NHSMUN

Background Guide | *UNPFII*

NHSMUN
National High School Model United Nations

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). My name is Myla Khan and I am honoured to be your Director for Session 1! I am entering my second year of school at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts where I am studying Finance. I was born in England, raised in California and the Middle East, and am proudly a Pashtun Pakistani, an Indigenous identity!

I originally joined MUN in middle school, and continued until this past year. Growing up, MUN had a huge impact on my academic career and character, and very quickly became a pillar in my life. I was able to meet people who cared as much as me about the intricacies of world conflicts and politics. MUN helps broaden your understanding of prevalent issues going on while fostering both a competitive and empathetic environment, everyone is able to be heard without being judged. So far, I have been a delegate and a mentor to new joining members of my secondary school's MUN program, and now a Director with NHSMUN. I can't wait to see your proposals and how you are able to debate them.

Outside of MUN, I enjoy being around nature and the environment, as well as being part of theatre. With that being said, I am a part of a Business and Environment Association, as well as being a part of my school's Theatre Program. I like to keep a lot of free time with me to let loose, where I build legos, garden, pretend like I am completing my Tony Award-Winning performance, and I also enjoy reading, both books and netflix subtitles.

As you S1 Director, I find it my job to ensure that each and everyone of you feel acknowledged, encouraged to be the best delegate possible. This conference is more than simply debating an issue, but as an opportunity to grow as people and build your character. By the end of the conference I hope you feel more connected to the issue, and more connected to yourself.

I look forward to meeting you and seeing our debate that lies ahead.

Best regards,

Myla Khan
Director, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
Session I
nhsmun.unpfii@imuna.org

NHSMUN
National High School Model United Nations

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)! My name is Alonndra Santiago Negron, and I am honored to serve as your Director of S2! I'm a rising sophomore at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, where I study International Relations. I was born in Chicago and proudly call Puerto Rico home.

I Joined Model UN when I started college, and it has quickly become one of the most impactful parts of my academic experience. Starting as a staffer and now becoming a Secretariat member of & MUN, I've grown to love MUN not only for the rigorous debate but also for the opportunity it provided to foster empathy , cooperation, and critical thinking. I've had the privilege of serving as various roles including crisis director, and these roles have deepened my appreciation for the behind- the-scenes work that goes into creating a meaningful, engaging committee experience. I'm especially excited to see how you all approach each of our topics.

Outside of MUN, I'm actively involved in several communities on campus. I'm a member of the International Relations club, Jefferson Pre-Law Society, Women's Club Basketball. Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women, Catholic Campus Ministry, The Latin American Student Union, and Alma Mater Productions. I also am a Tutor of The Arc of Greater Williamsburg. These organizations reflect my passion for leadership, community, advocacy and service. When I'm not busy with school or clubs, I love to travel and spend quality time with friends and family.

As your S2 Director, my goal is to create a space where every delegate feels heard, challenged, and encouraged to grow. Whether this is your first conference or your tenth, I hope you'll walk away from this weekend more confident in your voice and more connected to the global issues we're here to tackle together.

I can't wait to meet you all and witness the thoughtful, dynamic debates that lie ahead!

Best regards,

Alonndra Santiago Negron
Director, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
Session II
nhsmun.unpfii@imuna.org

A NOTE ON RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our Beginner Delegate Guide, Advanced Delegate Guide, Research Guide, and Rules of Procedure Guide. In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are both prepared to debate throughout the committee. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic. It is best to focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 20, 2026**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 30, 2026**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at nhsmun@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was established in 2000. As an expert advisory body to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The forum was formed after years of advocacy. These efforts exposed discrimination and unfair treatment of Indigenous Peoples across the world. [1]

A key influence was the work of José Martínez Cobo. He served as a Special Rapporteur from 1974 to 1986. During this time, he worked with the United Nations on a major study. His research showed widespread mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples. It documented violence and loss of culture. As well as limits on rights. The study showed inequality in health, housing, education, language, land, and jobs. Cobo explored what it means to be indigenous and why rights must be protected. His findings demanded urgent global attention. They laid the foundation for action at the international level. [2]

A direct result was the creation of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) in 1982. The WGIP was formed under the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Indigenous Issues. The group had two main goals. First, it reviewed new developments affecting Indigenous rights. Second, it drafted international standards to protect those rights. Its key achievement was drafting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).[3] After years of debate and revision, the General Assembly adopted the declaration in 2007. UNDRIP sets global standards. It protects the dignity, survival, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples everywhere.

The UNPFII built on this progress. It created a permanent platform for Indigenous voices inside the United Nations. Each year, the Forum meets for two weeks in New York. These sessions bring together Indigenous representatives, UN agencies, and member states. They discuss urgent issues and propose solutions.[4] The Forum makes recommendations to ECOSOC, which can shape UN policy and programs. It also works alongside other UN bodies to include Indigenous views.

The importance of UNPFII lies in its permanent role. For the first time, states gave Indigenous Peoples an equal space to speak. This allows their voices to guide decisions surrounding them. Over time, the Forum has become a key force. It advances Indigenous rights, raises global visibility, and shapes politics that impact Indigenous communities worldwide.[5]

Protecting Indigenous languages and rights in renewable energy projects is urgent. Indigenous communities still face cultural loss and threats to their lands today. These issues relate to UNPFII's goal of giving Indigenous Peoples a voice in decisions that impact their lives and futures.

1 "About UNPFII | UNPFII Recommendations Database." 2025. Un.org. 2025. https://unpfii.desa.un.org/about-unpfii.
2 "Martínez Cobo Study | United Nations for Indigenous Peoples." 2019. Un.org. 2019. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2014/09/martinez-cobo-study.
3 United Nations. n.d. "Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)." Social.desa.un.org. https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/indigenous-peoples-at-the-united-nations.
4 Marcus, Constanza. 2025. "The Indigenous World 2025: UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) - IWGIA - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs." Iwgia.org. April 25, 2025. https://iwgia.org/en/un-permanent-forum-on-indigenous-issues-unpfii/5716-iw-2025-unpfii.html.
5 "Addressing Indigenous Rights at the United Nations." 2010. Www.culturalsurvival.org. May 7, 2010. https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/addressing-indigenous-rights-united-nations.

Preserving & Revitalizing Indigenous Languages

Photo Credit: Julian hne

Language expresses culture and identity. Indigenous communities use language as a connection to traditional ceremonies, land, and spiritual beliefs, but they are quickly disappearing. UNESCO estimates that one spoken language disappears every two weeks.[1] Nearly half of the world's seven thousand languages are Indigenous, and most are at risk of extinction.[2] Elders in Indigenous communities are typically the last ones who speak the language. These languages and the associated history, knowledge, and cultural memory will be lost forever if future generations do not learn them.[3]

The United Nations proclaimed 2022-2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), cannot legislate, but it can recommend policies, highlight best practices, and encourage states and UN agencies to act in support of Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles 13-16, the ILO Convention 169, and UNESCO IDIL Global Action Plan are all international documents which support Indigenous Peoples' rights to their own languages, cultures, and education. UNDRIP is a non-binding declaration, but ILO Convention 169 is a legally binding international treaty for ratifying states.[4] UNESCO's plan provides a framework for implementing Indigenous language rights.[5]

Indigenous Peoples and organizations have language revitalization programs which teach young children their language. Others use technology like social media, podcasts, and smartphone apps for preservation. However, there are still some barriers. There may be a dearth of resources or trained teachers, some Indigenous languages do not have a writing system, many communities lack funding, and in some school districts, Indigenous languages are not officially accepted, so they cannot be used in government, media, or schools.

During this conference, delegates will discuss how to protect and bring back Indigenous languages, in line with UNPFII's goals. A key question to consider is how international organizations and governments can teach Indigenous languages. This is a global issue, but it is also a chance to work together, learn, and make a difference.

Topic Background

History of Suppression

About 6,700 of the 7,000 languages today are only spoken by three percent of the human population.[6] Most are Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are native languages of specific regions before colonization. Although Indigenous Peoples make up just six percent of the world's population, they speak most of the world's languages.[7] Language is deeply tied to identity. Papua New Guinea and surrounding islands, for example, have over 800 different Indigenous tribes, each with their own language. These cultures are geographically spread apart. As such, languages developed

1 United Nations, "A spoken language "disappears every 2 weeks," published January 20, 2016, news.un.org/en/audio/2016/01/608532.
2 "Indigenous Languages Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples," United Nations, accessed June 8, 2025, www.un.org/development/desa/Indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites /19/2018/04/Indigenous-Languages.pdf.
3 Brandon Holmes, "By preserving the language, you reinforce communities: a school saving one of Louisiana's oldest dialects," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2024, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/14/louisiana-school-Indigenous-cajun-languages-community-impact?utm_source
4 International Labour Organization, Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Convention No. 169), adopted 27 June 1989, entry into force 5 September 1991, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169; United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, adopted by the General Assembly in Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007, www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.
5 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032)," *International Decades* (UNESCO), last updated 16 January 2024, www.unesco.org/en/decades/Indigenous-languages/about/action-plan.
6 United Nations, "Indigenous Languages Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples."
7 United Nations, "Indigenous Languages Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

Ainus wearing their traditional clothes (Credit: Torbenbrinker)

independent of each other. Not only that, but these cultures are self-sufficient and did not intermingle much, so they developed separate languages from nearby cultures.

Languages help people connect to their heritage, their communities, and each other. Indigenous languages carry entire systems of knowledge, traditions, and ways of life. When a language disappears, a deep history and set of customs also disappear. These languages often developed over hundreds of years through migration, colonization, and adaptation to the environment.[8] As such, they cannot be replaced or recreated.

Colonial expansion since the 17th century contributed significantly to this decline. For example, in South Asia, Indigenous communities were taught English and British customs, which started to replace their native culture and traditions.[9] As a result, many traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural practices from the British Empire still persist and have fully replaced Indigenous ones. This has happened around the world with many different languages and cultures. Governments have restricted certain languages to make them disappear. This is called "linguistic suppression." For example, Ōlelo Hawai'i, the native Hawaiian language, and Gàidhlig, the native language of Scotland, were both banned by governments to create national unity.

One well-known example of an endangered Indigenous language is Ainu, spoken in Japan.[10] Today, there are only about ten fluent speakers. The Ainu language is unique because of its grammar and cultural roots. It comes from the Ainu people, who are believed to be descendants of the Jomon people. The Jomon were hunter-gatherers who lived in northern Japan, parts of Russia, and the Kuril Islands more than 10,000 years ago. This was long before the arrival of the Japanese. The Ainu culture is considered one of the oldest in East Asia. Their language is called an isolate, which means it has no known relatives. However, its nature as an isolate puts it at a very high risk of extinction. This is an issue that hundreds of other languages currently face.

Spanish became the dominant language in many colonial states, as it offered more global opportunities than native languages. Thus, Indigenous languages in colonial states became seen as low-status and unimportant.[11] Official

8 "Effects of Colonization and Climate Change on Indigenous Languages," Climate in Global Cultures and Histories: Promoting Climate Literacy across Disciplines, June 30, 2023, www.science.smith.edu/climatelit/effects-of- colonization-and-climate-change-on-Indigenous-languages/.

9 George Van Driem, "Chapter 14 Endangered Languages of South Asia George van Driem," in *Handbook of Endangered Languages* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2007), 303–41, www.isw.unibe.ch/e41142/e41180/e523709/e546637/ 2007e_ger.pdf; Smith College, "Effects of Colonization and Climate Change on Indigenous Languages," Climate in Arts and History, June 30, 2023, www.science.smith.edu/climatelit/effects-of-colonization-and-climate-change-on-Indigenous-languages/.

10 Mokuola Honua, "Indigenous Languages around the World," Mokuola Honua, 2015, www.mokuolahonua.com/resources/Indigenous-languages-around-the-world#language-5c89d97671c10b79fc962675.

11 Justyna Olko, "Language Attitudes and Educational Opportunities: Challenging a History of Oppression and Assimilation among Indigenous Communities in Mexico," n.d., accessed June 18, 2025.

government policies in the United States, Canada, and Australia also removed Indigenous children from their families and placed them in boarding schools. These schools worked actively to erase native culture.[12] In the United States and Canada, the "Indian Boarding School System" operated from the 1800s to the 1960s and taught English and Christianity to many children.[13] In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families under laws like the Aborigines Protection Act of 1909. Children were placed in foster homes with white families or sent to institutions run by government agencies and church missions.

Former colonies were not the only spaces where minority languages were minimized. For example, ideas of national unity with slogans like "one state, one nation, one language" in Türkiye were used to push one national identity.[14] Thus, minority languages in Türkiye, like Syriac, Kurdish, and Ubykh (which is now extinct), were historically suppressed. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, more countries began to support language rights and reforms. Some governments introduced policies to support multilingualism and recognize language rights, reversing earlier nationalist approaches. These changes were especially important in places that had once enforced nationalist language policies.

