



THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Volume VI – Climate Crisis

(release date: first quarter 2025)

Executive Summary

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council with a mandate to discuss Indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. At its first session in 2002, the Forum called on the United Nations to produce a report on the state of the world's Indigenous Peoples to discuss issues relating to Indigenous Peoples in the thematic areas within the Forum's mandate. The first volume, published in 2009, covered the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum mentioned above. Subsequent volumes have been more targeted to address specific topics relevant to Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous Peoples and health (2013), education (2017), the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2019) and most recently, Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources (2021).

The 2024 edition focuses on the vital role of Indigenous peoples in addressing the impacts of climate change. Although Indigenous Peoples account for only around 5 per cent of the world's population, they effectively manage and protect an estimated 80 per cent of the Earth's biodiversity and about 40 per cent of protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes. Since Indigenous Peoples first came to the United Nations, they have emphasized the fundamental importance of their relationship with their lands, territories and resources, which hold a deep cultural and spiritual significance within their societies.

In an expert group meeting report presented at the ninth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2010, it is noted that “the climate change crisis is a direct result of the unabated dumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere caused by a fossil-fuel-based economic model and the over-exhaustion of natural resources such as forests, peat lands, grasslands, soils, and the like. Indigenous Peoples disproportionately suffer from the serious impacts of climate change because they are mainly dependent on the integrity of their ecosystems for their survival and because of their impoverishment.”¹ The repercussions of the climate crisis are being felt deeply among Indigenous Peoples across the world, with Indigenous women particularly affected due to their central role as caregivers, knowledge keepers and resource managers with an intimate connection to their natural environment.

¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, “Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity – articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, report of the international expert group meeting, 5 February 2010 (E/C.19/2010/14), para. 26.





THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

This publication focuses on the climate crisis, its impact on Indigenous Peoples, and the role Indigenous Peoples can and do play in mitigating the effects of climate change. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of current and emerging issues in the context of the climate crisis from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples. Drawing on illustrative examples from across the seven sociocultural regions, the publication highlights both challenges and good practices linked to Indigenous Peoples' experiences with and responses to the ongoing climate crisis. Ultimately, the report is intended to serve as an authoritative reference and advocacy tool for Indigenous Peoples and civil society organizations and to contribute to the broader conversation around climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

Chapter one, written by Susan Chiblow, explores the interconnected nature of Indigenous Peoples' languages, cultures, wisdom, and scientific and technical knowledge and examines how they are being affected by the climate crisis. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, which are embedded in their languages and cultures, are grounded in a holistic, all-encompassing relationship with the universe, reflecting their commitment to living in harmony with nature.

The chapter explores the role Indigenous Peoples currently play – and the expanded role they are capable of assuming – in addressing the climate crisis. The chapter illustrates the important contributions made by Indigenous Peoples to environmental protection and demonstrates the value of their languages and cultures in safeguarding vital information related to climate change mitigation. It emphasizes the urgent need to support Indigenous-led programmes for the protection and promotion of Indigenous languages, cultures, and scientific and technical knowledge. Recommendations for policymakers are provided to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' scientific and technical knowledge is fully leveraged and integrated into climate change mitigation efforts at the national, regional and global levels, grounded in the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

Chapter two, drawn from a review commissioned by the World Health Organization (WHO), focuses on the impact of climate and environmental changes on Indigenous Peoples' health and well-being. Through a comprehensive literature review, the chapter explores the profound personal relationship Indigenous Peoples have with the physical landscape and examines how, as ecosystems transform, these relationships are disrupted, with serious repercussions for their physical, emotional and spiritual health.

The chapter identifies health-related risks linked to the detrimental effects of climate change, including specific risks to Indigenous women and girls. It is emphasized that Indigenous Peoples are not vulnerable by nature; rather, they are placed in situations of vulnerability as a result of social, economic and ethnic discrimination and are further disadvantaged by the impacts of climate change. The focus is not wholly on challenges, however; the review emphasizes the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous Peoples and calls for greater support for localized, Indigenous-led adaptations to new realities emerging as a result of climate shifts.

The findings of the chapter are threaded together by an overarching understanding that climate-related health impacts are rooted in and inseparable from Indigenous Peoples' connections to place. Environmental health and human health are inextricably linked.





THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

The chapter argues that because of this indivisibility, it is critical to establish a framework for Indigenous determinants of health that incorporates a repositioning of human engagement with the environment and accounts for Indigenous conceptualizations of health and well-being.

Chapter three, written by Max Ooft, looks at contemporary climate mitigation processes that can be detrimental to Indigenous Peoples, highlighting false solutions that are negatively affecting them and their traditional knowledge, languages, ecosystems and health. Using case studies from around the world, the chapter illustrates both positive and negative country experiences in implementing climate change mitigation initiatives. The chapter also examines the growing importance of climate financing – and the fact that only a small portion of the funding provided for mitigation and adaptation efforts is earmarked for Indigenous Peoples, with the resources almost always disbursed through intermediaries. It highlights the lack of direct financing for Indigenous Peoples’ organizations and concludes with key recommendations outlining changes that need to be made. In line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Permanent Forum has emphasized that Indigenous Peoples must be able to fully participate in all climate change mitigation projects and policies that involve or affect their lands, resources and ways of life now or in the future. The present reality is that in the push for profits from the green technology and energy transition, Indigenous Peoples’ lands and territories are becoming polluted and contaminated by toxic substances.

