Committee: United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)
Topic: Combating Systemic Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Populations
Written by: Hayam Ghanayem
Position: Chair

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1. Executive Summary

Despite comprising over 476 million people worldwide across more than 90 countries, Indigenous populations disproportionately suffer from systemic discrimination, structural poverty, forced displacement, and targeted violence. Although Indigenous peoples protect roughly 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, their rights to ancestral lands, self-determination, and cultural preservation are frequently infringed upon by state and non-state actors.

Systemic discrimination manifests in unequal access to healthcare, education, justice systems, and political representation. Concurrently, violence against Indigenous individuals—particularly environmental defenders, women, and girls—remains alarmingly high, often exacerbated by resource extraction, land grabbing, and militarization. International frameworks exist, yet bridging the gap between legal recognition and local enforcement remains a major global challenge.

2. Historical Background & Legal Frameworks

International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 (1989): The primary legally binding international treaty specifically dedicated to Indigenous and tribal rights. It establishes the mandate for governments to respect Indigenous customs, property rights, and institutions, and obligates states to consult Indigenous communities prior to structural projects affecting their lands.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007): The benchmark international non-binding instrument establishing minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Key articles affirm the right to

self-determination (Article 3), freedom from forced assimilation (Article 8), and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) regarding land development and relocation (Articles 10 & 32).

The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action: Explicitly recognized discrimination against Indigenous peoples as a severe form of racial discrimination and called on states to provide effective remedies, land rights protection, and political participation mechanisms.

3. Current Situation & Key Dynamics

Land Rights & Resource Extraction: Disputes over ancestral territories remain one of the most significant causes of discrimination and violence against Indigenous populations. Mining, logging, deforestation, large-scale agriculture, hydroelectric projects, and infrastructure development can result in displacement and environmental destruction when Indigenous communities are excluded from decision-making processes.

- Indigenous environmental and land defenders may also face threats, intimidation, criminalization, and violence when attempting to protect their territories. In many cases, weak enforcement mechanisms and limited access to justice contribute to impunity for those responsible. The protection of Indigenous land rights is therefore closely connected to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and the prevention of violence.

Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls: Indigenous women and girls often experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination based on gender, Indigenous identity, economic status, and geographic isolation. They may face disproportionately high levels of gender-based violence, exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of abuse.

- Accessing justice can be particularly difficult because of language barriers, limited availability of legal services, discrimination by institutions, and geographical distance from police stations or courts. Effective responses must therefore be culturally appropriate and developed with the participation of Indigenous women themselves.

Institutional & Socioeconomic Exclusion: Indigenous communities consistently face systemic gaps in access to quality education, medical facilities, legal aid, and socio-economic support programs. Cultural and linguistic barriers in judicial processes often result in arbitrary detention and a lack of legal redress.

Political Participation & Self-Determination: Although international law recognizes Indigenous peoples' right to participate in decisions affecting their lives and territories, meaningful participation is not always guaranteed in practice. Indigenous communities may be excluded from national political processes or consulted only after major decisions have already been made.

Displacement and Climate Change Impact: Climate change disproportionately affects many Indigenous communities because their cultures and livelihoods are closely connected to specific ecosystems and natural resources. Rising temperatures, droughts, flooding, sea-level rise, and environmental degradation can threaten traditional hunting, fishing, farming, and pastoral practices.

4. Bloc Positions

The Americas (e.g., Canada, United States, Latin American Nations)

Many nations in the region have adopted domestic legislation acknowledging UNDRIP or constitutional rights for Indigenous groups. However, tension persists regarding the practical execution of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) over major energy and infrastructure projects, alongside systemic issues surrounding judicial equity and historic redress.

Asia-Pacific Region

Some member states actively recognize Indigenous identity and land claims, whereas others categorize Indigenous groups under broader minority or tribal classifications. Policy priorities often emphasize economic development and integration, creating friction over regional autonomy and traditional land stewardship.