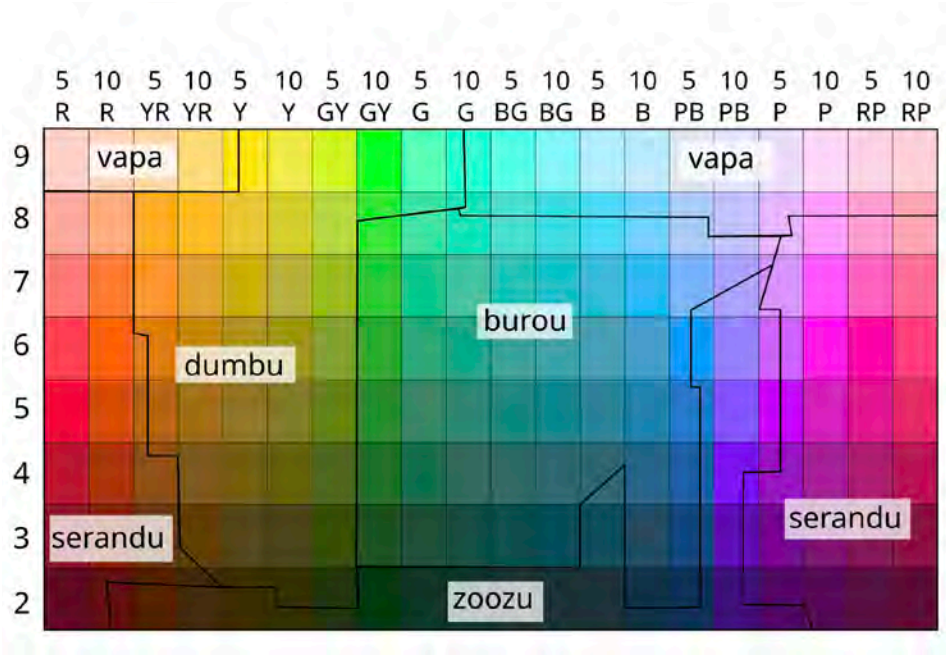
Cultural Significance of Indigenous Languages

Language and identity are intrinsically linked.[15] Languages contain knowledge developed over centuries, making them similar to ancestral guides or ecological encyclopedias. Many Indigenous languages express spiritual connections to the land, animals, and ancestors. They offer insights into the natural world that are often more detailed and locally specific than those found in dominant languages. If these languages are lost, future generations will lose access to this wisdom, which has helped Indigenous communities live in harmony with nature for thousands of years.[16]

Sacred knowledge and spiritual beliefs are expressed in Indigenous languages in ways that are difficult to translate into other, more popular languages. Rituals and ceremonies carry deep spiritual meaning, and when they are performed in another language, they can lose power and significance. In Indigenous cultures, language encourages relational thinking. It places importance on relationships between people, communities, and the environment, rather than focusing on individualism or ownership. For example, Indigenous languages may describe geography or time in cyclical or relational terms, rather than linear or progressive ones. This way of thinking reflects profound understandings of ancestry, community, and sustainability.

Linguistic relativity, the idea that language influences thought, plays a key role in how Indigenous speakers perceive the world. Indigenous languages often include ecological knowledge, such as the names of plants, animal behavior, and weather patterns. This knowledge is cultural, spiritual, and practical. In the absence of written records, oral stories preserve tribal knowledge of history, cosmology, and identity across generations.[17] Oral traditions act as living archives for entertainment, spiritual guidance, social instruction, and education. Indigenous knowledge is holistic, based on lived experience, and specific to each location. It is passed down through rituals, songs, proverbs, taboos, and

12 Smith College, "Effects of Colonization and Climate Change on Indigenous Languages," Climate in Arts and History, June 30, 2023, www.science.smith.edu/climatelit/effects-of-colonization-and-climate-change-on-Indigenous-languages/.
13 Dartmouth Libraries, "Indigenous People & Settler Colonialism | Dartmouth Libraries," www.library.dartmouth.edu, n.d., www.library.dartmouth.edu/slavery-project/Indigenous-people-settler-colonialism.
14 Erdal Ayan, "MINORITY LANGUAGE LOSS: SOCIO-CULTURAL and LINGUISTIC CAUSES," *European Journal of English Language, Linguistics and Literature* 2, no. 1 (2015), www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/MINORITY-LANGUAGE-LOSS-SOCIO-CULTURAL-AND-LINGUISTIC-CAUSES-Full-Paper.pdf.
15 Indigenous Corporate Training INC., "Why Continuity of Indigenous Cultural Identity Is Critical," Ictinc.ca (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., June 10, 2018), www.ictinc.ca/blog/why-is-Indigenous-cultural-continuity-critical.
16 Susan Chiblow and Paul J. Meighan, "Language Is Land, Land Is Language: The Importance of Indigenous Languages," *Human Geography* 15, no. 2 (June 13, 2021), doi.org/10.1177/19427786211022899.
17 Gonzalez, M, B Aronson, S Kellar, M Walls, and B Greenfield. "Language as a Facilitator of Cultural Connection." *Ab-Original* 1, no. 2 (2018): 176. doi.org/10.5325/aboriginal.1.2.0176.



Himba Language Color Names (Credit: Tavin)

folklore. Unlike written records, oral knowledge is flexible, updated through lived experiences, but colonization and modernization have weakened these traditions.[18] Still, oral storytelling remains a vital tool for preserving Indigenous languages and strengthening community bonds.

In Vanuatu, weather forecasting and environmental knowledge are passed down through spoken stories, chants, and rituals. These traditions help protect language and serve as practical tools for survival.[19] Elders protect *kastom*, the customs, laws, and environmental wisdom of the region. As climate change alters traditional indicators, this knowledge becomes harder to maintain and pass on. Yet, it remains essential for understanding and adapting to the environment. In Namibia, research indicates that Himba speakers, whose language does not separate blue from green, may categorize colors differently than English speakers.[20] Similarly, in Australia, the Guugu Yimithirr and Arrernte languages use cardinal directions instead of "left" or "right," which provides speakers with a great sense of navigation and spatial memory.[21] These examples show how language shapes human perceptions.

Health, farming, and environmental care are all embedded in ceremonies and oral traditions. Preserving Indigenous knowledge is important, not only for cultural integrity but also for sustainable development. It is essential to respect traditional ways of sharing knowledge while also finding ways to document and include Indigenous systems in modern education. This growing awareness has sparked initiatives to record and teach these customs to younger generations before they disappear. Oral traditions of *kastom* help communities prepare for extreme weather and adapt to changing conditions. Chants and ceremonies contain ecological wisdom, such as how to read the behavior of plants, clouds, and winds.

Today, the value of Indigenous knowledge systems in climate adaptation is gaining recognition. These systems offer a rich and nuanced understanding of the land, shaped by centuries of experience and expressed through language. Protecting Indigenous languages is not just about saving words; it is about preserving entire worldviews, relationships, and ways of living that are vital to humanity's future.

18 National Museum of the American Indian, "Native Knowledge 360°—Celebrating Native Cultures through Words: Storytelling and Oral Traditions," americanindian.si.edu, 2024, americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/storytelling-and-oral-traditions.
19 Jon Letman, "'Weather Magic' and Wind Lore: The Push to Preserve Ancient Knowledge in Vanuatu," the Guardian (The Guardian, September 6, 2024), www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/07/weather-magic-and-wind-lore-the-push-to-preserve-ancient-knowledge-in-vanuatu.
20 Maud Newton, *"It's Not Easy Seeing Green"* (*The 6th Floor*—New York Times blog), September 4, 2012, archive.nytimes.com/6thfloor.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/its-not-easy-seeing-green/#:~:text=And%20when%20tested%2C%20members%20of,captures%20the%20green%2Dblue%20test.
21 Felicity Meakins, Caroline Jones, and Cassandra Algy, "Bilingualism, Language Shift and the Corresponding Expansion of Spatial Cognitive Systems," *Language Sciences* 54 (July 2015): 1–13, doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2015.06.002.

Milestones in Indigenous Language Revitalization

Without written records or institutional support, at-risk languages are especially vulnerable. The responsibility of preserving them often falls on parents and grandparents who carry the cultural legacy. This burden is immense, and for generations, parents were told to assimilate their children, reinforcing the idea that Indigenous cultures were inferior or incapable of caring for their own. This belief led many families to stop practicing traditions and speaking their languages.[22] However, in some countries, certain Indigenous languages are treated with more respect than others due to historical significance. For example, in Afghanistan, the Pashto language is taught widely in eastern and southern regions because of the Pashtun people's deep historical ties to the land. The language is seen as a vital part of national identity in those areas.[23] However, in neighboring Pakistan, Pashto is only taught in regions with Pashtun communities. This shows how government decisions strongly influence which Indigenous languages survive.[24]

Globally, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), led by UNESCO, has created worldwide plans and tools to support Indigenous languages.[25] Even before it began, there were major steps forward. For example, New Zealand gave official status to Te Reo Māori, Norway recognized the Sámi languages, and Paraguay recognized Guaraní. Moving forward, the National Plan for Native Language Revitalization (2023–2033) in the US aims to promote Native languages everywhere, admit how past US policies caused language loss, increase public use of Native languages, and provide long-term support and funding.[26] These efforts sparked many community-led projects, such as oral history programs, local radio stations, and language nests, which support young children learning their Indigenous language from elders and other fluent speakers. In Namibia and Botswana, San languages face severe endangerment, so community radio, orthography development, and school lessons are part of revitalization, but funding and teacher training remain chronic challenges.[27]

Technology and education have also played a preservation role, with artificial intelligence (AI), phone applications, and multilingual tools helping people learn and protect their languages. Initiatives like First Voices provide digital platforms where Indigenous languages can be recorded, shared, and taught. These tools help preserve vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural knowledge. UNESCO continues to push for Indigenous languages to be used in media, schools, and government, and for Indigenous knowledge to be part of school lessons.

Te Reo Māori was once the most spoken language in what is now New Zealand.[28] In the 1980s, Te Reo Māori was officially called an endangered language. An early revitalization effort was a petition signed by over 30,000 people in 1972, asking for it to be taught in schools. In 1975, the first Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week) was held to promote the language to all New Zealanders. In 1982, new immersion programs began where elders taught young children Te

22 Katalina Toth, "The Death and Revival of Indigenous Languages," Harvard International Review, January 19, 2022, hir.harvard.edu/the-death-and-revival-of-Indigenous-languages
23 Nuffic, "Primary and Secondary Education - Afghanistan | Nuffic," Nuffic.nl, 2023, www.nuffic.nl/en/education-systems/afghanistan/primary-and-secondary-education.
24 Tribal News Network, "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Warns Officials for Failing to Teach Regional Languages in Schools," TNN - TRIBAL NEWS NETWORK, 2025, tnnenglish.com/khyber-pakhtunkhwa-warns-officials-for-failing-to-teach-regional-languages-in-schools.
25 UNESCO, "Best Practices and Lessons Learned to Preserve, Revitalize and Promote Indigenous Languages," Unesco.org, 2019, www.unesco.org/en/articles/best-practices-and-lessons-learned-preserve-revitalize-and-promote-Indigenous-languages.
26 U.S. Department of the Interior, "Biden-Harris Administration Releases 10-Year National Plan on Native Language Revitalization | U.S. Department of the Interior," U.S. Department of the Interior, December 9, 2024, www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-releases-10-year-national-plan-native-language.
27 Andrew Kline, Wikitongues, "Revitalizing the Khwedam Language," Medium, August 24, 2022, medium.com/wikitongues/revitalizing-the-khwedam-language-389f5c3525a1.
28 Angela Ballara, "History of the Māori Language - Te Wiki O Te Reo Māori - Māori Language Week | NZHistory, New Zealand History Online," New Zealand History, 2024, nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-language-week/history-of-the-maori-language.

Heiltsuk Nation members (Credit: US Embassy Canada)

Reo Māori. A major step came in 1985 with the Waitangi Tribunal Claim, where Māori people said the British Crown failed to protect Te Reo Māori. This led to the Māori Language Act of 1987, which made Te Reo Māori an official language of New Zealand. The act also created the Māori Language Commission, a government-supported group that promotes and supports the language. In 2004, a Māori-language television station was launched. Across New Zealand, shows and broadcasts in Te Reo Māori help normalize and celebrate the language.

In Taiwan, Indigenous languages like Amis and Atayal also benefit from revitalization policies after decades of suppression under Mandarin-only schooling.[29] This is with public broadcasting, school curricula, and elder-led immersion. Another example is the Heiltsuk people in British Columbia, Canada. They speak the Hí□ zaqv language.[30] This language was nearly lost due to colonial boarding schools but is now being revived through community-led efforts. Language houses are local programs where elders teach young people through everyday conversation. The Language Warriors program, where fluent speakers guide new learners through cultural events and planned lessons, also helps preserve the language. People also make dictionaries, apps, and recordings to share and save the language. Today, Hí□ zaqv is spoken in homes, schools, and local government. This is a strong example of how revival efforts can bring back knowledge across generations.

In Broome, Western Australia, the Yawuru people are bringing back their traditional language.[31] After years of trauma and disruption, the language is now taught in both primary and secondary schools. It is part of the curriculum through ceremonies, songs, and stories. Teachers are trained with help from linguists and elders to make sure the lessons are true to the culture. Elders and other speakers work directly with students through storytelling. Children are learning to read, write, and speak Yawuru while connecting with their land and traditions. The program has helped change how young people feel about the language. Before, it was seen as old-fashioned or even shameful, but now families use it at home and students speak it with pride.

