

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Promoting the Economic Prosperity of Indigenous People

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Introduction

Indigenous people around the world are the backbone of preserving our world's biodiversity; therefore, their economic and social prosperity has international importance. 2019 was declared the International Year of Indigenous Languages by UNESCO, a year to celebrate and work towards the preservation of languages and cultures held by an estimated 370 million indigenous people around the world spread throughout 90 countries (UNDP). Every day, more and more indigenous people are losing their rights to land, having their homes destroyed by 'development', and falling victim to malnutrition and illnesses such as HIV. Some groups, such as the Sentinelese in the Bay of Bengal, have made never made outside contact.

In contrast, others such as the Mursi Tribe in Ethiopia's Omo Valley have embraced outside contact and have even begun using 'tribal tourism' as a new source of income. Indigenous people constitute 15% of the population living in extreme poverty (WorldBank) and, in many places, have a significantly lower life expectancy than the country's average. Indigenous people also suffer economically by having significantly lower rates of education, which hinders their abilities to find employment.

Jeanette Armstrong from the Okanagan tribe in Canada spoke at the United Nations Headquarters in 2010 and said that "the biggest challenge faced by indigenous people today is maintaining their culture in a rapidly developing world" (UNDESA). For these reasons, actions must be taken by nations, whether they are home to indigenous communities or not, to preserve these cultures and promote prosperity for their future. The indigenous tribes in many places have also been able to retain traditions and promote environmentally sustainable practices. Many indigenous groups are fighting to protect the ecosystems that have been taken from them. Groups such as those living in the Amazon have succumbed to the wildfires that ravaged their homes and have been left to fall back onto a national government uninterested in their survival. For these reasons, it is of the highest importance that nations can collaborate and create resolutions to outline the continuity of these tribes in safe environments in the future. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, adopted by the General Assembly in September of 2007 was a monumental document that showed the efforts nations were willing to make towards the protection of indigenous peoples. In 2014 the General Assembly hosted the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which further outlined the steps delegates from a multitude of nations were willing to take. They must take in the future to

respect the contributions indigenous people have made historically, respect the rights of indigenous tribes and commit themselves to include more indigenous representatives to the relevant United Nations bodies.

Definition of Key Terms

Indigenous peoples

The United Nations definition of Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations is provided by Jose R. Martinez Cobo, the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. His definition reads as indigenous communities are those that are distinct from other societies and territories that have been colonized. They reside in their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identities are shared among all of their people.

Economic Prosperity

Being successful, especially in making money (Oxford). It is important to note that the discussion of economic prosperity in this committee must not lead to resolutions that simply outline methods of economic survival for indigenous peoples but solutions from which they can thrive.

Sustainability

Defined as the using of natural resources without damaging the environment, being able to use these resources for a continued amount of time (Oxford).

Background

Indigenous tribes around the world have access to different levels of economic support from their respective governments. While they have extreme importance in upholding biodiversity, traditions, and culture, many of them face high rates of crime, poverty, health concerns, and human rights abuses. In places where local governments fail to give the groups the support they need, the United Nations has a voluntary fund dedicated to providing indigenous communities with the necessary funding for their needs. The 2010 report made by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) found that 90% of the world's indigenous spoken languages may be extinct within the next 100 years, showing the extent of discrimination these people are facing. Climate change is also impacting the lives of many indigenous tribes, including the Nenets of Siberia, who are a nomadic group surviving on reindeer in temperatures well below freezing. Another example is the Bayaka of the Central African Republic, who have had to give up their traditional lifestyles to fully devote themselves to fighting for the conservation of the forest they call home. This shows the variety of issues indigenous people are being forced to live and struggle with every day.

Economic Disadvantages

It is difficult to gauge the economics of indigenous communities because there are different factors involved such as to what extent the indigenous peoples were drawn to the money market and labour force, the historical development of their communities and what their community economy is based off of. Some indigenous communities are self-

sufficient and run completely isolated from the rest of the world, such as sustaining themselves with growing their own food and trading amongst themselves. In other communities, some have tried to connect with the outside world and join more formal economic activities. This is very difficult at times because many face discrimination or do not have the necessary requirements to be able to find good work. In Canada, only 43% of indigenous peoples were employed, making aboriginal people twice as unlikely to be unemployed than non-aboriginals. There are also differences in income. A survey in Canada found that aboriginal people made more than \$8,000 less annually.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

One of the most important documents in outlining the rights of Indigenous peoples, published on September 13th, 2007, and adopted by the General Assembly, resolution 61/295 gave the most comprehensive description of the rights of indigenous people around the world. This document emphasized the role the UN plays in promoting rights and recognizing the respect of indigenous cultures. The 46 articles clearly outline the indigenous rights as individuals as well as groups, including education, autonomy, as well as protection from domestic violence. This declaration is not legally binding under any international law but is instead a series of guidelines against the marginalization of indigenous peoples. This unprecedented document may not have any legal power over the decisions nations make, but it shows international support for indigenous tribes all over.

