rights underpin culture, food, health, and livelihoods. States must recognise customary ownership, provide restitution for dispossession, and ensure free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), rejecting regressive doctrines such as Brazil’s *marco temporal*.

Rising demand for Indigenous territories, due to carbon markets, conservation targets, and the transition-minerals boom, has intensified persecution of Indigenous Peoples’ land rights defenders. The report links killings, harassment, and prosecutions to the opposition to projects advanced without FPIC. It calls for robust safeguards so that climate and biodiversity action do not reproduce land grabs under a “green” label.

The Special Rapporteur’s land report further demonstrates the connection between Indigenous Peoples’ territories and both national and international security. The report highlights that numerous Indigenous Peoples reside on or near international borders. Their territories are frequently subject to forced occupation by extremist and armed groups, as well as international trafficking networks involved in drugs and migration. Indigenous Peoples’ territories are also often at the centre of major geopolitical interests. These factors have led numerous States to militarise Indigenous Peoples’ territories. Often, Indigenous

communities are perceived not as victims of outside occupation, but as collaborators or supporters of State adversaries. As a result, they are excluded from security systems and frequently face criminalisation.

The Special Rapporteur calls for a paradigm shift through a new approach that sees value in the enhanced self-determination of Indigenous Peoples over their territories and recognises them as partners in both national and international security. Their extensive traditional knowledge of their lands and institutions is a valuable resource that States can use to build sustainable security. He invites consideration of a Security Council resolution on Indigenous Peoples and international security.

Country visit: Botswana (September 2025)

The Special Rapporteur conducted his first country visit to Botswana,⁴ in Africa. He held meetings with the President, senior officials and Indigenous communities in Gaborone, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and multiple settlements. He welcomed a marked policy shift: high-level political will, an Inter-Ministerial Committee, signals on lifting subsistence-hunting bans, and concrete gestures such as authorising the burial of a San elder on ancestral land. He encouraged a strategic, budgeted plan and urged ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 to anchor reforms. A full report is anticipated for the Human Rights Council in September 2026.

The Special Rapporteur found that misconceptions about the human-rights meaning of “Indigenous Peoples” persist, fuelling stigma and obstructing equality before the law. Many self-identified communities reject the term “Basarwa” as derogatory and are seeking recognition either as “Indigenous Peoples” or by ancestral names. He noted cross-border realities and called for facilitation of cultural links with neighbours. Constitutional and legal recognition emerged as the top Indigenous priority; officials also acknowledged setbacks, including the 2005 removal of a protective constitutional clause. Formal apology and alignment with international standards were flagged as good practices to consider.

The Special Rapporteur noted three urgent issues on lands and livelihoods: people relocated from customary lands into settlements

with inadequate services and deep social harm; San families living as de facto squatters on private farms without public services; and Central Kalahari Game Reserve returnees lacking essential services to make return viable. While a new Community-Based Natural Resource Management bill could help, communities reported weak representation and top-down control. He urged service provision in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, restitution or equivalent land for relocatees, and reforms that secure customary tenure and benefit-sharing.

Structural exclusion compounds rights gaps. Indigenous institutions and chiefs lack recognition in the Bogosi/House of Chiefs system; access to justice is impeded by the absence of court interpreters; languages face steep decline; and the education model, especially remote hostels, exposes girls to exploitation and drives drop-outs. The Special Rapporteur urged a redesign of the Remote Area Development Programme from a rights-based approach and with disaggregated data, action on labour exploitation and child labour on private farms, and adoption of robust FPIC frameworks as extractive and energy projects expand. He invited regional and donor support to match Botswana's stated intent with implementation.

Regional legal teams to bring the mandate closer to Indigenous Peoples

To address today's global challenges, the Special Rapporteur has made changes to the mandate. Notably, he has formed regional legal teams of young Indigenous lawyers for the first time, adding them to his external technical team. Teams have been established in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and a fourth team is currently being organised to cover the remaining regions globally. Their role is to respond more quickly to communications, complaints, and requests from Indigenous Peoples within their regions. Each legal regional team includes a senior lawyer and two young Indigenous lawyers. These teams have been formed with three connected goals in mind. First, these regional teams will strengthen Indigenous Peoples' ability to defend their territories, especially as global demand for transition minerals and energy rises. Second, the regional legal teams will help bring the mandate of the Special Rapporteur closer to Indigenous communities. Third, they will offer young Indigenous

lawyers valuable firsthand experience of the work of the Special Rapporteur.

