

ENHANCING PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN PARLIAMENT

"The interests of the indigenous peoples must be part of the new development agenda in order for it to succeed. [...] Together, let us recognize and celebrate the valuable and distinctive identities of indigenous peoples around the world. Let us work even harder to empower them and support their aspirations".

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Status of indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples are renowned for their rich cultures, traditional knowledge systems and unique ways of life. In many countries, however, they are dispossessed of their ancestral lands and territories, as well as deprived of their natural resources upon which they depend for their survival. This can result in the denial of their very right to life. Many indigenous peoples continue to suffer discrimination, extreme poverty and exclusion from political and economic power. Their belief systems, cultures, languages and ways of life are threatened, even to the point of extinction.

There are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples in some 90 countries throughout all regions of the worldⁱ. While they constitute 5 per cent of the world's population, they make up 15 per cent of the world's disadvantaged. Out of 44,000 MPs in the world today, there are a minimum of 979 indigenous MPs, 80 per cent of them menⁱⁱ. Of the 7,000 languages in the world today, it is estimated that more than 4,000 are spoken by indigenous peoples. Language specialists predict that up to 90 per cent of the world's languages are likely to become extinct or threatened by the end of the centuryⁱⁱⁱ.

The integration of indigenous peoples' rights and needs into key development processes such as the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals remains very important. There is growing international

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) adopted in September 2007, is the most advanced and comprehensive international instrument on indigenous peoples' rights. It builds on existing human rights enshrined in international human rights treaties and embodies global consensus on indigenous peoples' rights. The preamble of UNDRIP recognizes the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples, that indigenous peoples are free and equal to all other peoples, and have the right to be free from discrimination, in particular, discrimination based on their indigenous origin or identity (Article 2). UNDRIP defines the minimum standards necessary for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples of the world. It is now time to move towards the implementation of UNDRIP's provisions.

advocacy for more credible and effective systems of governance and accountability and an expectation that the post-2015 development framework will be people-centered and human rights-based.

UNDP's engagement with indigenous peoples

UNDP's engagement with indigenous peoples is grounded in its overall vision to help countries achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. This involves the three main areas of our work, which consist of developing sustainable development pathways, including protecting the environment, strengthening inclusive and effective democratic governance, and building resilience, particularly from conflicts and natural disasters. For UNDP, success in furthering human development is inextricably linked with human rights; we cannot achieve either in exclusion of the other as they are mutually reinforcing. Sustainable human development is not possible where discrimination, injustice, and social exclusion prevail, and where there is a lack of recognition of the value of

different worldviews that groups and communities bring to society. Indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, livelihoods and world views must be recognized if development processes are to be inclusive and sustainable. UNDP is committed to creating spaces for and guaranteeing the effective participation of indigenous peoples at all levels to ensure that their voices are heard and that they contribute to policy-making and programme formulation and implementation. UNDP works towards guaranteeing access to opportunities and supporting an enabling environment in which indigenous peoples are empowered and can develop their full potential to lead dignified lives in harmony with their world vision.

Inclusive political processes and institutions: Strengthening minorities and indigenous peoples' participation and representation in parliaments

UNDP supports 70 parliamentary development programmes globally. In line with Outcome 2 of UNDP's Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 which puts an emphasis on supporting parliaments to deliver sustainable development gains and respond to citizen's expectations for voice, development and accountability, UNDP is advocating for better representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliaments and contributing to fostering cooperation among parliamentarians in terms of ensuring compliance with UNDRIP and strengthening the respect of indigenous peoples' rights. UNDP and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have worked on producing a series of knowledge products under the inclusive parliament's initiative to: increase knowledge on the representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in Parliament; provide tools for parliaments and other stakeholders on promoting inclusive parliaments; build capacity to advocate for more inclusive parliaments.

Why indigenous peoples' rights are important to parliamentarians

A democratic parliament is representative of the social diversity of the population. A parliament that is unrepresentative of this diversity will leave some social groups and communities feeling disadvantaged in the political process or even excluded altogether, with consequences for the quality of public life or the stability of the political system and society in general. The participation of indigenous individuals serving as members of parliament is often a marker of the inclusiveness of parliament. Their presence has special symbolic value, just as the absence of indigenous parliamentarians may convey the opposite message. The limited size of the indigenous population in some countries, combined with their marginalization in mainstream political parties, means that indigenous peoples are not always elected to parliament under the general electoral system.

Indigenous peoples' institutions, systems of governance and traditional knowledge often provide insights into the search for solutions to today's complex environmental,

developmental and governance problems. Indigenous peoples' perspective and their full and effective participation in policy and decision-making must be seen as instrumental in breaking the cycle of discrimination and exclusion. Guaranteeing their participation also enriches discussions in parliament and re-evaluates the cultural mores of society.

When it comes to protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, parliaments and parliamentarians have a central role to play in law-making, adopting budgets, and overseeing the executive branch of government. These activities can involve a spectrum of rights that have an immediate impact on the lives of indigenous peoples. In this context it is important to address the triple discrimination faced by many indigenous women on account of their gender, their indigenous identity and their socio-economic status. Where parliamentarians and parliaments bear the responsibility of ratifying international human rights treaties, together with other branches of government, become the guardians of international human rights standards and their application in domestic contexts. The rights of indigenous peoples enshrined in UNDRIP reflect existing rights affirmed in international human rights law, now placed in the context of indigenous peoples' realities. Parliamentarians have an important role to play in ensuring the implementation of international human rights, including the UNDRIP and related legal and constitutional norms.

Handbook for Parliamentarians on Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Partnering with the IPU, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP launched a [Handbook for Parliamentarians - "Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"](#) to mark the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (22-23 September 2014, New York). The Handbook provides a series of checklists that can be used to assess parliamentary engagement with indigenous peoples' rights and identifies areas that may require strengthening. It also provides practical ideas for the implementation of UNDRIP – highlighting examples of how the provisions of UNDRIP have been implemented at the national and local levels. It presents good practices in relation to the recognition and exercise of indigenous peoples' rights in different regions of the world. Additional reference materials on indigenous peoples' rights are also provided, as well as an annex containing the full text of UNDRIP. The Handbook is available English, French, Spanish and Russian on [UNDP's website](#) and on the [AGORA](#) parliamentary development knowledge platform.

Contact Information: charles.chauvel@undp.org

[Fast facts: Indigenous Peoples](#)

ⁱ State of the World's Indigenous Peoples (United Nations publication, Sales no. 09.VI.13).

ⁱⁱ IPU survey, Beyond numbers: the participation of indigenous peoples in parliament.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Language Vitality and Endangerment (Paris, 2003).