

THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous youth as agents of change for self-determination

Virtual commemoration on 9 August 2023

(09-10:30 am EST/New York Time)

Zoom link to register: <https://tinyurl.com/Indigenous23>

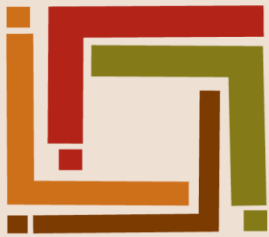
The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated globally on 9 August. It marks the date of the inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982¹. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is organizing a virtual commemoration of the International Day on Monday, 9 August 2023. Indigenous Peoples, Member States, UN entities, civil society, and the public are all invited.

Indigenous youth as agents of change for self-determination

The right of peoples to self-determination occupies an important place in international human rights law, and is recognized as a fundamental right in major human rights instruments (covenants), including the United Nations Charter. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination (Art. 3) and in exercising this right, they have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Self-determination is fundamental and must be taken together with Articles 1 and 2 of the UN Declaration because Indigenous Peoples are subject to international human rights law and as Peoples are equal to all other Peoples. These three articles of the UN Declaration confirm that Indigenous Peoples, including children and youth, have the right to make their own decisions and carry them out meaningfully and culturally appropriate to them. In other words, Indigenous Peoples have an equal right to govern themselves, equal to all other Peoples.

Indigenous youth are playing an active role in exercising their right to self-determination, as their future depends on the decisions that are made today. For instance, Indigenous youth are working as agents of change at the forefront of some of the most pressing crises facing humanity today.

¹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 49/214. International Decade of the World's Indigenous People [A/RES/49/214]. <http://www.un-documents.net/a49r214.htm>



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Since colonization, Indigenous youth have been faced with ever-changing environments not only culturally in modern societies, but in the traditional context as well. While living in two worlds is becoming harder as the world changes, Indigenous youth are harnessing cutting-edge technologies and developing new skills to offer solutions and contribute to a more sustainable, peaceful future for our people and planet. Their representation and participation in global efforts towards climate change mitigation, peacebuilding and digital cooperation are crucial for the effective implementation of the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, and to their enjoyment of collective and individual human rights, the promotion of peaceful co-existence, and ensuring equality of all.

In the lead-up to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023, marking the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and the [Summit of the Future in 2024](#), it is important to ensure an inclusive and diverse youth engagement in multilateral fora towards transformative changes in decision-making processes. The meaningful engagement of Indigenous youth in the following areas are crucial to exercising the right to self-determination and ensuring a better future for all:

Climate action and the green transition

Indigenous youth in their communities play differentiated roles and functions, from which derive certain rights, responsibilities, abilities, and social recognition. Their roles and functions can differ according to their cosmovision and Indigenous languages. For example, from an early age Indigenous youth, both boys and girls, are trained by their parents, the community and nature to participate in family activities, socialize with their peers and elders, through games, imitation and collaborating in activities such as agriculture, shepherding, sowing, and household chores, as well as in the way community ties are established between them. Therefore, Indigenous youth also have an intimate relationship with the land and biodiversity.

Importantly, ways of living for Indigenous youth are changing due to evolving social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. For example, education systems that are not culturally appropriate and do not include or value the cultural reality of Indigenous knowledge, the misuse of new communications technologies that stereotype Indigenous ways of life, and the expansion of extractive and resource-exploitation companies that undermine Indigenous Peoples' values and societies.



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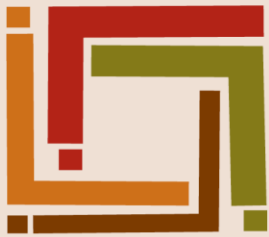
However, Indigenous youth have been changing this reality and becoming key players in the global climate action movement. As the next generation, Indigenous youth are positioning Indigenous Peoples' unique alternative solutions to climate change and issues related to the 'green transition', especially where the development of many green technologies, such as mineral extraction and hydroelectric dams, are harming Indigenous Peoples' lands, territories, resources and rights. The issues raised by Indigenous youth in the climate change debate can offer important insights into climate action and sustainable resource management, and they must be afforded a seat at all levels of decision-making table.

Mobilizing for Justice

Discrimination impacts the lives of Indigenous youth in ways that affect their self-esteem, loss of spiritual richness, loss of language and denial of their cultural roots. Many Indigenous youth face multiple barriers, cultural clashes, and different influences that over time, push them to acquire an identity that is foreign to their place of origin to avoid being the object of discrimination and racism, in extreme cases rejecting their culture, languages, and the practice of ancestral customs. In some cases, entire generations of Indigenous youth have grown up out of their communities but have retained a connection to their lands and territories through their families, Indigenous Peoples' organizations or others.

Despite these challenges, there are examples of Indigenous youth participation in Indigenous Peoples' organizations, in urban and rural areas, and even outside national borders, who are revitalizing and promoting their cultural identities. They are organizing diverse activities to strengthen cultural identity, participating in assemblies, and sharing cultural spaces with Indigenous elders, and creating a solidarity network among Indigenous youth.

The new generation of Indigenous advocates are mobilizing to shift the narrative around Indigenous Peoples. They have become the driving force for societal change through social mobilization, making use of online platforms to showcase and celebrate their cultures, languages, and knowledge systems to a wider audience, and to highlight injustices within their communities. Through their voices, Indigenous youth are sharing their stories and building solidarity among other young people, in turn raising awareness of Indigenous Peoples' issues, both at home and abroad.



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Intergenerational connections

As they find their place in society, identity is fundamental for Indigenous youth. Individual and collective identity is also attached to the land, language, traditional livelihoods, ceremonies, arts, crafts, and family members and society as a whole. Identity is transferred through family ties: the transmission of the history of the land and the transfer of knowledge. Consequently, it is important to have an intergenerational dialogue between youth and elders, because youth represent continuity along the path already walked by their ancestors.

As the keepers of traditional and scientific knowledge, Indigenous elders hold the key to Indigenous Peoples' cultures, values and cosmovision. Indigenous elders teach Indigenous youth and children the importance of family, community, nature and their responsibilities within these structures. Therefore, the connection between the generations is a crucial aspect of Indigenous Peoples' wellbeing, as it facilitates the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and fosters strong bonds between generations. As the future custodians of the planet, Indigenous youth have a wealth of resources and expertise right at their fingertips, simply by connecting with the teachings of their grandparents, who also have learned from their ancestors.

Finally, there is a need to strengthen intergenerational dialogue as well as the dialogue between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples, so that future relationships will be positive for many generations to come.

Format and invited speakers

The virtual commemoration will include an opening segment with a traditional ceremony, followed by a pre-recorded statement from UN high level officials and a virtual statement from the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The interactive dialogue segment will include the participation of invited speakers and a moderator. Speakers will share their expertise and experience from their Indigenous Peoples' communities in the role of Indigenous youth in exercising self-determination in the context of climate action and the green transition; mobilizing for justice; and intergenerational connections.