Communications and press releases

During 2025, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, jointly with other mandate holders of the Human Rights Council, sent 49 communications⁵ to Member States and other actors in response to information received on alleged violations of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. These communications on cases are included in the Special Procedures' joint communications report, submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, and publicly available online in the Special Procedures communications database.

For example, in a communication sent to Indonesia⁶ on 25 September 2025, the Special Rapporteur raises grave concerns about systemic violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights. These include the State's continued non-recognition of self-identified Indigenous Peoples, the erosion of autonomy and protections in West Papua following the 2021 revision of the Special Autonomy Law, the revival of transmigration with risks of cultural and demographic harm, and the human rights impacts of National Strategic Projects, extractive and "green" energy initiatives carried out without FPIC, often amid militarisation and repression of peaceful protest. It documents emblematic cases: the nickel mining expansion on Kabaena island affecting the Bajau people, the dispossession of the Cek Bocek (Berco) in Sumbawa, exclusion from conservation under Law No. 32/2024, the criminalisation of land defenders, and existential threats to Indigenous Peoples in isolation, while linking these patterns to breaches of UNDRIP and core human rights treaties. The letter requests detailed government explanations and corrective measures across several points, from aligning laws and ensuring FPIC to protecting Indigenous Peoples and defenders, enforcing Constitutional Court No. 35/2012, and regulating business. It urges immediate interim steps to halt violations and ensure accountability.

Furthermore, in a communication sent to Panama⁷ on 5 November 2025, the Special Rapporteur expressed concerns at allegations received of systematic human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples during social protests that began in April 2025. It describes a

State response marked by a state of emergency in Bocas del Toro with suspension of constitutional guarantees (including *habeas corpus*), internet/telecom restrictions, and the 1,300-officer “Operación Omega” leading to excessive force, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, criminalisation, and hate speech against Indigenous leaders, alongside the denial of FPIC and the deactivation of dialogue mechanisms. The letter documents specific incidents, raids and abuses in Ngäbe-Buglé and Emberá-Wounaan territories, emblematic gender-based violence, mass dismissals of Indigenous banana workers, and threats to Indigenous fishers’ subsistence and access to traditional islands.

In 2025, the Special Rapporteur further used press outreach to amplify urgent protection gaps and policy priorities. Early in the year, he welcomed the United States’⁸ decision to grant clemency to Indigenous leader, Leonard Peltier, underscoring long-standing due-process concerns and the need for humane treatment of ageing detainees. During COP30⁹ in Belém, he joined UN experts in urging human rights-based climate action aligned with international legal obligations and later condemned a deadly attack against Guarani and Kaiowá communities in Brazil,¹⁰ calling for protection, investigations and the finalisation of demarcation. He also welcomed Norway’s¹¹ precautionary pause on deep-sea mining licences until 2029 as a win for oceans, climate stability and Indigenous cultural rights, emphasising the precautionary principle and the need for robust safeguards.

Collaboration with UN entities and regional human rights bodies

Throughout 2025, the Special Rapporteur deepened the mandate’s co-operation with UN mechanisms and regional bodies in order to advance Indigenous Peoples’ rights. He engaged the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) at its 24th session in New York, delivering a statement in the human rights dialogue, participating in side events and media programmes, and holding bilateral meetings. He urged stronger recognition, protection from criminalisation, and better resourcing of UN mechanisms; he also recommended scheduling the human rights dialogue during the Forum’s first week to maximise participation and

impact. He later took part in the 18th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) in Geneva, where he also delivered a statement at the plenary and participated in side events and meetings.

At COP30 in Belém, working with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat and fellow UN Special Procedures, the Special Rapporteur co-signed a joint experts' call for human rights-based climate action aligned with international law and engaged Presidency-led dialogues to foreground Indigenous Peoples' FPIC, participation, and land rights across mitigation, adaptation and just transition agendas. The Special Rapporteur also addressed the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome, reinforcing the centrality of self-determination and food sovereignty in UN programming.

At the regional level, the Special Rapporteur engaged the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) during its 83rd session in Banjul and met the Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa. He further briefed the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, calling for EU policies that uphold FPIC and align the green transition with international standards. He also worked with different regional presences of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to convene issue-focussed exchanges: with Kanak representatives via the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, and with Eastern African Indigenous and civil society organisations via OHCHR Nairobi.