Indigenous People and the Environment

It is estimated that around 80% of the world's biodiversity is located within indigenous territories, and this space coincides with the World Wildlife Fund's list of top 200 areas with the most threatened biodiversity where 95% of these areas are located in indigenous protected land. Many climate activists claim that the world should look at indigenous practices to find ways to develop more sustainably in the future in terms of food production, animal agriculture, land degradation, and biodiversity conservation. Sadly, much of this land has come under threat from various industries such as logging, mining, animal agriculture, and oil exploration. Many indigenous communities have found a way to live in harmony with their natural surroundings for hundreds of years, but these lands are being seized because in many court cases the indigenous communities proving they have lived there for hundreds of years does not have any legal bearing to allow them to keep their land. This has reached the extremity of indigenous communities being forcibly removed from their homes.

Awá People of the Amazon

The Awá people, for example, are said to be on the brink of extinction as their tribe of 355 members is being attacked by illegal loggers, settlers and cattle farmers who are not holding back from taking down Awá who stand in the way of their activities. A Brazilian judge, José Carlos do Vale Madeira, described the situation as a "real genocide" amid reports an Awá child was killed by loggers who ran down their camp. A spokesperson of the Awá said in an interview, "This land is mine, it is ours. They can go away to the city, but we Indians live in the forest. They are going to kill everything. Everything is dying." The negligence of the Brazilian government to protect its indigenous population has led to such extremities that other nations must look at this example and not let their indigenous peoples

fall to the same fate. In Venezuela, the government approved a mining project that would give them 12% of the country's land, and the majority of that land is home to indigenous groups.

Lumad People

In the Philippines, the island of Mindanao is home to 18 tribes nicknamed the Lumad. President Rodrigo Duterte's recent implementation of Martial Law across the island due to the war on drugs and terrorism has resulted in the extreme punishments of Lumad people protesting the invasion of mining and logging companies onto their land. The Lumads have also shown their support online for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe protesting a pipeline that was proposed to be built through their reservation in the United States. This solidarity across indigenous tribes, each fighting their own battle, should inspire people of all backgrounds to join this act of unity because there is often strength in numbers. Proof of this can be seen in the uprising of the Waorani tribe in Ecuador, who protested against the government from selling their portion of the Amazon off for development and succeeded in stopping the sale from proceeding. In July of this year, an Ecuadorian court ruled that the land the Waorani have lived on for hundreds of years will be marked as protecting and kept away from oil drillers.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

This forum falls under the economic and social council and serves the purpose of dealing with issues that relate to economic and social development, environment, culture, and human rights of indigenous peoples. This forum must provide expert advice to other committees when issues regarding indigenous populations are discussed. This forum has access to the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues, which makes their plans for engagement possible. In their most recent meeting in May 2019, they updated the Activities of the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch.

Brazil

There are around 305 indigenous tribes living in Brazil who are given around 13% of Brazil's landmass to reside on, 98% of it being within the Amazon. All of these tribes, some remaining uncontacted, have been living off of the earth for hundreds of years, a livelihood being put at risk under Brazil's newest president, Jair Bolsonaro. This far-right leader has dramatically decreased the political power of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), who was in charge of indigenous people's rights by putting it under the authority of the Brazilian Agricultural Ministry. This means that the ministry controlled heavily by beef and logging industries will be able to change the FUNAI's mandate and sell previously protected indigenous land to these companies. Throughout his presidential campaign, Bolsonaro made claims that he will not give one inch of land to indigenous tribes and calls for their assimilation into society, which is a direct violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People which states that integration into society must be a choice made by the indigenous people in question. Kevin Mayoruna, a leader from the Javari Matsigenka tribe, said that "the current government's dream is to exterminate the indigenous people so they can take our land." Many see Bolsonaro's administration driven by the desire to sell-off the Amazon land to be commercially

developed, with the indigenous residents of the Amazon being seen as obstacles to be terminated. Losing much of the Amazon to commercial development would not only ruin the lives of indigenous tribes but have global environmental implications. While Brazil is not the only nation with indigenous populations, it is a critical situation to discuss in light of the recent Amazon rainforest fires and agenda of the current president. Bolsonaro has defended all his policies despite international outrage. Bolsonaro has also rejected all foreign aid towards the Amazon claiming he will develop the forest as he sees fit, meaning stealing land from the indigenous. The international fire the Brazilian government is coming under for their dealing of indigenous people does not seem to be stopping Bolsonaro's policies of destruction.