Hí□ zaqv, Te Reo Māori, and Yawuru all show how communities can save their languages. Governments, schools, and NGOs can strengthen these efforts, but long-term success requires respecting local values

29 NPR, "Taiwan Alters Its Approach to Identity and Education of Its Indigenous Inhabitants," June 6, 2023, www.npr.org/2023/06/06/1180361031/taiwan-alters-its-approach-to-identity-and-education-of-its-indigenous-inhabitan
30 Leyland Cecco, "'I Can Still Hear Their Words': The Fight to Save the Hí□ zaqv Language," the Guardian, January 21, 2025, www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/21/i-can-still-hear-their-words-the-fight-to-save-the-hizaqv-language?.
31 First Languages Australia, "Case Study — School Programs and Yawuru Language Revival in Broome, Western Australia," Global Lessons: Indigenous languages and multilingualism in school programs, December 21, 2018, medium.com/global-lessons-Indigenous-languages-and-multilingu/school-programs-and-yawuru-language-revival-in-broome-western-australia-8cd69e99e4e0.

and Indigenous leadership.[32] For example, Māori communities in New Zealand started language nests before getting government support. When partners support language programs instead of controlling them, success is more likely. Revival works best when language is tied to place, ceremony, oral traditions, and traditional knowledge, which keeps language connected to identity and daily life.

Global and Regional Trends

About 350 of the 7,000 spoken languages have fewer than 50 speakers; many only have one person who fluently speaks it.[33] Only 24 major languages are spoken by half of the world's population, and about 2,680 languages are presently at risk of disappearing.[34] Indigenous Peoples make up less than 6 percent of the world's population but speak many diverse languages. This shows a major imbalance in language diversity. Nearly 2,000 Indigenous languages are considered critically endangered by UNPFII, meaning they have fewer than 1,000 speakers. One current example is Kenya's Yaaku (Yaakunte) language, which is nearly extinct. As of 2024, only nine people speak it fluently.[35] Most speakers are older, so to help save it, the community started teaching it in local schools. Elders share traditional knowledge like seasonal changes, healing plants, and forest names. About 300 students are part of the program, which hopes to bring back everyday use and cultural understanding.

UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) says that Indigenous languages can survive through community-led tech development.[36] It encourages Indigenous groups to make and manage their own digital tools, like apps, archives, and online dictionaries, to help people learn and share their languages. Projects include digital storytelling, video recordings, and open-source learning platforms. This approach puts Indigenous Peoples in charge as creators and leaders, following ideas of data ownership and cultural independence. It shows how community-driven innovation is replacing top-down tech solutions.

Connecting artificial intelligence (AI) with Indigenous languages has also shown potential. Some speakers use voice features on AI platforms to talk in their language, and the platform replies using correct grammar and vocabulary.[37] AI models can become a useful tool for learning and preserving these languages. UNESCO has created a Toolkit for Indigenous Language Revitalization that brings together education systems (like bilingual lessons and teacher training), digital access, funding, and policy changes. It stresses the need for bilingual education and trained teachers.[38] It also supports digitizing Indigenous languages, including writing systems, grammar, and spelling, so communities have the tools to learn and grow their language. Tools like text-to-speech and speech-to-text are also included. To close the digital gap, the toolkit calls for better internet access in Indigenous areas and supports "digital justice," making sure all groups benefit fairly from language technology.

Smaller-scale technologies, such as Small Language Models (SLMs), may suit Indigenous contexts better than Large Language Models

32 Jioanna Carjuzaa, "Revitalizing Indigenous Languages, Cultures, and Histories in Montana, across the United States and around the Globe," ed. William G. Ruff, *Cogent Education* 4, no. 1 (September 8, 2017), doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2017.1371822.
33 The Guardian View, "The Guardian View on Endangered Languages: Spoken by a Few but of Value to Many," the Guardian (The Guardian, April 5, 2024), www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/05/the-guardian-view-on-endangered-languages-spoken-by-a-few-but-of-value-to-many?.
34 United Nations | Department of Economic Social Affairs, "Why Indigenous Languages Matter: The International Decade on Indigenous Languages 2022–2032 | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)," social.desa.un.org, February 10, 2023, social.desa.un.org/publications/why-Indigenous-languages-matter-the-international-decade-on-Indigenous-languages-2022.
35 Gioia Shah, "Growing a 'Word Forest': The Kenyan Teacher Trying to Save Her Language from Extinction," the Guardian (The Guardian, October 2024), www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/oct/01/kenya-endangered-languages-extinction-yaaku-yaakunte-maasai-forest?.
36 UNESCO, "IFAP Advocates for Community-Driven Technology in Indigenous Language Revitalisation," Unesco.org, 2022, www.unesco.org/en/articles/ifap-advocates-community-driven-technology-Indigenous-language-revitalisation?.
37 Nina Sangma, "Artificial Intelligence and Indigenous Peoples' Realities," *Cultural Survival*, March 19, 2024, www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/artificial-intelligence-and-Indigenous-peoples-realities?
38 UNESCO, "Empowering Indigenous Languages in the Digital Age: A Toolkit for Action," Unesco.org, 2022, www.unesco.org/en/articles/empowering-Indigenous-languages-digital-age-toolkit-action.

(LLMs).[39] Local chatbots and digital helpers that speak Indigenous languages are already used. These tools can create content that fits the culture, but they also come with challenges.[40] Mistakes or bias can happen if outside groups train the models. That's why community support, teamwork, and control over the technology are important. Ethical AI rules and partnerships between public and private groups can help bring back languages. Communities must be involved and the tools must be designed to fit their needs.

CURRENT STATUS

UNESCO's International Decade (IDIL) (2022–2032)

UNESCO is leading a global effort to protect, bring back, and support Indigenous languages through the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032). This was announced by the UN General Assembly in late 2019. This program focuses on saving language diversity as a key part of human knowledge and cultural history. The Decade builds on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, which showed that keeping Indigenous languages alive needs long-term, well-planned, and well-funded efforts.

The main goal of the Decade is to protect and strengthen Indigenous languages in all areas of life, public and private. This includes media, laws, schools, digital spaces, and cultural activities. UNESCO plays a big role in running the Global Action Plan for IDIL, which has ten key focus areas. These areas connect language revival with protecting the environment, human rights, and long-term development. Topics include digital access, passing on Indigenous knowledge, language rights, and access to education. UNESCO's Theory of Change shows how all these parts are connected and highlights the need for teamwork between governments, schools, communities, and Indigenous Peoples.[41]

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) helped create and shape IDIL. The Forum stresses the importance of Indigenous leadership in planning and running the Decade's programs. It also calls for clear ways to measure progress and wants Indigenous experts involved in national plans.[42] Partnerships between global groups and local communities show a growing focus on community-led efforts.[43] One example is the MasterWord–UNESCO project, which works to save Mayan languages through digital tools and local training. These programs show how global support can help local language efforts while respecting Indigenous control and knowledge.

IDIL is also being put into action through country-level programs. For example, a forum in the Philippines, hosted by the UNESCO National Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs, looked at the urgent state of Indigenous languages.[44] The

39 Brixey, Dr. Jacqueline (Lina). "Using Artificial Intelligence to Preserve Indigenous Languages - Institute for Creative Technologies." Institute for Creative Technologies, January 22, 2025. ict.usc.edu/news/essays/using-artificial-intelligence-to-preserve-Indigenous-languages/.
40 Brooke Tanner and Cameron F Kerry, "Can Small Language Models Revitalize Indigenous Languages?," Brookings, March 19, 2025, www.brookings.edu/articles/can-small-language-models-revitalize-Indigenous-languages/.
41 UNESCO. "2022 - 2032 International Decade of Indigenous Languages." 2022 - 2032 International Decade of Indigenous Languages, n.d. idil2022-2032.org/.
42 UNESCO. "Digital Preservation of Indigenous Languages: At the Intersection of Technology and Culture." UNESCO, July 14, 2023. www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-preservation-Indigenous-languages-intersection-technology-and-culture.
43 Mayan Language Preservation Project. "MasterWord and UNESCO Join Forces to Preserve and Digitize Mayan Languages for Future Generations." Mayan Language Preservation Project, September 27, 2024. mayanlanguagepreservation.org/press/masterword-unesco-collaboration/.
44 UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines. "DFA-OPCD and UNACOM Held a Forum on the State of Indigenous Languages in the Philippines." UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, September 2, 2022. www.unesco.gov.ph/2022/09/dfa-opcd-and-unacom-held-a-forum-on-the-state-of-Indigenous-languages-in-the-philippines/.

forum discussed problems like colonial languages taking over, city growth, and weak support systems. It also shared successful ideas like teaching in native languages. Supporting Indigenous women is another key part of IDIL.[45] In many families and communities, women pass on language, as explained in "Voices of Resilience: Indigenous Women at the Heart of Language Preservation." Helping Indigenous women through leadership roles, education, and storytelling projects helps protect entire cultures.

UNESCO also promotes language diversity through outreach efforts like the "Hello in Indigenous" campaign.[46] This campaign encourages people around the world to learn greetings in Indigenous languages, building unity, awareness, and respect. Alongside more significant changes and resources, these symbolic actions play a helpful role. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages is a rare chance to stop language loss and highlight the value of cultural and language diversity. Its success depends on strong, well-funded teamwork led by Indigenous Peoples, with support from global groups, national governments, and communities. To make sure the Decade reflects Indigenous views and supports self-rule and human rights, UNPFII continues to play a key role. It will be vital to keep up the momentum, make sure everyone is included, and adjust plans to meet the needs of different Indigenous groups as the Decade continues.

Language activist Esther Abisag Anguilar Tziu promoting Mayan language and knowledge (Credit: Psubhashish)

UNESCO Mayan Languages Project (2023)

One example of Indigenous Language Protection is the Mayan Languages Preservation and Digitisation Project, which started in May 2023.[47] This community-led effort is run by MasterWord Services, Inc., in partnership with UNESCO. It preserves many Mayan languages spoken in North America by making them easier to find, use, and keep alive. The main goal is to deal with both the practical and cultural problems of language loss. A major challenge is the lack of digital tools for the more than 22 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala alone. Some of these languages are used by over seven million people, but they are not often seen in digital spaces, public services, or schools.[48] The project balances community control with expert knowledge by creating open-source glossaries, special keyboards, and a multilingual website. Native speakers, many trained as interpreters or academic partners,

45 UNESCO. "Voices of Resilience: Indigenous Women at the Heart of Language Preservation." *UNESCO*, November 28, 2024. www.unesco.org/en/articles/voices-resilience-Indigenous-women-heart- language-preservation.
46 UNESCO. "Hello Indigenous: A Blueprint on the Preservation of Endangered Indigenous Languages through Digital Inclusion." UNESCO, January 12, 2024. www.unesco.org/en/articles/hello-Indigenous.
47 Mayan Languages Preservation Project, "Home," *Mayan Languages Preservation Project*, Accessed July 18, 2025, mayanlanguagespreservation.org/.
48 Mayan Languages Preservation Project, "Home."

help make sure the language and culture are treated with care and accuracy.

Another key part of the project is the Practical Roadmap to Digitisation. This guide is designed to help any Indigenous language group interested in going digital, not just Mayan communities. It gives step-by-step instructions for making talking glossaries (which mix written definitions, audio, and pictures), building keyboards for Android and other devices, running community workshops, and exploring advanced tools like Neural Machine Translation (NMT).[49] Under UNESCO's IDIL program, the roadmap will be available as a self-serve platform to support teamwork across borders, share resources, and help other groups copy the model.

One of the project's first big successes was publishing glossaries in six Mayan languages, along with audio recordings to support oral traditions. These help older speakers in places like rural Guatemala, where reading and writing levels may be low. The glossaries focus on important areas like health, legal rights, education, and the environment. They also serve as living language records, updated by native speakers.[50] Interpreters use them too, especially when trying to tell apart different Mayan language versions.

The launch of special keyboards for Android phones is the project's most visible tech achievement. In December 2024, keyboards for Universal Mayan, Q'eqchi', and K'iche' were released on the Google Play Store.[51] These keyboards use standard alphabets from the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG), helping keep spelling consistent across dialects. Community feedback shows that these keyboards are vital for reading, writing, searching, typing, and texting in native languages. Project Director Dr. Winston Scott explained the keyboards mark a big step toward digital fairness by showing that Mayan languages belong online. Community members expressed that having a keyboard in one's own language allows for clear and respectful communication.[52]

The project's structure focuses on community leadership and global support. The partnership between MasterWord and UNESCO connects the project to global policies while keeping Indigenous Peoples in charge of content and decisions. Local speakers, linguists, and interpreters shape the words, design, and digital tools, while MasterWord provides the tech support.[53] UNESCO stresses that for tools like script encoding, input methods, and font design to work well and respect culture, linguists, developers, and native communities must all be involved. The Mayan Languages Preservation and Digitisation Project had already reached several major goals by early 2025. It helped over 100 community members create digital content that was both accurate and culturally meaningful. It launched new Android keyboards for Q'anjob'al, Mam, and Kaqchikel, the less common Mayan languages. Most importantly, it gave Mayan speakers better access to key services like healthcare, legal help, and education in Central America and in North American diaspora communities.[54]

The UNESCO-MasterWord partnership for Mayan languages is now seen as a model for saving Indigenous languages in the digital age. Its core strength is community leadership. The project's next goals include adding more languages, exploring NMT tools, and sharing the Practical Roadmap widely to help other Indigenous groups. The project supports the belief that language rights are human rights

49 Mayan Languages Preservation Project. "MasterWord and UNESCO Join Forces to Preserve and Digitize Mayan Languages for Future Generations." *Mayan Languages Preservation Project*, October 1, 2024. mayanlanguagespreservation.org/2024/10/01/masterword-and-unesco-join-forces-to-preserve-and-digitize-mayan-languages-for-future-generations/.
50 Scott, Winston. "Lessons from the Mayan Languages Preservation and Digitization Project." MultiLingual, February 2025. multilingual.com/magazine/february-2025/lessons-from-the-mayan-languages-preservation-and-digitization-project/.
51 Mayan Languages Preservation. "Keyboards - Mayan Languages Preservation Project." Mayan Language Preservation Project, December 17, 2024. mayanlanguagespreservation.org/keyboards/.
52 MasterWord. "MasterWord's Social Impact: 2023 Year in Review." MasterWord, January 2, 2024. www.masterword.com/blog/masterwords-social-impact-2023/.
53 UNESCO. "Digital Preservation of Indigenous Languages: At the Intersection of Technology and Culture." *UNESCO*, April 17, 2024. www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-preservation-Indigenous-languages-intersection-technology-and-culture.
54 Mayan Languages Preservation Project. "About." Mayan Languages Preservation Project. Accessed July 18, 2025. mayanlanguagespreservation.org/about/.

and makes sure no language is left behind by placing Mayan languages firmly in the global digital space.