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*This article was written by the current Special Rapporteur, **Dr. Albert K. Barume**. He is an expert in international human rights law from the Democratic Republic of Congo and a former Chairperson of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as former Expert on Indigenous Peoples’ issues for the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. He is the first person from Africa to hold this mandate.*



World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

Indigenous Peoples have rights over their traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and genetic resources, including associated intellectual property rights, as recognized in Article 31 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹ “Traditional knowledge” generally refers to technical know-how, skills and practices developed, utilized and passed down within a community’s traditional context. Examples include medicinal, agricultural and ecological knowledge, as well as methods for doing things such as weaving and house construction.² “Traditional cultural expressions” are the myriad forms in which traditional culture is expressed, including music, dance, stories, art, ceremonies, designs and symbols.³ “Genetic resources” are genetic material of actual or potential value found in plants, animals or micro-organisms. Examples include medicinal plants, agricultural crops and animal breeds.⁴

Conventional intellectual property laws are woefully inadequate in protecting these rights. Indigenous Peoples’ intangible cultural heritage, ranging in forms from textile designs to traditional songs, medicinal plant knowledge and environmental conservation, is often treated as being in the “public domain”, and misappropriation by those within the pharmaceutical, fashion and film industries, among others, is widespread and ongoing.

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a UN agency with 194 Member States, provides a forum for negotiating new international intellectual property laws. In 2000, WIPO Member States established the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC). From 2010, the IGC conducted

formal, text-based negotiations to develop legal instruments for the protection of traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and genetic resources. In a breakthrough development in 2024, WIPO adopted a treaty on genetic resources.⁵ Negotiations on traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions are ongoing. Indigenous Peoples participate in the IGC as observers and participate collectively through an *ad hoc* Indigenous Caucus averaging around 25 to 30 people per session.

Overview

Background information on the IGC and Indigenous Peoples' participation therein can be found in prior editions of *The Indigenous World*.⁶ In 2025, the IGC continued text-based negotiations on legal instruments for the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, holding two sessions. IGC 50 (March 3-7) and IGC 51 (May 30-June 5) took place at the WIPO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and were offered in a hybrid format. As the concluding session of the IGC's 2024-2025 biennium, IGC 51 also included stocktaking and developing a recommendation to the WIPO General Assembly for the renewal of the IGC's mandate and work program for the next biennium.⁷ Indigenous participation in the IGC continued to be hampered by a lack of funding, despite widespread acknowledgment of the problem and a concerted effort to address it within the WIPO Program and Budget Committee. More countries signed up to the two WIPO treaties adopted in 2024 – the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge and the Riyadh Design Law Treaty – although neither treaty has yet come into force.

IGC 50

The IGC's mandate for the 2024-2025 biennium called for the IGC to continue its work toward the objective of finalizing an agreement on international legal instrument(s) to ensure the protection of traditional

knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.⁸ IGC 50 was the second session of the biennium to take up negotiations on the traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions draft instruments. Because Member States at IGC 49 (December 2024) were unable to agree on text revisions to the draft instruments proposed at that session, negotiations at IGC 50 began with the same texts that were the starting point for IGC 49.⁹

In accordance with usual practice, the WIPO Secretariat organized an Indigenous Caucus meeting the day prior to the session, and the Caucus met daily throughout, including in meetings with the IGC Chair, Regional Groups and individual Member State Delegations. An Indigenous Panel entitled “Traditional Knowledge and Climate Change: Views of Indigenous Peoples” was held on the opening day of the session.

IGC 50 was chaired by Ms. Erika Watanabe Patriota from Brazil. Ms. Anna Vuopala of Finland, who served as Chair of IGC 49, sat as Vice-Chair. With the new Chair came a new methodology, focused primarily on negotiations in “informals”. Under this methodology, Regional Groups and the Indigenous Caucus selected representatives to attend smaller negotiation sessions which, to foster open discussion, were not webcast or recorded. The informals were facilitated by Ms. Ann Edillon of the Philippines, who served as “Friend of the Chair”.¹⁰ Daily reports were made to the plenary summarizing the work in the informals.

Through this process, Member States were able to agree to some minor text revisions, including streamlining the text by deleting several alternative text provisions no longer supported by any Member State,¹¹ capitalizing all references to “Indigenous Peoples” and removing all brackets around the word “Peoples”. In a key development, the Friend of the Chair captured the results of the work in a new proposed consolidated text, combining the traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions texts into a single instrument. This reflected the position of some Member States and the Indigenous Caucus that traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions are inextricably linked, and thus protections should be addressed in a more holistic fashion.