Australia

Aboriginal Australians are said to be one of the oldest population, and while many have assimilated into modern Australian life, some still live traditionally out in the desert. When the British came to Australia in 1788, almost 20,000 aboriginals died in conflict with the colonizers. In the mid-1900s, 33% of aboriginal children were forced into adoptive homes, and against their will had to lose their languages and culture. This became known as the "stolen generation" and while Australia has since apologized for this atrocious act, life for indigenous peoples is still not easy. The Native Title Act of 1993 gives aboriginal tribes the rights to land, public housing, legal negotiating rights, and more. The progression of this nation shows an excellent example of a country evolving from intense discrimination against indigenous peoples to embracing their culture and history as their own and outlining ways to allow them to grow.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1923 - 25	Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Chief Deskaheh attempted to speak in Geneva at the League of Nations to defend the rights of his tribe to live under their own laws, land, and faith, but he was denied access to speak. Maori leader T.W. Ratana traveled to Geneva to speak out against the breaking of the Treaty of Waitangi, which had given Maori people ownership to their land but was also denied the ability to speak at the meetings. These attempts were the first times that indigenous leaders became internationally involved.
1981	A study done by Jose R. Martinez Cobo on The Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations provided the first official definition of what constitutes a group, community, or nation as "indigenous," which provided the framework towards outlining the rights of these peoples.
1982	The UN established the Working Group on Indigenous Populations as part of the sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. This group allowed indigenous peoples to voice their concerns at the UN and provided a pathway for indigenous peoples to have increased involvement in commissions. The working group met for the last time in 2007.

1993	Through resolution A/RES/47/75 the General Assembly declared the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. This served the purpose of encouraging nations to build better relationships with indigenous people.
1994	The General Assembly resolution A/RES/48/163 set-up the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People to increase international awareness on the rights of indigenous people. During this decade, many UN agencies worked to design plans for education, housing, health, and employment of indigenous people.
2000	This year the permanent forum on Indigenous Issues was opened as part of the Economic and Social Council to provide expert advice, raise awareness, and prepare discussions on indigenous issues.
2007	The publication of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People by the General Assembly gave the best explanation of the rights of indigenous people to the international community and was unprecedented in international law.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Over the years, there have been small scale resolutions towards helping the indigenous as well as large scale solutions provided by international bodies such as the United Nations. Some indigenous tribes face issues unique to their location, such as the Standing Rock Tribe, who suffered from the building of a pipeline through sacred parts of their land or the Mbenga tribe of western Congo, who suffered from deforestation and extensive killings during the Congo Civil War. However, the general trends of all problems are that indigenous people's human rights are being taken away. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People provides the most explicit outline of indigenous rights around the world. For example, Article 2 reads as, "Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular, that based on their indigenous origin or identity." The rest of the 46 articles cover more topics, including the right to freedom, peace, security, and the right to being consulted before laws that may impact their lives are implemented. In 2007 4 countries remained non-signatories, which are the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, which all share a similar colonial history and turmoil with indigenous groups. They used their government systems recognition of indigenous rights as being enough to uphold the wishes of the UN declaration without having to sign it. By 2010 all countries changed this and now support the UNDIP wholeheartedly. Some smaller-scale resolutions to this issue include the legal battle involving the Ogiek people in Kenya. The African Court on Human and Peoples Rights ruled in favor of the tribe that they were wrongfully evicted from their land and are not allowed to live there safely. In New Zealand, the Maori people won a fight lasting over 100 years that proclaimed the Whanganui River as human, giving it access to \$30 million to improve its health. These previous resolutions to issues show that issues can be resolved on any size scale, but just as one solution is found, another problem needs to be addressed. The indigenous people of one group cannot prosper while others are suffering.

- The Outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, September 25th, 2014 (**A/RES/69/2**)

Possible Solutions

- A possible solution could be setting up an international court dedicated to dealing with issues involving indigenous rights such as court rulings over land disputes or other human rights violations. This court can function under the previously existing forum on indigenous issues but be dedicated to full time fighting legal battles. This court can also provide indigenous peoples with funding for legal actions they may have within their nations and provide legal representation to those that do not have.
- Sub-committees within the UNPFII that focus on different areas of the world that have high populations of indigenous groups so that indigenous people in all parts will have forum members who can focus specifically on their issues and commit to helping and representing them with their full dedication
- Efforts of assimilation, education of tribes, and reducing ethnical discrimination

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/youthpol/en/equest.fileutils.dochandle?p_uploaded_file_id=500 (International Labour Organization’s and the Australian Government’s Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018)

This document is useful because it provides ideas for solutions towards the prosperity of indigenous peoples that were actually implemented in Australia and has a very clear action plan

- II. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf (**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**)

This document is useful because it is the monumental UN document that outlined how Indigenous people must be treated around the world

- III. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000262748> (UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples)

This document is useful because it shows how UNESCO took the words of the Declaration of Rights and put it into action plans published in this report

- IV. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/04/TK-Emerging-trends-in-the-generation-transmission-and-protection-of-TK-final-paper.pdf> (Conference Room Paper at the Eighteenth Session of the UNPFII)

This document is useful because it provides a comprehensive study of how indigenous knowledge is important and must be protected

- V. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00178> (Native Title Act 1993 administered by the Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet, amended in 2017)

This act can act as a guideline to show how a country provides a clear outline of the rights indigenous peoples have

- VI. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2.html> (This link provides access to the UNPFII page that has all documents from all 18 plenary sessions)

This site is extremely useful because it shows all the resolutions, speeches, and statements made by the UNPFII since its founding