Sustainable Development Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 goals created by the UN and its member countries in 2015 to solve the world's biggest problems. These goals offer a vision for improving the world by 2030. One of them, SDG Four: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, is inextricably linked to the revitalization and preservation of Indigenous languages.[55] Australia's First Nations Languages Education Program helped over 1,000 people learn Dharug. This was made possible by a USD 11 million investment from the Australian government in 2025 to teach endangered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in more than 70 schools.[56] This program supports every child's right to learn in their own language and promotes fairness in education while protecting language diversity.

Multilingual education also makes learning more inclusive. UNESCO reports that 40 percent of people worldwide do not get an education in their mother tongue, and in some places, that number is as high as 90 percent. When students do not learn in their native language, they face challenges that hurt their success in school.[57] Alternatively, programs that include Indigenous languages support the goals of SDG Four by encouraging lifelong learning for everyone. Research from South Australia also shows that language revival improves emotional and mental health, proving that learning in one's own language has many benefits.

Knowledge passing through tradition, as a community elder shows younger members how to grind corn to make maize (Credit: Gabriela Medina)

SDG 16 also connects to Indigenous language preservation. This goal promotes just, peaceful, and inclusive societies.[58] Losing an Indigenous language means losing traditional knowledge about nature, leadership, and ways of life. For example, UNESCO says that one word in the Heiltsuk language, X□ maay, holds generations of climate knowledge.[59] Protecting these languages helps achieve SDG targets SDGs 16.10 (public access

55 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All." United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, accessed July 18, 2025. sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4.
56 Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine. "Arramăt – Indigenous Perspectives on Sustainable Development." Canadian Commission for UNESCO, November 28, 2023. en.ccunesco.ca/idealab/arramat-Indigenous-perspectives-on-sustainable-development.
57 UNESCO. "Multilingual Education, the Bet to Preserve Indigenous Languages and Justice." *UNESCO*, March 5, 2024. www.unesco.org/en/articles/multilingual-education-bet-preserve-Indigenous-languages-and-justice.
58 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "Goal 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels." *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, accessed July 18, 2025. sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16.
59 Anita Hofschneider, "UNESCO Appoints Indigenous Co-Chairs to Protect Languages and Knowledge Amid Climate Crisis," Grist, June 25, 2025, grist.org/global-Indigenous-affairs-desk/unesco-appoints-Indigenous-co-chairs-to-protect-languages-and-knowledge-amid-climate-crisis/.

to information) and 16.7 (inclusive institutions) by making sure minority groups are seen, heard, and valued.

These ideas are reflected in recent global actions. In June 2025, UNESCO chose Indigenous leaders to co-chair efforts to protect knowledge and languages during the climate crisis. This helps make cultural materials, oral histories, and knowledge systems easier to access in native languages, so communities can fully take part in their cultural lives. This fights discrimination, which supports SDG targets 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice) and 16.b (fair laws and policies).[60] These efforts build peaceful societies where language rights support social justice.

Climate change is another major issue. Research from Bihar, India, in May 2025 shows that regional languages like Angika, Bajjika, Surjapuri, and Tharu are disappearing because of more floods and droughts.[61] Environmental stress prevents language transmission. This makes it harder to reach SDG 16 goals like peace, fairness, access to justice, and strong institutions. When languages vanish, communities lose the ability to lead and make decisions in their own language. This weakens access to information and fair decision-making. It also keeps these groups out of education, law, and policy discussions, making it harder to achieve justice and fair laws. When language diversity is lost, social unity breaks down, and the voices of marginalized groups are left out of important decisions.

Together, these examples show how saving Indigenous languages supports both social justice (SDG 16) and fair education (SDG 4). Language rights help improve well-being and support sustainable development, whether through national education funding, Indigenous-led governance, or climate protection. Understanding these links helps us see how culture plays a vital role in global progress, especially for future leaders and international students.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

These countries all have various demographic populations, some with more Indigenous groups than others. Additionally, countries with similar demographics may still disagree on the best approach to take when crafting resolutions for language preservation. Therefore, these blocs are split by policy orientation. However, all countries mentioned are illustrative and not definitive policy statements. Some countries may also align with more than one bloc, and governmental policy may change quickly as administrations change too.

Education and Integration Bloc

This bloc includes countries with strong national school systems and often various spoken languages. These countries may include India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Malaysia. Such countries help promote Indigenous languages through government-run school systems that focus on bilingual teaching and linking schools with other Indigenous groups.[62] This can streamline resources, maintain national unity, and integrate Indigenous languages into existing structures. As many of these countries have documented Indigenous languages, their actions will have a global effect on saving languages. There will also be differences within this bloc, as countries may support multilingual education in principle, but policies

60 UNESCO. "Daily Use of Indigenous Languages Boosts Social Justice." *UNESCO*, December 10, 2024. www.unesco.org/en/articles/daily-use-Indigenous-languages-boosts-social-justice.
61 Devina Krishna. "Climate Change Threatens Bihar's Indigenous Languages." Times of India, May 27, 2025. timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/climate-change-threatens-bihars-Indigenous- languages/articleshow/121438706.cms.
62 *Social Connectedness*, "The Power of Immersion and Bilingual Schools for Indigenous Language Revitalization," May 25, 2018, www.socialconnectedness.org/the-power-of-immersion-and-bilingual-schools-for-indigenous-language-revitalization/

may prioritize national cohesion over true Indigenous language preservation.

Such countries are motivated to obtain more funding, technical help, and teamwork for these projects. They care about building skills and improving systems. National education systems are the most effective tool to preserve Indigenous languages, in their view. The loss of Indigenous languages is framed as a byproduct of modernization rather than intentional exclusion. This bloc supports protective actions led by the government. Countries without huge multilingual populations might support similar efforts too. Education-focused states like Germany and Gulf states, which emphasize funding and skills training, may support multilingual education globally, especially through international aid and development programs. States like China and France are education-driven but generally promote a national language, making their roles in multilingual education more complex.[63]

This bloc would support initiatives like mother tongue multilingual education (MTB-MLE). This is when children learn their native language before switching to the national language.[64] Another option is creating school programs and learning materials that match the culture. Also, countries could invest in teacher pipelines, which are programs to hire and train Indigenous teachers who understand the language and culture, or get elders involved in classrooms through school-community partnerships. Overall, this bloc prefers solutions that focus on improving schools, training teachers, and adding Indigenous languages into curricula. While they focus on national programs, they acknowledge the need for more resources in Indigenous communities too.

Rights-First and Sovereignty Bloc

This bloc supports cultural freedom and Indigenous-led initiatives. They focus on community-led ways to protect languages and the right to make one's own choices. This bloc includes countries where Indigenous Peoples have strong political voices or autonomy. Governments in this bloc generally support Indigenous communities leading revitalization, with governments acting as partners. They scrutinize proposals lacking Indigenous leadership, often pushing for explicit guarantees of community authority. While open to partnerships, they resist state-led solutions that risk sidelining Indigenous voices. For this bloc, Indigenous governance systems and freedoms are central to language preservation. Saving their languages is a matter of natural Indigenous control. This bloc says Indigenous Peoples should not only help with language revitalization but also lead it and take full responsibility.

Countries like Finland, Sweden, Costa Rica, Chile, and South Africa, which emphasize human rights frameworks internationally, might also be included. These states often vote in favor of human rights-based language at the UN and fund Indigenous projects abroad. The US might also fit here, as it federally recognizes 574 tribes as sovereign nations with government-to-government relationships and protects the right of tribes to use and develop their languages.[65] However, the US does underfund Indigenous efforts, placing responsibility on community organizations. This bloc would support tribal-led immersion schools, media, and apps with federal funding as support. Other possible solutions include making Indigenous languages official, co-official, or protected by national laws or constitutions. This bloc would support institutions led by Indigenous groups, such as media outlets, language boards, and schools.

This Rights and Sovereignty Bloc works with groups who believe that

63 Shanshan Fu, "China's Vocational Training Industry: Opportunities for Foreign Investment," *China Briefing*, July 12, 2023, www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-vocational-training-industry-opportunities-for-foreign-investment/; United Nations Development Programme (Arab States), "Skills for Peace: Empowering Youth to Build a Better Arab States Region," *UNDP Stories*, July 15, 2024, www.undp.org/arab-states/stories/skills-peace-empowering-youth-build-better-arab-states-region

64 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *MTB-MLE: mother tongue-based multilingual education;lessons learned from a decade of research and practice*, UNESCO, 2014, unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000231865.

65 Mainon A. Schwartz, *The 574 Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in the United States*, CRS Report R47414 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 18, 2024), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47414

Indigenous Peoples should lead their own language preservation. They are friendly with those who support reconciliation, but they push for Indigenous control compared to government-led projects. This bloc will work with others to strengthen Indigenous independence.

Reconciliation-Centered and Responsibility Bloc

This bloc maintains that past injustices of forced assimilation, colonization, and government-led erasure are the reasons why Indigenous languages are dying out. Countries of this bloc may include Bolivia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway, Mexico, and other states with legacies of colonial assimilation and active reconciliation processes. Its goal is to treat saving languages as more than just keeping culture alive, but also about taking responsibility for history. This includes funding, legal support, and changes to systems and institutions. It would support formal apologies, reparations, long-term public funding, official status for Indigenous languages, and rewriting history curricula.

Some countries, like Australia, may straddle blocs. In such cases, delegates should determine what their country's top priorities may be. For example, many of Australia's policies are framed around reconciliation and acknowledging historical harm, but with underfunded policies. Post-colonial states that frame Indigenous issues through colonial responsibility, reparations, or transitional justice have positioned themselves in UN debates around historic responsibility and reconciliation. It is possible some former colonial powers may align with this bloc if they acknowledge past injustices or offer symbolic apologies. However, their commitments are often weaker than countries with prominent Indigenous populations.

In Canada, public shows of reconciliation, like with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, official apologies, and a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, demonstrate a commitment to Bloc Three's priorities, but Indigenous communities argue this progress is too slow.[66] New Zealand's Māori language revival is one of the most successful examples globally, which the government frames as a treaty obligation. In Bolivia, Indigenous languages have constitutional recognition, and in Scandinavian countries, there are Sámi parliaments and Sámi language rights.[67]

Despite stated national policies and goals, many communities still experience assimilation pressures. Even so, this bloc has stated intentions to make up for harm caused by colonialism. It may push for strong wording in places that call for government responsibility and action to repair harm. Many states embrace reconciliation in speeches and symbolic acts but hesitate to provide full funding, land rights, or legal autonomy. Policies often reflect pressure from Indigenous movements or international reputation.

To recognize the deep impact of past wrongs, governments could use public money to support the media, pay teachers, fund Indigenous-language schools, and build systems for translation to help bring back Indigenous cultures and languages. This bloc works with others by pushing governments to admit their actions against the Indigenous community and take responsibility for the harm that they caused them. They work for formal apologies, legal recognition, and long-term funding as a form of justice for the loss of the Indigenous language. In debate, they push for historical accountability and strong government commitments to repair harm.

66 FOX 13 Seattle Digital Team, "What Is Canada's National Day of Truth and Remembrance?" *FOX 13 Seattle*, September 30, 2024, https://www.fox13seattle.com/news/national-day-truth-remembrance.
67 James Anaya, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Addendum: The Situation of the Sami People in the Sápmi Region of Norway, Sweden and Finland*, United Nations, A/HRC/18/35/Add.2, 6 June 2011, https://un.arizona.edu/search-database/situation-sami-people-sapmi-region-norway-sweden-and-finland

Committee Mission

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is a key UN group that works to support Indigenous Peoples' rights, voices, and well-being. It started in 2000 as a group that advises the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its main job is to talk about Indigenous concerns like economic growth, education, health, the environment, human rights, and culture. It gives Indigenous Peoples a place to speak about global problems and influence decisions that affect their communities.