Despite the efforts of the Chair and an almost palpable desire among most Member States to avert a second consecutive session with the outcome of no consensus, Member States could not agree on forwarding the revised, consolidated text as the basis for further nego-

tiations to IGC 51. In the end, Nigeria blocked a consensus based on the Chair's decision to permit, in addition to the agreed-upon changes, the inclusion of language in Article 5 "Scope of Protection" introduced by the United States. The United States' proposal focused on "measures" to "safeguard" traditional knowledge and cultural expressions rather than binding legal protections, which Nigeria viewed as compromising the "rights-based" approach of the article. The controversy highlighted a critical challenge in the ongoing negotiations, which is that Member States are pursuing competing, incompatible approaches to protecting traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. Some Member States, and the Indigenous Caucus, support a "rights-based" approach with legally binding protections for Indigenous Peoples' rights, while other Member States support a non-binding "measures-based" approach focused on utilizing existing intellectual property protections and developing and using voluntary guidelines and model contracts.

In other developments during the session, the Russian Federation's proposal from IGC 49 that would have required Non-Governmental Organizations admitted as Observers to the IGC to submit documentation confirming their existence in the jurisdiction of a Member State – which had caused concern among some Member States and Indigenous Caucus members, and which was deferred from IGC 49 to IGC 50 – was once again deferred. A request for IGC accreditation submitted by the Russian Federation-based Center for the Study of Cultural Heritage Promoting the Sustainable Development of the Peoples of the North was denied, following an objection by the Russian Federation.¹²

IGC 51

Following two negotiation sessions with no agreement on text revisions, IGC 51 once again began with the traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions draft texts that were the starting point at IGC 49.¹³ As the concluding session of the 2024-2025 biennium, the session was also tasked with stocktaking and negotiating a renewed mandate and work program to recommend to the General Assembly for the 2026-2027 biennium. Given the lack of agreement among Member States at IGC 49 and IGC 50, reaching agreement on the recommended mandate and work program was far from a foregone conclusion.

In addition to the usual Indigenous Caucus meeting the day prior to the start of the session, the WIPO Secretariat organized a second all-day preparatory meeting on the Sunday during the session. The Caucus also met daily throughout the session, including in meetings with the IGC Chair, Regional Groups and individual Member State Delegations. An Indigenous Panel entitled “International Legal Instrument(s) on Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions: Views of Indigenous Peoples” was held on the opening day of the session.

The session was co-chaired by Ms. Erika Watanabe Patriota from Brazil and Ms. Anna Vuopala of Finland. In anticipation of the challenges in reaching agreement on the mandate and work program, and the gravity of the consequences if agreement could not be reached, substantive text negotiations were limited to a single day of discussion in informals.¹⁴

In addition to uppercasing “Indigenous Peoples” and removing alternatives no longer supported by any Member State, the revised versions of the texts resulting from the informals included new alternatives to capture Member States’ positions expressed during the negotiations, including an Article 5 alternative proposed by the United States embracing its measures-based approach previously introduced at IGC 50. Disappointingly, agreement was not reached to remove the brackets around “Peoples” in “Indigenous Peoples”, despite “Indigenous Peoples” being included with no brackets in the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge adopted by WIPO Member States by consensus in 2024. The United Kingdom, in particular, indicated that it is not able to support recognition of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Despite concerns expressed by some Regional Groups and individual Member States at the rushed nature of the text discussions, and the inclusion of new alternatives viewed by some as “widening the gaps” rather than working toward provisions that could be agreed by all, in the interest of compromise and finding a way forward, Member States agreed to the revised texts as the basis for further negotiations. Importantly, new alternative provisions were bracketed in the instruments to document that they do not have the support of all Member States.

