



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

Fact Sheet

## Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration

*The issue of indigenous peoples and urban migration is an ongoing priority of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and will be discussed during its Seventh Session, to be held at UN Headquarters in New York from 21 April to 2 May 2008.*

The number of the world's population who are migrating within countries and between countries continues to rise. In 2008, for the first time in history, half of the world population will be living in urban areas. The impact of urbanization is being keenly felt by indigenous peoples across the world, and carries both potential serious consequences for their culture, heritage and connection to their traditional lands as well as socio-economic opportunities.

Despite the widespread assumption that indigenous peoples live overwhelmingly in their rural territories, the reality is that urban areas are home to large indigenous populations. As urban indigenous peoples are normally geographically scattered, they can be overlooked as a distinct community.

### ❖ Why do indigenous peoples migrate?


- Indigenous peoples worldwide are vulnerable to a range of social and economic factors that affect their human rights. They tend to lack access to education, and live on lands that are vulnerable to natural disasters, with inadequate or no sanitation, and poor or no access to health services, all of which contribute to lower productivity and incomes among indigenous populations.
- Indigenous peoples are increasingly migrating to urban areas, both voluntarily and involuntarily. However, the growth of urban indigenous communities is not only fuelled by rural to urban migration, but also, and probably more importantly, by natural increase-- the difference between the numbers of births and deaths in a population..
- "Push" factors contributing to indigenous peoples' migration to urban areas include land dispossession when indigenous peoples are forcibly removed or driven from their homelands, poverty, militarization, natural disasters, lack of employment opportunities, and the deterioration of traditional livelihoods.
- With no viable economic alternatives in rural areas, indigenous peoples are drawn to urban settings by the prospect of job opportunities and economic security.

### ❖ Impact and consequences

- Family separations caused by internal indigenous migration can have a profound psychological effect on the individuals who migrate as well as on those men, women and, perhaps most of all, the children left behind. It is particularly difficult to maintain family relationships when a family member migrates over longer distances.
- According to the International Organization for Migration, remittances from migrants from developing countries to their home communities are estimated to exceed official development assistance and are second only to the foreign direct investment.



United Nations

- 
- In many cases, urban indigenous communities do not have adequate access to information about services available to them, especially when they do not participate in their planning or managing these services. This contributes to the continued marginalisation of indigenous communities in urban centres.
  - Indigenous peoples who migrate to urban areas face discrimination and often do not enjoy basic rights, being subjected to limited access to health services, inadequate housing and unemployment. Racism and discrimination towards urban indigenous peoples persists, despite the increasingly multicultural nature of cities.
  - Indigenous migrants often find it hard to sustain their language, identity and culture and to pass these on to younger generations. Hence, the loss of indigenous heritage and values is at stake.
  - Youth are particularly vulnerable in urban settings. Disempowered and marginalized from the urban society in which they live, they also lack opportunities to retain and develop the cultural identity, knowledge and traditional skills.

### ❖ Recommendations

Living in cities can be a positive experience for indigenous peoples and has the potential to provide many opportunities for improving their socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, remittances sent by urban indigenous peoples can provide support and contribute to the survival of rural communities.

In addition to incorporating the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into domestic legislation, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has made several specific recommendations to UN Member States for improving the lives of urban indigenous peoples. These include:

- Urging States that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- Recommending that relevant States, in cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, establish indigenous peoples' centres in urban areas to address their medical needs and provide legal and other forms of assistance, including helping urban indigenous peoples to deal with issues related to their cultural identity.
- Recommending that relevant States recognize indigenous peoples' right to prior, free and informed consent as outlined in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and provide support mechanisms for involuntarily displaced indigenous peoples and to allow them to return to their original communities.
- Recommending that States, in order to combat the adverse effects of migration, cooperate with indigenous peoples to provide employment and economic development opportunities within their territories.

### ❖ Additional Information

**For more information on the Seventh Session**, please visit:  
[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session\\_seventh.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_seventh.html)

**For interviews with UN officials and indigenous leaders**, please contact: Nancy Groves, Department of Public Information, tel: 917-367-7083, e-mail: [mediainfo@un.org](mailto:mediainfo@un.org)

**For Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues**, please contact: Mirian Masaquiza, Secretariat of UNPFII, tel: 917-367-6006, e-mail: [IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org](mailto:IndigenousPermanentForum@un.org)