African Region

Member states frequently evaluate Indigenous rights within the broader scope of ethnic diversity, pastoralist land rights, and communal resource governance. Efforts center around land security for nomadic and minority communities, balancing national economic growth with local customary rights.

European Union & Western Nations

Strongly advocate for international human rights standards, environmental protection, and funding programs supporting Indigenous land management. Focus areas include protecting

human rights defenders, combating climate vulnerabilities, and upholding global supply chain accountability.

5. Possible Solutions

Strengthening the Implementation of Existing International Frameworks

Member States should strengthen the domestic implementation of international standards, particularly the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and, where applicable, ILO Convention No. 169. Governments can review national legislation to ensure that laws regarding land rights, consultation, cultural protection, and access to justice are consistent with international human rights standards.

Protecting Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

States should establish clear and transparent consultation procedures for projects that may affect Indigenous lands, resources, or communities. Consultation should take place early in the decision-making process and should be conducted in ways that respect Indigenous languages, customs, and representative institutions.

FPIC mechanisms can help reduce conflict surrounding development projects and ensure that Indigenous communities have a meaningful role in decisions affecting their territories.

Protecting Indigenous Human Rights Defenders

Governments should strengthen measures to protect Indigenous leaders, environmental defenders, journalists, and community representatives who face threats or violence. Possible measures include:

- improving investigation and prosecution of attacks;
- providing accessible reporting and protection mechanisms;
- preventing the misuse of laws to criminalize peaceful human rights activities;
- increasing accountability for state and non-state actors responsible for violence.

Improving Access to Justice

States can improve access to justice by providing affordable legal aid, interpretation services, culturally appropriate court procedures, and training for police officers, judges, and other public officials.

Special attention should be given to reducing discrimination within law-enforcement and judicial institutions and ensuring that victims can safely report violence without fear of retaliation.

Addressing Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

Member States should develop targeted and culturally appropriate strategies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls. These strategies should include:

- accessible shelters and support services;
- culturally appropriate healthcare and counseling;
- stronger investigation of crimes;
- improved cooperation with Indigenous women's organizations;
- prevention programs developed with local communities.

Increasing Indigenous Representation and Participation

States should create or strengthen mechanisms that allow Indigenous peoples to participate directly in decisions affecting them. This may include representative councils, advisory bodies, consultation mechanisms, and greater Indigenous participation in local and national government.

A key principle should be “nothing about Indigenous peoples without Indigenous peoples,” meaning that policies should not be developed without meaningful participation from the communities affected.

International Cooperation and Capacity Building

Developed and developing countries can cooperate through funding, technical assistance, training programs, and the sharing of best practices. International organizations can support governments in strengthening legal frameworks, collecting reliable data, and developing culturally appropriate public services.

6. Glossary

Ancestral Lands: Territories traditionally inhabited, used, or culturally connected to Indigenous peoples.

Cultural Preservation: The protection and continuation of Indigenous languages, traditions, customs, beliefs, and cultural practices.

Disaggregated Data: Data separated into different groups, such as Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, to better identify inequalities.

Environmental Defender: An individual or community member who works to protect land, ecosystems, or natural resources from environmental harm.

Forced Assimilation: Policies or actions intended to make Indigenous peoples abandon their cultural identity, language, traditions, or way of life.

Impunity: A situation in which individuals responsible for crimes or human rights violations are not held accountable.

Indigenous Peoples: Distinct communities with historical connections to particular territories who maintain unique cultural, social, political, and economic characteristics.

Land Grabbing: The acquisition or control of land, often on a large scale, without fair consultation, consent, or adequate protection of the rights of affected communities.

Self-Determination: The right of peoples to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.

Systemic Discrimination: Discrimination embedded within laws, institutions, policies, or social systems that creates unequal outcomes for certain groups.

UNDRIP: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, which establishes international minimum standards for the rights and dignity of Indigenous peoples.

ILO Convention No. 169: A legally binding international convention concerning the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples.

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