In one positive development, at the conclusion of the session, Member States were also able to agree on a recommended mandate

and work program for the 2026-2027 biennium. Key features include: (1) the IGC will continue to discuss intellectual property issues concerning genetic resources and their interlinkage with traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions but will not do any normative work related to genetic resources during the biennium; (2) the work program will include three, eight-day negotiation sessions; and (3) the WIPO Secretariat will organize an Indigenous Expert Workshop sometime during the biennium.¹⁵

In another development of note, the request for accreditation of the Russian Federation-based Interregional Public Organization Union of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples “SOYUZ” was denied, based on an objection by Ukraine.¹⁶

Funding Indigenous participation

As noted, participation in the Indigenous Caucus remains limited, with only approximately 25 to 30 participants per session. WIPO has a Voluntary Fund to support the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the IGC; however, it is funded solely by donations and is frequently depleted. In June 2025, the WIPO Program and Budget Committee considered a proposal to address this problem by providing funding for Indigenous participation from WIPO’s regular budget. Despite receiving broad support, the proposal was unsuccessful due to the objections of a few Member States.¹⁷ Because the Voluntary Fund was once again depleted, no Indigenous representatives were funded to attend either IGC session in 2025.

Update on WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge and Riyadh Design Law Treaty

In landmark developments in 2024, WIPO Member States adopted two new international intellectual property treaties relevant to the protection of Indigenous Peoples’ rights: the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge and the

Riyadh Design Law Treaty.¹⁸ As of 09 July 2025, 44 Member States had signed up to the Genetic Resources treaty and two countries, Malawi and Uganda, had ratified it.¹⁹ Both the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have urged Member States to become parties to the treaty.²⁰ As of 11 July 2025, 25 WIPO Member States had signed up to the Riyadh Design Law Treaty but none had ratified or acceded to it.²¹ Each treaty will come into force three months following its ratification or accession by 15 parties.

Looking forward

Negotiations on traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions will continue at IGC 52, 4-13 March 2026, and IGC 53, 16-25 September 2026.²² The third and final negotiation session of the biennium, IGC 54, will take place sometime in March/April 2027.

Notes and references

1. “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.” G.A. Res. 61/295, annex, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (13 September 2007), art. 31(1).
2. “Traditional Knowledge.” WIPO, <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/tk/>. Because the term “traditional knowledge” can be somewhat misleading, as it implies antiquity, many Indigenous activists, in their international advocacy in multilateral processes, prefer to refer simply to the “knowledge of Indigenous Peoples” or “Indigenous knowledge”. In the WIPO negotiations, Indigenous representatives emphasize that traditional knowledge is not confined to ancient knowledge but includes new and evolving Indigenous knowledge.
3. “Traditional Cultural Expressions.” WIPO, <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/folklore/>
4. “Genetic Resources.” WIPO, <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/genetic/>. Genetic resources found in nature are not creations of the mind and thus are not intellectual property. Intellectual property issues are, however, associated with genetic resources, for example in the case of inventions utilizing genetic

resources or where traditional knowledge is associated with the use of genetic resources.

5. An update on the status of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge, as well as a second treaty of relevance to Indigenous Peoples adopted by WIPO in 2024 – the Riyadh Design Law Treaty– is provided below. For background on the treaties, see *The Indigenous World* 2025, April 2025, at 765-768.
6. See *The Indigenous World* 2019, April 2019, at 651-658; *The Indigenous World* 2020, April 2020, at 770-776; *The Indigenous World* 2021, April 2021, at 805-813; *The Indigenous World* 2022, April 2022, at 830-837; *The Indigenous World* 2023, April 2023, at 703-711; *The Indigenous World* 2024, April 2024, at 669-677; and *The Indigenous World* 2025, April 2025, at 764-772.
7. The IGC operates under two-year mandates, renewed biennially by the WIPO General Assembly.
8. See <https://www.wipo.int/documents/d/igc/docs-en-igc-mandate-2024-2025.pdf>
9. The texts of the instruments and all other documents from IGC 50, as well as a video of the session, are available at https://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/details.jsp?meeting_id=85308
10. In 2025, Ms. Edillon was named as the new Director of WIPO's Traditional Knowledge Division, following the retirement of Mr. Wend Wendland. Mr. Wendland served as Director of the Traditional Knowledge Division from the very beginnings of the IGC and played a central role in all its work over the decades, including the 2024 adoption of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge.
11. To reflect all the differing positions of Member States, the draft texts contain numerous alternative formulations of the various articles.
12. See https://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=642602 (Decision on Agenda Item 3).
13. The texts of the instruments and all other documents from IGC 51, as well as a video of the session, are available at https://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/details.jsp?meeting_id=85309
14. If the IGC fails to reach agreement, negotiation of the mandate and work program is taken up by the full WIPO General Assembly. If the General Assembly fails to reach agreement, negotiations are suspended (as occurred in 2015) until agreement is reached.
15. The WIPO General Assembly approved the recommended mandate and work program at its meeting in July 2025. See <https://www.wipo.int/documents/d/igc/docs-en-igc-mandate-2026-2027.pdf>
16. See https://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=645831 (Decision on Agenda Item 3).
17. See Andres Izquierdo, "WIPO Budget Committee Concludes Without Agreement on Indigenous Participation Funding," *InfoJustice*, June 23, 2025, <https://infojustice.org/archives/46525>
18. See *The Indigenous World* 2025, April 2025, at 765-768.
19. An active list of signatories and ratifications/accessions is available at <https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/treaties/en/docs/pdf/gratk.pdf>
20. UN Economic and Social Council, Report on the Twenty-Fourth Session (21 April–2 May 2025), E/2025/43-E/C.19/2025/8, Official Records, 2025, Supplement No. 23, para. 80, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/2025/43>; UN Human Rights Council, *Right of Indigenous Peoples to Data, Including with Regard to*