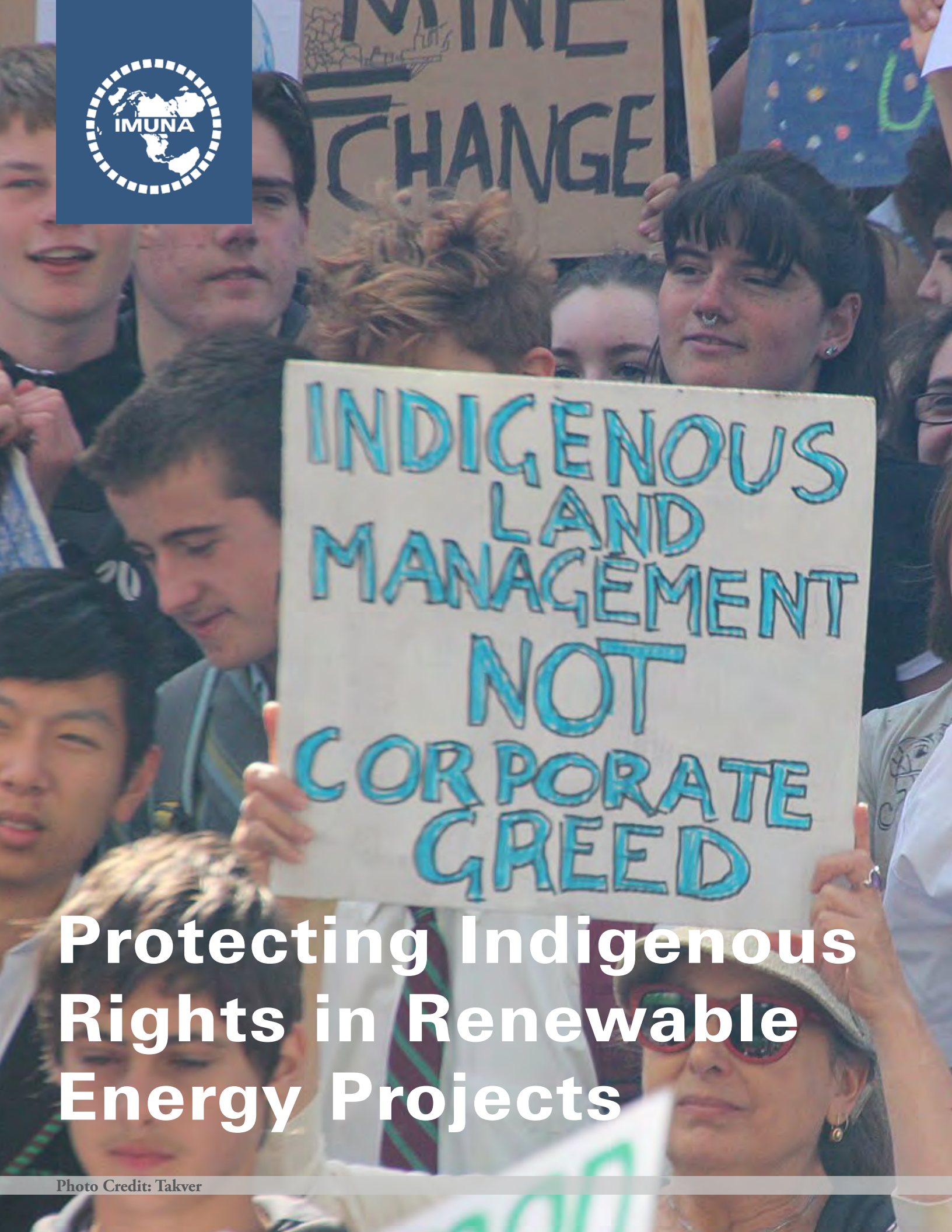
One of UNPFII's top goals is to help others understand the challenges that Indigenous Peoples face and to offer advice to the UN and its members. Even though it cannot make laws or treaties, it still plays a big role in shaping discussions, raising awareness, and helping different groups work together. It also helps make sure that Indigenous views are heard in global conversations, especially when those conversations are about their land, rights, or way of life.[68]

UNPFII plays an important role in the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages. Language is closely linked to preserving Indigenous cultures, improving education, and supporting Indigenous knowledge. The UNPFII brings this topic to the forefront and can push governments and organizations to act. This is especially important now, during the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032). The goal is to support urgent efforts to save languages. Delegates must study current efforts and find ways to strengthen them. This requires looking at what stops the programs from working and how UNPFII can push for solutions that respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and build their leadership.

It is also important to understand what UNPFII cannot do. As an advisory group, the UNPFII cannot force countries to act. It cannot fund language programs or pass laws to protect Indigenous languages. Still, it can have a strong voice by sharing detailed suggestions, pointing to programs that work well, and helping Indigenous communities, governments, and international organizations work together.[69]

This committee's goal is not only to understand the problem but also to offer creative, respectful, and doable solutions. Indigenous communities are already working hard to save their language. Delegates should support and increase these efforts, not to speak for them, but to speak with them. This is not just about saving languages. It is about justice, identity, and the future of Indigenous cultures around the world. With quality research, debate, and teamwork, delegates can help build a future where Indigenous voices are heard in their native languages.

68 DESA. "About UNPFII | UNPFII Recommendations Database." Un.org, 2025. unpfii.desa.un.org/ about-unpfii.
69 DESA. "UNPFII History | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)." Un.org, 2025. social. desa.un.org/issues/Indigenous-peoples/unpfii/unpfii-history.



Protecting Indigenous Rights in Renewable Energy Projects

Photo Credit: Takver

Around the world, Indigenous Peoples have deep connections to the land they live on. However, Indigenous land has often been taken or used by outside powers, often without permission. For centuries, Indigenous communities have been displaced from ancestral lands through colonization, being forced to move, and unfair legal systems. These continue to shape land ownership and access today. Across the world, Indigenous Peoples have resisted harmful development through protests, legal action, and community organization. They have also rallied and supported international tools like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and principles like Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) which exist to protect Indigenous rights. Yet, enforcement remains weak in many areas, and legal systems often favor governments or corporations.

Additionally, the need for renewable energy has become more urgent in the past twenty years. As governments and companies rush to fight climate change by building clean energy infrastructure, many are turning to rural or resource-rich areas. Though often described as 'green,' such projects can cause environmental damage. Many projects also start without asking for permission from the Indigenous Peoples who live there. According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, more than fifty percent of the world's renewable energy projects in the past decade have impacted Indigenous lands, often without proper discussion and permission.[1] While renewable energy can be a good step for the planet, it can also cause harm when projects are developed without respecting Indigenous sovereignty or traditional knowledge systems. Indigenous Peoples have also co-managed clean energy projects, offering models of collaboration and justice.

This topic touches on climate change, human rights, economic justice, and Indigenous survival. Delegates will be asked to look at energy not just as a technical issue, but as a human issue. This affects communities, cultures, and future generations. Solving it will require diplomacy, creativity, and a strong understanding of both past injustices and future possibilities.

Topic Background

Historical Dispossession of Indigenous Lands

Indigenous Peoples have inhabited their ancestral lands for generations. However, starting in the 15th century, colonization, expansion, and industrialization led to the widespread removal and exploitation of Indigenous communities and territories. European powers invoked the Doctrine of Discovery and 'Terra Nullius' (nobody's land) to claim lands already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples.[2] Even when treaties promised to protect Indigenous lands, they were often broken, renegotiated, or disregarded when valuable resources were discovered.[3]

Many policies removed Indigenous Peoples from their lands. In the US, the Indian Removal Act (1830) forced thousands of Native Americans to move from the Southeast US to present-day Oklahoma.[4]

1 International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), *IWGIA – International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*, accessed August 23, 2025, iwgia.org/en/.
2 United Nations, "'Doctrine of Discovery', Used for Centuries to Justify Seizure of Indigenous Lands, UN Rights Expert Says," *UN Press*, July 6, 2012, press.un.org/en/2012/hr5088.doc.htm; Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, "Terra nullius," *Wex*, last reviewed April 2022, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/terra_nullius.
3 Historica Canada, "Treaty 8," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-8; National Park Service, "Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (Horse Creek Treaty)," *NPS.gov*, www.nps.gov/articles/000/horse-creek-treaty.htm.
4 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830," *Milestones: 1830–1860*, history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/indian-treaties.

Similarly, the Trail of Tears saw the death of thousands of Indigenous Peoples due to disease, starvation, and exposure. In Canada, when Indigenous Peoples stood against these policies, they were met with military police. The North-West Rebellion in 1885 was a movement led by Métis leader Louis Riel. He attempted to stand against lost land and limited political rights.[5] However, Riel was tried and executed. This showed the government's refusal to recognize the rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

Colonial powers historically forced Indigenous Peoples into settlements, disrupting traditional life and ensuring control for colonists. They often used extreme violence. In Guatemala, the civil war involved genocide against the Mayan people.[6] In Brazil, ranchers violently pushed people off land in the Amazon. In Africa, colonial governments forcibly relocated entire communities to accommodate infrastructure projects or establish conservation areas.[7] In Asia, Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines and other areas have been pushed from their lands to make way for mining and development.[8] These patterns of forced relocation and violence continued into the 20th and 21st centuries.[9] Land has been taken for expansion, gold rushes, fur trading, rubber harvesting, and more.

Losing land means losing cultural, spiritual, and economic security. Land is tied to history, ancestor spirits, and traditional knowledge. When sites are destroyed or people are forced off, entire systems are disrupted, such as hunting, fishing, and ceremonies. Forced relocation, to areas with different ecosystems or poor resources, made it difficult for communities to sustain traditional ways of life. Many states are currently also working on methods to protect traditional practices and ceremonies. However, legal battles over land are long and complex.[10] While some Indigenous groups have won cases, many others remain stuck in bureaucracy.

The historical dispossession of Indigenous lands is a global issue with deep roots. From the legal doctrines of the colonial era to modern land grabs for development and conservation, the pattern of taking land without consent is still an ongoing battle. However, Indigenous communities around the world are not passive victims; they are active agents of change. Through legal action, protest, cultural revelation, and international advocacy, they are asserting their rights and reclaiming their lands. Understanding this history is crucial for creating a just future in which Indigenous Peoples have complete control over their territories. As we shift toward renewable energy and climate solutions, we must be cautious not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Indigenous lands are in focus as wind, solar, hydropower, and the minerals that enable them scale up.

The Rise of Renewable Energy and Disruptions to Indigenous Land Use

Renewable energy is a central part of the global response to combat the rise of climate change. Wind, solar, hydroelectric, biomass energy, and geothermal power can generate electricity without fossil fuels. These sources reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow global warming. However, the transition to clean energy requires large amounts of land and natural resources. As a result, many renewable energy projects are being built on or near Indigenous lands, creating new concerns over land use, permission, and environmental protection. Some of these projects benefit

5 Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, "1885 Northwest Resistance," *IndigenousPeoplesAtlasOfCanada.ca*,, Indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/1885-northwest-resistance/.
6 Commission for Historical Clarification, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, HRDAG, 2013, hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CEHreport-english.pdf.
7 Human Rights Watch, "It's Killing Our Culture: Human Rights Impacts of Relocating Tanzania's Maasai," July 31, 2024, www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/31/its-killing-culture/human-rights-impacts-relocating-tanzanias-maasai.
8 Global Witness, "How the Militarisation of Mining Threatens Indigenous Defenders in the Philippines," 2024, globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/how-the-militarisation-of-mining-threatens-Indigenous-defenders-in-the-philippines/.
9 Lily Grisafi, "Prosecuting International Environmental Crime Committed Against Indigenous Peoples in Brazil," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review Online*, November 10, 2020, hrlr.law.columbia.edu/hrlr-online/prosecuting-international-environmental-crime-committed-against-Indigenous-peoples-in-brazil/.
10 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (2009), www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP/en/SOWIP_web.pdf.

Indigenous communities, but others would force them off their land.

Wind power projects particularly affect Indigenous lands. Wind farms are often built in remote areas with steady wind, frequently home to Indigenous communities. In Mexico, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec has become home to many wind turbines, but many Indigenous groups have argued that they were built without permission and their construction destroyed sacred sites.[11] Contrastingly, the Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations jointly own two BC wind farms with Pattern Energy in Canada. This ensures that money earned from the farms stays in the community.[12] Such projects are more respectful and inclusive. Similarly, in the United States, the Moapa Band of Paiutes in Nevada partnered with a large private solar energy company to provide clean energy, jobs, training, money, and resources to the community.[13]

Hydroelectric dams, while low-emission, require vast land and often flood Indigenous territories. Their creation results in the destruction of forests, wildlife habitats, and Indigenous lands. In India, hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh have been criticized for displacing Indigenous groups such as the Adi and Nyishi, disrupting rivers central to their livelihoods.[14] First Nations argued against the Site C Dam in British Columbia, stating it violates longstanding treaties and negatively impacts cultural survival.[15] For some, the impact is so big that it prevents performing traditional practices.[16]

Hellisheiði geothermal energy plant in Iceland in 2023. (Credit: Xavier Bolós)

Geothermal energy uses heat from the Earth's core. It is considered a type of clean energy. Water is stored in large wells, and the heat from the Earth's core turns the water into vapor. Then, the vapor moves a fan turbine that creates electricity. Creating such wells has resulted in permanent damage to culturally important sites. In Kenya, Maasai communities have challenged geothermal projects near Lake Naivasha, arguing that promised jobs and infrastructure never arrived and that sacred lands were damaged.[17] However, examples such

11 Jacobo Ramirez and Steffen Böhm, "Transactional Colonialism in Wind Energy Investments: Energy Injustices against Vulnerable People in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec," *Energy Research & Social Science* 78 (2021): Article 102135, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629621002280.
12 Government of British Columbia, "News Releases 2025," *news.gov.bc.ca*,, news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2025ECS0004-000041
13 Federal Highway Administration, "Project Profile: Moapa Southern Paiute Solar Project," *fhwa.dot.gov*,, www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/nv_moapa_solar_project.aspx.
14 *Land is Life*, "Statement of Solidarity with the Adi People in Their Campaign to Protect the Siang River and Ancestral Lands from Mega-Dam Construction in Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India," June 3, 2025, www.landislife.org/land-is-life-statement-of-solidarity-with-the-adi-people-in-their-campaign-to-protect-the-siang-river-and-ancestral-lands-from-mega-dam-construction-in-arunachal-pradesh-northeast-india-9862/.
15 Treaty 8 Tribal Association, "About Site C," *Treaty 8 Tribal Association*, treaty8.bc.ca/about-site-c/
16 Society of Environmental Journalists, "Exploring the Impacts of Hydroelectric Megaprojects on Indigenous Lands," *sej.org*, www.sej.org/publications/features/exploring-impacts-hydroelectric-megaprojects-Indigenous-lands.
17 Ben Ole Koissaba, "Maasai in Kenya Go to Courts to Stop Evictions Caused by World Bank's Geothermal Power Project," *Cultural Survival*, June 13, 2013, www.culturalsurvival.org/news/maasai-kenya-go-courts-stop-evictions-caused-world-banks-geothermal-power-project.

