



United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues



What is the UNPFII?

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is the UN's central coordinating body for matters relating to the concerns and rights of the world's indigenous peoples. It submits recommendations to the Council on issues related to indigenous peoples. It holds a two-week session each year which takes place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City but it could also take place in Geneva or any other place as decided by the forum.



Purpose

The UNPFII is an advisory body that reports to the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established by resolution 2000/22 on 28 July 2000. Its mandate deals with themes related to Indigenous Peoples' economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. Its mandate deals with themes related to Indigenous Peoples' economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

It is a special forum for networking among indigenous delegates, and for forming alliances with other organizations, United Nations agencies, donors, representatives of Member States, NGOs, etc. The sessions also provide an opportunity to raise awareness, to inform and to share your concerns with other key actors on the issues of Indigenous Peoples.



Structure

The Permanent Forum is comprised of sixteen independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity, who serve for a term of three years as Members and may be re-elected or re-appointed for one additional term. Eight of the experts are nominated by governments and eight are nominated directly by indigenous organizations in their regions.

What does the UNPFII do?

The UNPFII makes recommendations and prepares reports for the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and for the United Nations system. It raises awareness and promotes the integration and coordination of indigenous issues within the UN system. It prepares and disseminates information on indigenous themes, it does this by;

1. providing expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the Council, as well as to programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, through ECOSOC;
2. raising awareness and promoting the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system;
3. preparing and disseminating information on indigenous issues by holding annual two-week sessions



United Nations Mechanisms for Engagement of Indigenous Peoples

For decades, indigenous peoples have mobilized themselves to influence the UN systems to assert and establish the recognition and inclusion of their rights in global processes and mechanisms. In 2007, this culminated in the achieving the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by the United Nation. Since then three other mechanisms have followed the UNDRIP under the Human Rights Council to further the rights of Indigenous Peoples, these are: the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (SSRIP) and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP).¹



Who are Indigenous Peoples?

An official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN-system body due to the diversity of indigenous peoples. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:²

1. Have a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories;
 2. Consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories;
 3. Form at present non-dominant sectors of society;
 4. Are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.
-
- A photograph showing a group of indigenous people in a field, possibly harvesting rice. They are wearing traditional head coverings and are focused on their work. The background is a vast field of tall grasses.



Indigenous Peoples in the Context of Myanmar ³

In Myanmar, Indigenous Peoples are broadly sub-grouped under eight categories- Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine, and Shan. This broad categorization is contested however. For example, the Naga, Danu and Tavoy (Dawei) Indigenous Peoples do not identify themselves as belonging to any of those broad categories. Likewise, the term taing-yin-tha in Burmese (sometimes officially translated as national races by the government, or ethnic nationalities) is used to refer to those who have been present in the current geographical area of Myanmar/Burma since before the beginning of the first British annexation, and is usually used to refer to the main eight ethnic categories, including the majority group of Bamar.

Indigenous Peoples' use the terminology htanay-taing-yin-tha for Indigenous Peoples', which translates as "original dwellers who have strong ancestral ties to the present territories", based on the concept of self-identification, and using the criteria of non-dominance in the national context, historical continuity, ancestral territories, and cultural values.

Htanay-taing-yin-tha have their own traditional systems of self-governance. Some indigenous areas were later colonised by Bamar kingdoms, but many continued with self-governance until British annexation (such as Chin, Kachin and Shan). Other indigenous areas such as Naga were never colonised by the British and were considered to be 'unadministered areas' during the colonial era.

References

¹— Right! Volume 2: Updated training manual on Indigenous Peoples, 2015, AIPP.

²— UNDP Factsheet: Who are Indigenous Peoples and POINT's who are IPs?

³— IP Coalition of UPR report in Myanmar 2020

https://www.docip.org/fileadmin/documents/Docip/Fiches_pratiques/Fiches_EM RIP/EN/Factsheet_EM RIP_2019-en.pdf

<https://www.docip.org/en/indigenous-peoples-at-the-un/permanent-forum/>