Data Collection and Disaggregation: Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/HRC/60/66, 60th sess., agenda items 3 and 5, Annex Expert Mechanism Advice No. 18 (2025), para. 22, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/2025/43>

21. An active list of signatories and ratifications/accessions is available at <https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/treaties/en/docs/pdf/rdlit.pdf>.
22. See <https://www.wipo.int/documents/d/igc/docs-en-2026-igc-schedule.pdf>

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PART 3

General Information

About IWGIA

IWGIA is an international human rights organisation, founded in 1968, that has partnered with Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for rights, recognition, and dignity for nearly six decades. We started as a small group of academics turned activists, determined to bring global attention to the realities of Indigenous Peoples. We have grown into a trusted and steadfast ally and partner of Indigenous Peoples' organisations, movements, and networks across all seven socio-cultural regions. Partnerships are the foundation of our work. Over time, we have seen how our long-term, consistent relationships have grown into strategic alliances that have contributed to shaping the global Indigenous rights architecture.

We foster change by:

- **Documenting** the situation of Indigenous Peoples and the human rights violations they experience. We document lessons learned about Indigenous Peoples' strategies, actions and the successes they have achieved in the struggles for their rights. We document Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and their contributions to addressing current challenges. We produce and analyse data on the situation of Indigenous Peoples and the implementation of their rights;
- **Advocating** for change at local, national and international levels. We advocate for Indigenous Peoples' rights and their implementation at all levels. We facilitate the exchange of experiences and strategies on advocacy between Indigenous Peoples' organisations and institutions within countries, regions and internationally. We share information and knowledge on Indigenous Peoples' rights and strategies; and by
- **Directly supporting** Indigenous Peoples in asserting their rights. We support Indigenous Peoples' movements, organisations and institutions through direct access to finance and technical support, based on their own priorities.

Our vision

IWGIA's vision is a world in which Indigenous Peoples everywhere fully exercise and enjoy their inherent and internationally-recognised rights and promote their visions for well-being.

Our mission

IWGIA's mission towards this vision is to promote and defend Indigenous Peoples' collective and individual rights, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

How to get involved

You can follow our work by signing up for our newsletter: <http://eepurl.com/dsPkNP> or by following us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn – just search for us @IWGIA.

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The 2026 edition marks the 40th anniversary of this unique publication — a milestone that highlights both the enduring value of long-term documentation and the importance of centering Indigenous perspectives in global discussions. The 87 articles in this edition, written by 129 volunteer authors, document developments Indigenous Peoples have experienced throughout 2025 and include a special focus on peace and security.

IWGIA publishes this book with the intent that it is used as a documentation tool and inspiration to promote and defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their struggles, worldview and resilience.

“The Indigenous World is the first port-of-call for an up-to-date understanding of live issues for Indigenous Peoples globally. Written by world-leading experts in the field, it is an authoritative guide for academics and advocates especially. The breadth of coverage is truly impressive. I congratulate IWGIA on the 40th anniversary of this essential series.”

— Dr. Claire Charters, Professor and Co-Director,
Te Puna Rangahau o Te Wai Ariki|New Zealand Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Law

“The Indigenous World has been a unique and so far unparalleled tool enabling judges, human rights regional mechanisms, lawyers and policy makers to understand and have a clear global picture of Indigenous Peoples’ rights across the world.”

— Dr. Albert K. Barume,
UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