Flames of struggle: Indigenous Xakriabá people during the National Movement of Indigenous Peoples (Credit: Edgar Kanaykõ Xakriaba)

as the Tu Deh-Kah Geothermal and the Fort Nelson First Nation in Canada are success stories. Partnership with the community has allowed for their production to be safe and appropriate. It considers both environmental and cultural goals.

A big concern with new projects on Indigenous lands is the lack of FPIC, a right affirmed in UNDRIP. It makes sure that Indigenous Peoples can freely decide whether to allow projects on their land. However, many governments and companies fail to follow FPIC by either providing incorrect information or pressuring the people into accepting a deal. After a deal is signed, many profits and benefits go straight to the company rather than being shared with the communities that were affected. This increases overall inequality.

Many projects cause harm, but some empower and protect Indigenous Peoples. Allowing some communities to co-manage and lead development projects helps people create a more equitable and sustainable system, but projects are complicated to organize.[18] Wind and solar farms may disturb wildlife, block traditional migration routes, or require deforestation. Dams can disrupt river systems and fish populations that are essential to Indigenous diets and traditions.[19] Therefore, delegates must consider specific concerns for each type of energy. Regardless, when Indigenous Peoples are included as partners and as leaders, renewable energy can become a tool for economic development, environmental protection, and cultural revitalization.

Indigenous Resistance to Resource Development

Indigenous Peoples have lived on ancestral lands for generations. In recent centuries, development projects have harmed the environment, polluted water, and disrupted traditional ways of life. In response, Indigenous communities have resisted, using their voices and protecting their spaces. Indigenous resistance also connects to larger issues such as human rights, climate change, and the right to make decisions that secure a brighter future.

In the colonial period, from the 1500s to the early 1900s, European colonizers arrived in places like the Americas, Africa, and Asia. They claimed land that belonged to Indigenous Peoples. Many were displaced, killed, or enslaved. Indigenous governments, laws, and cultures were not respected. Back then, the colonizers used

18 Prism Sustainability Directory, "Green Energy Projects' Impact on Indigenous Lands," prism.sustainability-directory.com/scenario/green-energy-projects-impact-on-Indigenous-lands/.
19 Government of British Columbia, "Fort Nelson First Nation," *BC Gov: First Nations A–Z Listing*, last updated April 14, 2025, www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/fort-nelson-first-nation.

harsh military force and harsh punishment to stop resistance.[20]

As modern countries were established, governments undertook large-scale projects. These projects included building railroads, highways, dams, and factories, which all required land. Often, Indigenous Peoples were not asked for permission to use the land, nor compensated for it. Even though governments had signed treaties with Indigenous nations, they often broke their promise or changed the rules later to take more land.[21]

The modern Indigenous Rights Movement has been active since the 1960s. Resistance never disappeared, but it entered a new phase after World War II as global human rights movements gained momentum. Civil rights movements began organizing protests, forming legal groups, and joining forces across borders at this same time. This eventually led to the start of the international Indigenous rights movement. The global community began to listen better to Indigenous Peoples on issues such as land rights, cultural freedom, and environmental protection. As the resistance evolved, many significant groups and individuals became involved in this global issue.[22]

Indigenous elders, youth, women, and leaders organize protests, protect sacred sites, and fight for their rights in courts. They employ numerous methods to resist, including intense peaceful blockades, global media campaigns, and even partnerships with human rights groups. However, these communities often face opposition from the government and large corporations. Many governments view Indigenous resources mainly as tools for economic growth. They may allow companies to build within these lands without asking permission from the Indigenous groups. Some governments criminalize Indigenous resistance and arrest protestors or label them a threat to national security. Large corporations often implement development projects for oil pipelines, mines, and dams. Some state support for Indigenous rights, but many began work without valid consent from Indigenous landowners.[23] Company reimbursements rarely cover the full harm.

In many cases, Indigenous Peoples were not asked for permission to use the land, nor compensated for it. Even though governments had signed treaties with Indigenous nations, they often broke promises or changed the rules later to take more land.

International organizations, such as the United Nations, UNPFII, and the International Labour Organization (ILO), support Indigenous rights through global agreements. Even so, many governments and companies do not comply. Thus, Indigenous communities have resisted harmful projects in powerful and creative ways. A prominent example is the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in the United States, who protest the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) near their land. This is not a renewable energy project, but it demonstrates activism against government-sanctioned projects. The pipeline has remained in operation while court-ordered review proceeds.[24] In Canada, the Site C dam was built on the Peace River in British Columbia, in an area that has been promised to the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations. These nations have stated that the dam floods important hunting and fishing lands. This makes it a breach of

20 Organization of American States, *Ancestral Lands of Indigenous Peoples*, www.oas.org/en/iachr/Indigenous/docs/pdf/ancestrallands.pdf
21 History.com Editors, "Native American Timeline," *History.com*, www.history.com/articles/native-american-timeline.
22 Nicole Redvers, Paula Aubrey, Yuria Celidwen, and Kyle Hill, "Indigenous Peoples: Traditional Knowledges, Climate Change, and Health," *PLOS Global Public Health* 3, no. 10 (2023): e0002474, doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002474.
23 United Nations, "'Doctrine of Discovery,' Used for Centuries to Justify Seizure of Indigenous Lands, UN Rights Expert Says," UN Press Release, 2011, press.un.org/en/2011/hr5053.doc.htm.
24 National Museum of the American Indian, "DAPL and the Plains Treaties," americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl.

Treaty 8, signed in 1899.[25] These treaties are critical to Canadian identity and are referenced throughout the government. Despite lawsuits and protests, Canada defends building the dam, arguing that it is essential for renewable energy.

In other situations, Indigenous groups have used legal rulings to stop projects. Discouragingly, many companies say they will protect Indigenous rights and follow FPIC rules until profits are at stake.[26] Thus, Indigenous groups work with human rights organizations, environmental activists, and global media to raise awareness. Lately, social media has spread the message to people around the world. Protecting nature and the climate within Indigenous lands is vital. The forests, rivers, and biodiversity are crucial for combating climate change. Thus, keeping these lands safe helps the planet and supports global climate goals.[27] Indigenous resistance offers a distinct perspective on development. It balances financial gain with genuine concern for nature and the people surrounding it. Indigenous movements challenge governments and companies to alter their methods, but there are still significant disagreements about consent and decision-making.

Legal Frameworks and Indigenous Land Rights

Early legal systems established by colonial powers did not allow Indigenous Peoples to own lands. Many Indigenous Peoples believe land is collectively owned, whereas colonial powers divide up the physical spaces. In Australia, the legal doctrine of Terra Nullius allowed for settlers to claim land without permission from the Aboriginal peoples who lived there. In 1992, after Mabo v. Queensland, the High Court of Australia overturned that law and formally allowed for ownership of land by the Aboriginal peoples through the 'native title.'[28] This Australian legal doctrine gives Aboriginal people rights over their land and waters. That said, it only offers limited protection and is often challenged. In Canada, the 1876 Indian Act limited the right of Indigenous land use and gave full control to the federal government.[29] In countries such as Kenya and South Africa, colonial-era laws, which limited the rights of the Indigenous, are still practiced even today and affect the Maasai and San people.[30]

Many Indigenous Peoples believe land is collectively owned, whereas colonial powers divide up the physical spaces.

Noting these injustices, the International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 (ILO 169) and UNDRIP were created.[31] The ILO 169 is a treaty that requires all ratifying countries to ensure the basic rights of all Indigenous and tribal people to maintain their culture, way of life, and right to land. The convention also requires governments to seek permission from the Indigenous Peoples before starting any land projects that may affect them. UNDRIP outlines the individual and collective rights of all people. It includes articles about land rights, self-determination, and cultural protection. FPIC is at the forefront; Indigenous Peoples must not be forced into compliance. Many countries have created domestic laws based on UNDRIP

25 Government of Canada "Order in Council Setting Up Commission for Treaty 8" P.C. No. 2749, Copied 1966. www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028813/1581293624572
26 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples*, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/FreePriorandInformedConsent.pdf.
27 Number Analytics, "Indigenous Connection to Land," www.numberanalytics.com/blog/Indigenous-connection-to-land.
28 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, "Mabo Case, aiatsis.gov.au/explore/mabo-case.
29 Facing History and Ourselves, "Historical Background: Indian Act and Indian Residential Schools," www.facinghistory.org/en-ca/resource-library/historical-background-indian-act-indian-residential-schools.
30 International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, *Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa*, iwgia.org/images/documents/popular-publications/land-rights-of-Indigenous-peoples-in-africa.pdf.
31 United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, www.un.org/development/desa/Indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf; International Labour Organization, "Convention C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)," normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE,P55_LANG,P55_DOCUMENT,P55_NODE:REV,en,C169,/,.

because of moral and political pressure, but other countries, such as the United States and Australia, were initially against the declaration and only later endorsed it with reservations. Thus, tensions persist, like in Ecuador, where oil projects proceeded even with Indigenous protests.[32]

However, Indigenous communities have also won big national and international cases. In the 2014 case of Tshilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, the Canadian Supreme Court recognized the full right of the Aboriginal people to about two thousand square kilometers of land.[33] This case was one of the first times that the court had granted Aboriginal peoples control over their land and reserves. Similarly, Delgamuukw v. British Columbia (1997) was a major case that clarified the legal definition of Aboriginal title and affirmed that oral histories are valid in court as evidence.[34] Moreover, the case of the Saramaka people v. Suriname (2007) established that the Saramaka people have collective land rights and must be consulted before development.[35]

Despite victories in court, there are challenges. It is costly and time-consuming for some legal processes. Some delays negatively impact communities and disrupt their traditions. Secondly, even a win in court does not ensure the actual enforcement of policies. In Colombia, for example, the Constitutional Court ruled that the U'wa people must give permission for oil exploration in their territory. However, enforcement has been poor, and the Indigenous community still has to continue protesting against companies that keep trying to use the land. In the Philippines, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 gives legal protection to land passed down from generations of Indigenous Peoples. However, mining companies continue to mine in Indigenous regions, with government support and without explicit permission of the Indigenous peoples.[36] When leaders of these groups take a stance, they often face violence and force. Between 2012 and 2022, hundreds of Indigenous Peoples were killed when defending territory from illegal mining, logging, and farming.

Walk for land rights, Chambal, India (Credit: Ekta Parishad)

Many countries have not accepted or enforced UNDRIP and other agreements. Even where adopted, enforcement is weak. In some cases,

32 Mongabay News, "In Ecuador's Amazon, Big Oil Exploits Indigenous Communities in the Absence of the State," June 2025,, news.mongabay.com/2025/06/in-ecuadors-amazon-big-oil-exploits-Indigenous-communities-in-the-absence-of-the-state/.
33 *Canadian Journal of Constitutional Studies*, "Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia (2014): An Expansion of Title and Justification," April 2015, www.constitutionalstudies.ca/2015/04/tsilhqotin-nation-v-british-columbia-2014-an-expansion-of-title-and-justification/.
34 *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 256, Supreme Court of Canada, decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1569/index.do; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Overturning the Doctrine of Terra Nullius*, aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/research_pub/overturning-the-doctrine-of-terra-nullius_0_3.pdf.
35 Cultural Survival, "Saramaka People v. Suriname: Human Rights Victory and Its Messy Aftermath," www.culturalsurvival.org/news/saramaka-people-v-suriname-human-rights-victory-and-its-messy-aftermath.
36 International Energy Agency, "The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997," www.iea.org/policies/18031-the-Indigenous-peoples-rights-act-of-1997.

Discussion from 2024 Tribal Clean Energy Summit (Credit: US DOE)

domestic laws may even oppose policies mentioned in the UNDRIP. Some countries have determined that all resources are owned by the state. Therefore, no Indigenous claims are valid because domestic law does not allow anyone's ownership beyond the state. In addition, some Western laws require a single owner of land, but most Indigenous groups collectively own land. As seen through the examples above, enforcement of policy is a major concern. Overall, legal systems serve as a tool for resistance, but they must also come with political awareness, cultural protection, and community resilience.