Chapter four, written by Edna Kaptoyo, offers some insights on how the climate crisis is affecting the economies of Indigenous Peoples given their close connection to the environment and its natural resources. Indigenous economies are regenerative and sustainable in nature; they are not driven by financial profit but rather grounded in the cosmovisions of Indigenous Peoples, which prioritize community-led practices, the sustainable management of lands and resources, and a keen awareness of the impact humans have on the environment.

Drawing on examples from the seven sociocultural regions, the chapter underlines Indigenous Peoples’ commitment to responsible economic development – despite the increasing pressure they face to conform to the global market economy and despite growing climate action efforts threatening their lands and resources.

By demonstrating the strengths of Indigenous economic models through examples of good practice, the chapter provides policymakers with concrete solutions showing how to incorporate sustainable Indigenous economies into climate change mitigation efforts and thereby create a more inclusive economy based on respect and trust.

Chapter five, written by Johnson Cerda, examines the progress Indigenous Peoples have made in carving out a space for themselves in the international climate change arena and highlights some of the challenges they continue to face in securing a seat at the table in negotiations linked to key international conventions.

While Indigenous Peoples have only been allowed to participate as observers in climate conventions and declarations, they have nevertheless played a critical role in shaping key environmental texts, including the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity. This final chapter provides an in-depth analysis of Indigenous Peoples’ working groups and platforms, highlighting their effective approaches to advocacy in





THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

international climate change processes and providing concrete recommendations on how their participation can continue to be strengthened.

Author profiles

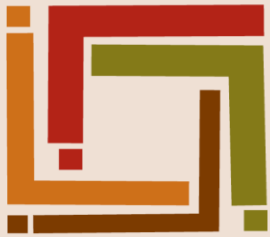
Susan Chiblow holds a Bachelor of Science in biology, a Master of Science in environment and management, and a Ph.D. in environmental science with a specialization in *N'bi Kendaaswin* (water knowledge). Over the past 30 years, she has dedicated her efforts to working with First Nations communities and Elders, striving to protect the environment. Currently, she serves as an Anishinaabe advisor on environmental projects and policy analysis. Chiblow is an expert in Anishinabek law development, watershed planning, and traditional ecological knowledge. She has contributed to drafting international documents for the United Nations and special rapporteurs focusing on First Nations issues.

Max Ooft has over 20 years of experience advocating for Indigenous Peoples' rights in both national and international Indigenous Peoples' organizations, as well as through development work at the United Nations Development Programme office in Suriname. Ooft has been active in local community development, programme design, and the implementation and evaluation of human-rights-based approaches to sustainable development. He has contributed to, inter alia, the UNDP policy on Indigenous Peoples and the UNESCO policy on engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

Edna Kaptoyo is a social development specialist with extensive experience in advocacy, global environmental law, and policymaking. She is an active member of the Indigenous Peoples Caucus and the national gender and climate change working group in Kenya, as well as other national and international platforms addressing Indigenous issues. Throughout her career, Kaptoyo has advocated for Indigenous Peoples' rights, participating in initiatives such as water catchment restoration by Indigenous women and documenting best adaptation practices in Indigenous communities.

Johnson Cerda is the Senior Director of the Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. He has a long-standing history of working with Indigenous Peoples organizations and Ecuadorian government institutions involved in Indigenous Peoples issues. Cerda has served as a member of the GEF-NGO committee representing Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and as a member of the Panel of Experts for the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility of the World Bank. He has also co-directed the Amazon Alliance and participated in UNFCCC negotiations for over 20 years, consistently advocating for Indigenous Peoples' rights throughout his career.





THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

For the chapter commissioned by WHO, the research team included the following:

- **University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada:** Laura Jane Brubacher, India Bruton, Warren Dodd, Susan J. Elliott, Simon Glauser, Chenel Lozon, Hannah Neufeld, Kaitlyn Patterson, Laura Peach, and Tara Tai-Wen Chen
- **University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada:** Sheri Longboat

Indigenous experts who co-shaped the review and participated in engagement meetings

- Amina Amharech, Founding Member of the Amazigh Community Network AZUL and Member of the International Land Coalition
- Arthur Blume, Professor in the Department of Psychology of Washington State University
- Tonje Margrete Winsnes Johansen, Advisor, Arctic and Environmental Unit at the Saami Council
- Lena Maria Nilsson, Research Project Coordinator, Arctic Centre/Epidemiology and Global Health/Lavvu
- Sara Olsvig, International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council
- Anne Simpson, Climate Change Policy Advisor at the Inuit Circumpolar Council

Additional Indigenous experts who participated in engagement meetings

Mukaro Borrero, Phoolman Chaudhary, Samantha Chisholm Hatfield, Rhys Jones, Belkacem Lounes, Margaret Tunda Lepore, Casey Kickett, Aqqaluk Lynge, Hanieh Moghani, Sherry Pictou, Zaira Zambelli Taveira, and Tarcila Rivera Zea

Responsible WHO officers

- Theadora Swift Koller, Senior Technical Lead/Unit Head, Health Equity, GRE
- Cristina Romanelli, Technical Officer, Climate Change, Nature Based Solutions and Health
- Hortense Nessler, WHO Technical Officer
- Susana Gomez, WHO consultant
- Rachel Hammonds, WHO consultant