Evolving Roles of Indigenous Communities in Energy Projects

Traditionally, Indigenous Peoples were not involved with energy project decision-making, even when these projects directly affected their territories. Today, some Indigenous communities co-manage or lead renewable energy projects. Communities have expanded resistance to suggesting methods of compromise and collective growth. In Canada, the T'Souke First Nation, on Vancouver Island, built one of the biggest solar power projects in British Columbia. This project was led by the community and reflected their goals of sustainability, economic growth, and cultural continuity. Today, it provides clean energy and creates local jobs and training programs. In the United States, the Blue Lake Rancheria Tribe in California created a solar power grid that powers tribal buildings, a hotel, a certified Red Cross emergency shelter and nearby buildings. These projects enhance energy independence and climate resilience, especially in areas where there are many wildfires.

Similarly, in Alberta, the Lubicon Lake Nation built the Piitapan Solar Project to power their health center. Not only was it owned and operated by the community, but it also marked a broader commitment to healing both land and people.[37] Similarly, in Alaska, the Chaninik Wind Group, a coalition of Yup'ik villages, collaborated to build and manage wind turbines to offset the high cost of diesel power. These examples show how Indigenous communities are also actively finding ways to take control and increase environmental sustainability.[38] Overall, these models combine traditional control systems with modern business strategies. It makes energy sovereignty a practical and achievable goal.[39] Energy sovereignty is rooted in the right of Indigenous Peoples to determine their futures, manage their lands, and develop autonomously.

37 CBC News, "Lubicon Lake First Nation Using Solar to Power Health Centre," November 23, 2015, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/lubicon-lake-first-nation-using-solar-to-power-health-centre-1.3199688.
38 Blue Lake Rancheria Tribal Government, *Blue Lake Rancheria*, www.bluelakerancheria-nsn.gov/.
39 Chaninik Wind Group, "Chanik Wind Project Final Report," U.S. Department of Energy, July 2013, www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/12/f27/chaninik_final_report_ee00002497_july_2013.pdf.

Energy sovereignty means that communities decide how energy is generated, what sources are used, and how benefits are distributed.

In New Zealand, Māori-led trusts are investing in geothermal, wind, and solar projects. These investments demonstrate environmental values and traditional Māori customs. The focus is on generating income, the long-term well-being of the land, and future generations.[40] In Chile, Mapuche communities have agreed on partnerships in wind and hydroelectric projects. While some of these ventures have been controversial, others present new possibilities for community-led revenue generation. In the Philippines, Indigenous communities in Mindanao have begun partnering with NGOs to install micro-hydropower systems that provide electricity while protecting rivers. In Tanzania, Hadzabe and Datoga groups are exploring solar microgrids to replace reliance on diesel, linking energy development to land stewardship.[41] Internationally, the Indigenous Council of Central America has pushed for cooperation, policy reform, and Indigenous-led innovations across the world.[42] A significant challenge to full participation in energy development is a lack of technical knowledge. So, many Indigenous communities and partners have launched education and training programs.

The Indigenous clean energy social enterprise in Canada supports Indigenous energy leaders with mentorship, networking, and funding. The 20/20 Catalyst program trains dozens of young Indigenous individuals every year in clean energy project planning and leadership.[43] In the United States, the National Tribal Program works with Native Americans to install solar systems and train community members in solar installation.[44] These projects create jobs and also new professionals. The First Nations Major Projects Coalition (FNMPC) in Canada helps Indigenous communities understand project ideas, assists with financial risk, and discusses equal terms. Meanwhile, academic partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities create detailed research on renewable energy, especially from a cultural and ecological context.[45]

Elders may prioritize cultural stewardship, while younger members emphasize jobs. Projects need inclusive governance and clear accountability.

However, decisions about land use, profit distribution, and project scale can divide communities. Elders may prioritize cultural stewardship, while younger members emphasize jobs. Projects need inclusive governance and clear accountability. In British Columbia, there is a new debate about Wet'suwet'en territory over pipeline agreements. Some leaders oppose projects that councils have approved, resulting in complex legal and social tensions. Ensuring inclusive governance, where all voices are heard, is essential. Successful projects typically feature transparent decision-making, community-wide agreement, and mechanisms for accountability. Many Indigenous communities face economic challenges in launching energy projects because of limited funds. Government programs may require upfront investment or matching funding, which is not always possible for under-resourced communities. Even granting official permissions can be long, costly, and misaligned with Indigenous

40 Adam J. R. Greenaway, "Maori Values in Geothermal Management and Development," *ResearchGate*, 2022, www.researchgate.net/publication/363026985_Maori_values_in_geothermal_management_and_development.
41 Ibruvwiyo Iroro Ogheneochuko, "Can Tanzania's Solar Push Replace Reliance on Diesel Generators?," *Energy in Africa*, July 8, 2025, https://energyinafrica.com/insight/can-tanzanias-solar-push-replace-reliance-on-diesel-generators/
42 Andrea M. Silva, "The Commoditization of Ecosystems within Chile's Mapuche Territory: A Violation of the Human Right to Health," *Health and Human Rights Journal*, February 19, 2023, www.hhrjournal.org/2023/02/19/the-commoditization-of-ecosystems-within-chiles-mapuche-territory-a-violation-of-the-human-right-to-health/.
43 Indigenous Clean Energy Social Enterprise, "About ICE," SOI Foundation, soifoundation.org/en/company/Indigenous-clean-energy-ice-social-enterprise/.
44 Tribal Alternatives, "Tribal Alternatives," www.tribalalternatives.org/.
45 First Nations Major Projects Coalition, "About FNMP," fnmpc.ca/.

timelines. For example, in the US, permitting for solar or wind projects on tribal land requires agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which can take years. In Canada, an intergovernmental conflict between the federal, provincial, and Indigenous governments can stall development.

Therefore, new financial models, such as loan funds, community bonds, and blended finance public-private partnerships, are becoming popular. These mechanisms attempt to close funding gaps and increase the visibility of Indigenous-led projects. Indigenous-led renewable energy projects incorporate cultural and ecological values into design and implementation. Protecting sacred sites, minimizing environmental harm, and aligning with traditional teaching are all common goals. The Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation in Quebec has developed energy solutions with passive solar design, mass heating, and sustainable forestry, all aligned with Cree values. Such approaches show that energy development can be done in sustainable ways. Indigenous communities resist harmful development and build better projects. These projects serve as examples of respect for sovereignty and promoting long-term stability.

CURRENT STATUS

Current Challenges and Conflicts in Renewable Development

From 2023 to today, Indigenous communities worldwide have faced mounting challenges associated with the rapid expansion of renewable energy development. The implementation of such projects often replicates patterns of environmental injustice and dispossession, despite green promises. Recent renewable energy development efforts have created new conflicts between Indigenous Peoples, state governments, and corporate developers. There are ongoing issues of sovereignty, exclusion of stakeholders from decision-making, environmental degradation, and the criminalization of Indigenous resistance.

Global investment in renewable energy has skyrocketed over the past three years.[46] Solar, wind, hydro, and battery storage projects are being constructed at an unprecedented rate. However, many projects are placed on or near Indigenous lands without meaningful consultation or consent. Governments, driven by urgent emissions targets, are fast-tracking approvals and offering land concessions to corporations without honoring Indigenous sovereignty. The result is a wave of conflicts where Indigenous communities are forced to fight for their rights.[47]

In the United States, the Biden administration's renewable expansion included large-scale solar and wind projects in the Southwest. These projects might positively help benefit tribal access to electricity.[48] However, there were concerns in 2023 about the desecration of sacred sites and environmental damage from solar installations that were approved by the Bureau of Land Management.[49] Despite protests, projects moved forward, revealing the limitations of existing consultation mechanisms.

In 2024, the Nyangumarta, Karajarri, and Ngarla peoples opposed the Asian Renewable Energy Hub, a significant solar and wind development in

46 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Investment 2024: Overview and Key Findings*, published 2024, www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-investment-2024/overview-and-key-findings.
47 Snigdha Das, "Give Indigenous People Their Rights to Tackle Climate Change: Archana Soreng," *Vikalp Sangam* (May 1, 2021), vikalpsangam.org/article/give-Indigenous-people-their-rights-to-tackle-climate-change-archana-soreng/.
48 U.S. Department of the Interior, "Biden-Harris Administration Announces $71 Million to Electrify Homes Across Indian Country," press release, www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-71-million-electrify-homes-across-indian.
49 Environment + Energy Leader, "Bureau of Land Management Announces Major Energy Policy Shifts," *Environment and Energy Leader*, www.environmentenergyleader.com/stories/bureau-of-land-management-announces-major-energy-policy-shifts,77508.

Western Australia.[50] The project was marketed as a cornerstone of Australia's climate strategy, so Indigenous objections over consultation failures and cultural disruption were ignored. In Canada, new mining and hydro projects tied to renewable supply chains, particularly rare earth extraction for battery production, have ignited protests from Cree, Inuit, and Innu communities. These Indigenous nations argue that they were not adequately consulted and that the environmental and cultural costs are being downplayed. This has led to accusations of "green colonialism," in which sustainability goals are used to justify the continued exploitation of Indigenous lands.[51]

Lake Naivasha, Kenya at sunset (Credit: Bett Duncan)

Although renewable projects are lucrative, financial gains rarely reach the communities whose lands they occupy. In Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, solar megaprojects profited from electricity sales and international carbon credits in 2023. However, Mayan communities who leased their land for these projects received minimal compensation and limited access to promised employment opportunities. A 2024 report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) found that Indigenous groups received less than 5 percent of total revenues generated by renewable energy projects on their lands.[52] In Kenya, Maasai communities displaced by geothermal development near Lake Naivasha have similarly reported a lack of follow-through on promised infrastructure and jobs. Without clear legal frameworks mandating equitable revenue distribution, Indigenous Peoples remain excluded from the economic benefits of the energy transition.[53] Beyond finances, Indigenous communities continue to be excluded from decision-making processes. In the Philippines, hydroelectric dams in the Cordillera region were approved in 2024 without genuine FPIC from the Igorot people.[54] Consultation is often viewed as a box-checking exercise rather than a genuine dialogue.

Another challenge is the dominance of state-sanctioned governance structures. In Brazil, FUNAI, the agency responsible for Indigenous affairs, was criticized in 2025 for allowing energy contracts to proceed without respecting Indigenous decision-making protocols.[55] Companies have also been known to bypass traditional leaders, engaging only with elected officials or

50 (2025), www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629625002646.
51 'Green colonialism': Indigenous world leaders warn over west's climate strateg, *The Guardian*, April 23, 2023, www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/23/un-Indigenous-peoples-forum-climate-strategy-warning.
52 International Renewable Energy Agency, *Renewable Energy and Jobs: Annual Review 2024*, published October 2024, www.irena.org/Publications/2024/Oct/Renewable-energy-and-jobs-Annual-review-2024.
53 Cultural Survival, "Our Land, Our Livelihood: Jackson M. Sháá and the Enduring Struggle of the Narasha Maasai," Cultural Survival, www.culturalsurvival.org/news/our-land-our-livelihood-jackson-m-shaa-and-enduring-struggle-narasha-maasai
54 Mongabay News, "Philippines Hydro Boom Rips Indigenous Communities," September 2024, news.mongabay.com/2024/09/philippines-hydro-boom-rips-Indigenous-communities/.
55 Mongabay News, "After Outcry, Brazil Supreme Court Nixes Proposal for Mining on Indigenous Lands," April 2025, news.mongabay.com/2025/04/after-outcry-brazil-supreme-court-nixes-proposal-for-mining-on-Indigenous-lands/.

Protest against Dakota Access and Keystone XL Pipelines(Credit: Pax Ahimsa Gethen)

individuals more likely to approve their plans. This undermines internal governance and weakens community unity. Even when Indigenous communities attempt to engage with these projects, they are often met with inaccessible processes. Technical documents are rarely translated into Indigenous languages, and timelines for feedback are short. Communities lack the financial resources to hire environmental experts or legal advisors, putting them at a disadvantage when negotiating or challenging proposals.

While these technologies are promoted as clean and sustainable, they can still cause harm to biodiversity, water systems, and cultural landscapes. The destruction of medicinal plants and wildlife habitats disrupted spiritual practices and threatened ecological balance. In the US, the Thacker Pass Lithium Mine in Nevada has become a high-profile example of the costs of development.[56] Lawsuits challenge the rushed approval process and the lack of cultural impact assessments. Meanwhile, in the Amazon, solar farms tied to carbon offset markets have led to deforestation, affecting Indigenous food security and eroding traditional knowledge systems.[57]

The rise in Indigenous-led protests over renewable development has also triggered state repression. In Guatemala, Q'eqchi' leaders were arrested in 2023 for protesting the Oxec hydroelectric project. Human rights groups condemned police violence and arbitrary detentions.[58] In Chile, Mapuche land defenders opposing wind farms were detained without trial in 2024.[59]

These actions reflect a troubling trend of criminalizing Indigenous resistance. Instead of viewing Indigenous Peoples as partners in sustainability, states and corporations treat them as obstacles. Criminalization erodes trust, escalates tensions, and deters younger generations from participating in advocacy or governance. Events of recent years reveal that the global shift toward renewable energy is far from universal. While the planet urgently needs alternatives to fossil fuels, this transition must not come at the expense of Indigenous rights. The continued exclusion of Indigenous communities from planning, profits, and protections only deepens existing inequalities. Indigenous knowledge, resilience, and stewardship offer powerful tools for sustainable living, provided the world is willing to listen.

56 Lithium Americas, "Thacker Pass Overview," Lithium Americas, lithiumamericas.com/thacker-pass/overview/default.aspx.
57 "Amazon Damming Concern: Carbon-Offsetting Pirates Threaten Indigenous Forests," *BBC News*, article ckg2ekjjgldo, www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/21/amazon-Indigenous-communities-carbon-offsetting-pirates-aoe.
58 AP News, "Thousands Protest Against Guatemala's President Arevalo Porras Over Indigenous Rights," *Associated Press*, apnews.com/article/guatemala-arevalo-porras-protests-Indigenous-839258324d349e00f30e6cf3883ad0cf.
59 Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, "Statkraft's Response to Arbitrary Arrests of Mapuche-Williche Defenders," www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/statkrafts-response-to-arbitrary-arrests-of-mapuche-williche-defenders/.

Recent Conflicts and Legal Battles

As previously mentioned, Indigenous Peoples face numerous ongoing legal battles as energy development accelerates throughout the world. One of the most emblematic cases is the previously mentioned Dakota Access Pipeline. This oil pipeline crosses lands sacred to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and threatens their water sources. The tribe and allies protested fiercely in 2016-2017, gaining global attention. However, construction was completed and the pipeline remains operational as of 2025. The tribe argues that the project violates many laws. In 2023, the US Army Corps of Engineers released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a detailed review demanded by the Indigenous communities and environmental advocates alike. Instead of resolving concerns, the draft report raised a whole new level of alarms.

The DEIS outlined a list of five potential paths moving forward, including dismantling its pipeline, rerouting it, leaving it in place, removing it with conditions, or abandoning the whole project. While this might appear comprehensive, the review has been widely criticized for taking a narrow and incomplete approach, especially concerning the long-term environmental and climate impacts of continued oil transportation. According to environmental experts, the DEIS fails to properly assess harm caused by burning oil transported throughout the pipeline. The Corps claimed that removing the pipeline would be more harmful to the climate, rather than keeping it operating. However, they acknowledged carbon emissions from operations could cost billions in damages annually. The DEIS also downplayed the risk of a pipeline rupture, stating that cleanup would be sufficient, ignoring potential contamination of Indigenous water sources. The DEIS was prepared by a firm with ties to the petroleum industry, raising concerns about a conflict of interest. During a public hearing in November 2023, tribal members and activists urged the Corps to reject the project altogether. As of mid-2025, no final decision has been made.[60]

Indigenous nations argue that they were not adequately consulted and that the environmental and cultural costs are being downplayed. This has led to accusations of "green colonialism," in which sustainability goals are used to justify the continued exploitation of Indigenous lands.

The Willow project is a massive oil drilling initiative in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). The project is one of the largest planned fossil fuel projects on US public lands in decades. Similar to DAPL, this is not a renewable energy project but it demonstrates strong Indigenous activism and government priorities. The project would also construct roads, airstrips, and hundreds of miles of pipelines in a fragile Arctic ecosystem that is already experiencing climate change. Some Alaska Native corporations, such as the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, have supported the project due to its promised economic and infrastructure benefits. Many local Inupiat community members worry that oil drilling could disrupt caribou migration patterns and increase pollution risks. There are further concerns about health disparities and environmental degradation in Native villages near existing oil infrastructure. A 2023 Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) allowed the project to proceed with slightly reduced drilling, but many legal experts and activists argue the review was still insufficient. Indigenous and youth-led advocacy groups have mobilized global media campaigns such as #StopWillow, bringing

60 Natural Resources Defense Council. "Dakota Access Pipeline: What You Need to Know." *NRDC*, last modified July 18, 2024, www.nrdc.org/stories/dakota-access-pipeline-what-you-need-know#-environmental-impact.

attention to the disproportionate burden placed on Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the name of national energy development. As of 2025, the Willow Project is facing multiple ongoing lawsuits from environmental and tribal organizations, including Earthjustice and the Sovereign Inuit for a Living Arctic. The Willow Project illustrates the complex intersection of energy security, Indigenous rights, climate justice, and local sovereignty.[61]

Despite legal challenges, many Indigenous communities are creating their own pathways to energy sovereignty. Across North America and beyond, Indigenous Nations are launching solar, wind, and hydroelectric projects that reflect climate goals and cultural values. In the United States, tribes like the Standing Rock and Navajo Nation have launched successful solar initiatives to expand energy access, reduce fossil fuel reliance, and create local jobs. In California, the Yurok Tribe combines solar development with river restoration, while the Moapa Band of Paiutes operates a utility-scale solar farm supplying electricity to major cities.

Internationally, Indigenous communities in Ecuador, Canada, and Australia are innovating with cooperative ownership models, hybrid technologies, and off-grid systems designed for cultural resilience. These projects center on self-determination and are shaped by deep ecological knowledge. Still, many Indigenous energy projects struggle to access government funding due to complex application processes, commercial readiness requirements, and a lack of tailored support. However, the rise of Indigenous-led solutions shows that clean energy can be achieved without replicating colonial models of resource extraction, with the right support.

Sustainable Development Goals and Indigenous Energy Justice

The United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) intersect directly with Indigenous struggles over land and energy. However, many national and global efforts to meet these goals fail to include Indigenous Peoples meaningfully in the process. SDG seven is about affordable clean energy. While the goal is universal access to clean energy, many Indigenous communities still lack basic electricity, face high-energy costs, or are excluded from clean energy planning. Ensuring energy equity requires culturally informed solutions that support Indigenous ownership and control.

Climate Action is SDG 13.[62] Indigenous Peoples are on the front lines of climate change, both as stewards of carbon sinks like forests and as communities highly vulnerable to environmental damage. However, they often receive minimal support in climate adaptation or global funding. Therefore, addressing this gap is critical to global climate justice. Similarly, SDG 15 is about Life on Land, which relates to overall ecosystem health.[63] Many energy developments, from deforestation to mining, are directly impacting biodiversity-rich Indigenous territories. Therefore, recognizing the value of Indigenous conversations and land management is essential to achieving this goal.

Until Indigenous rights in renewable energy projects are guaranteed, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) will not be met. Ongoing energy conflicts, like those involving DAPL or Thacker Pass, reveal structural inequalities and weak institutional safeguards for Indigenous rights. Additionally, the activists who speak up against the injustices deserve to be protected. Stronger enforcement of FPIC, treaty obligations, and Indigenous legal systems are all necessary.

61 Yereth Rosen, "Appeals Court Upholds Approval of Willow Project on Alaska's North Slope," *Alaska Beacon*, June 13, 2025, alaskabeacon.com/2025/06/13/appeals-court-upholds-approval-of-willow-project-on-alaskas-north-slope/; The Indigenous Foundation, "The Willow Project and Its Impacts on Indigenous Communities," *The Indigenous Foundation*, May 2024, www.theIndigenousfoundation.org/articles/the-willow-project-and-its-impacts-on-Indigenous-communities.

62 "Goal 13 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," *Sustainable Development Goals,* United Nations, accessed August 4, 2025, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16.

63 "Goal 15 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," *Sustainable Development Goals,* United Nations, accessed August 4, 2025, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

Blocs are groups of countries that share similar goals, values, or strategies on international issues. These blocs often form based on political views, economic interests, or cultural connections. Countries have different ideas about who should control land, how resources should be used, and how much say Indigenous communities should have in development projects. Additionally, these positions vary by current government. The alignment of a country will not always be fixed. These differences shape debate, writing resolutions, and the partnerships that happen during committee sessions.

Indigenous Sovereignty and Rights in Energy Development

The pro-Indigenous rights bloc strongly believes that Indigenous communities must have the final say in what happens on their land. This bloc views Indigenous sovereignty as the right to govern and control their land and resources as a basic human right. They argue that FPIC is a precondition under UNDRIP before any project begins on Indigenous territory.[64] FPIC means Indigenous communities have the right to accept or reject projects that could impact their environment, culture, or way of life. This bloc disagrees sharply with countries that believe only consultation is enough without full consent. They also stand against any project that threatens the environment or conflicts with Indigenous preferences.

Another key point of division is how the bloc sees the role of international law. Members of this bloc believe that agreements like UNDRIP should be fully implemented. They think that countries should not violate Indigenous rights. They also support the idea of creating international funds to support Indigenous-led projects, especially in renewable energy, where Indigenous knowledge can lead to Sustainable Solutions.

The Indigenous rights bloc includes countries with strong human rights records, countries with significant Indigenous populations, and countries with progressive laws protecting Indigenous communities. These countries see Indigenous Peoples as key players in environmental protection and sustainable development. Their policies often go beyond national interest, emphasizing global responsibility and social justice. Countries in this bloc may advocate for creating international funds that support Indigenous-run renewable energy projects, recognizing that Indigenous knowledge can help address climate change.

In committee, these blocs often oppose the pro-development bloc, especially on issues like land sovereignty and environmental protection. However, they can work with the balanced development bloc when proposals include real protections for Indigenous rights. Members like Bolivia, who have a majority Indigenous population, New Zealand, known for its Treaty of Waitangi, Canada, who have adopted UNDRIP, and Ecuador, where Indigenous groups lead environmental activism, often take a strong stance within this bloc.[65]

Pro-Development Bloc

The Pro-Development Bloc believes that using a country's natural resources is essential for national progress. This bloc focuses on economic growth, energy security, and infrastructure development. They argue that countries have the right to decide how they use their resources, even if that means moving forward with projects on Indigenous lands. While they agree that Indigenous communities should be consulted, they do not believe

64 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295, art. 32 (Sept. 13, 2007), https://undocs.org/A/RES/61/295

65 United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change: Emerging Research and Policy Directions* (UNPFII, 2021), https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/

that Indigenous groups should have the power to stop important national projects. They see FPIC as a recommendation, not a requirement.[66]

This bloc supports government-led development and often prioritizes large-scale projects that attract foreign investment and create jobs. They believe that national interest comes first and that the government should decide how resources are used, sometimes even if that means overriding local opposition. They suggest offering financial benefits, such as revenue-sharing deals or community development projects, instead of giving Indigenous groups control over decision-making. This bloc sees environmental concerns as manageable through regulations rather than strict international oversight. They believe that balancing economic growth with environmental protection is possible through government policies and new technologies, not by giving Indigenous communities veto power over projects.

Countries in this bloc tend to have larger economies or are focused on rapid industrial growth. Their governments often rely on natural resources to boost economies and reduce poverty. They support partnerships between governments and private companies, especially in the energy and mining sectors. This bloc's members often push for policies that protect national sovereignty over natural resources. They favor consultation processes managed by governments and prefer giving Indigenous communities financial benefits rather than control. They also encourage foreign investment and believe that economic development should not be delayed by local opposition.

In the committee, this bloc frequently clashes with the Pro-Indigenous Bloc, especially on land sovereignty and FPIC. However, they sometimes work with Balanced Development when compromises can be made, especially on projects that include benefit-sharing or sustainable plans.[67] Countries like China, Brazil, Russia, and India, each with strong resources, would likely be key players in this bloc.

Balanced Development Bloc

The Balanced Development Bloc seeks compromise and believes that Indigenous communities must be active partners in decisions about development projects. They see FPIC as important, but also think that development can happen if it is done fairly and with proper agreements. This bloc supports benefit-sharing agreements, where profits from projects are shared with Indigenous communities. They also promote joint ventures between governments, Indigenous groups, and private companies. They believe that Indigenous participation can make projects more sustainable and help prevent conflict.

Another key division is their view on international law. The Balanced Development Bloc supports international agreements like UNDRIP, but believes in adapting them to fit local contexts. They think the government and Indigenous communities should work together to create fair consultation processes which respect both rights and economic needs. They also focus on capacity-building, helping Indigenous communities gain skills, resources, and legal knowledge to engage in development discussions.

Countries in this bloc are known for balancing rights with economic development. They often have good records on environmental protection and social responsibility. These countries support inclusive policies that protect Indigenous rights while also allowing for responsible development. The Balanced Development Bloc proposes solutions like fair benefit-sharing agreements, strong consultation processes that meet international standards, and partnerships that give Indigenous communities a meaningful role in projects.[68] They also support using international platforms for resolving disputes and promoting

66 UN General Assembly, "Voting Record and Explanations of Vote: UNDRIP," A/61/PV.107 (Sept. 13, 2007), https://undocs.org/A/61/PV.107
67 International Labour Organization, *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*, No. 169, art. 6–7 (June 27, 1989), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314
68 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits*, 2011, https://www.cbd.int/abs/

dialogue between governments and Indigenous groups.

In committee, this bloc often acts as a mediator between the Pro-Indigenous Rights and Pro-Development Blocs. They help create compromise resolutions that respect Indigenous rights while allowing for economic growth. Countries like Norway, known for its strong environmental policies, Chile, which balances mining with Indigenous advocacy, Kenya, recognized for community-led development, and the Philippines with Indigenous involvement in governance are typical members of this bloc.[69]

Committee Mission

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Issues (UNPFII) is a group which gives advice to the UN about Indigenous Peoples' rights, culture, and development. This committee was created to make sure Indigenous voices are heard when it comes to big global decisions. In this committee, delegates will focus on the topic of Indigenous Land and Energy Development, a growing issue that affects Indigenous communities around the world. Fittingly, the theme this year of the UNPFII annual session is "Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within United Nations Member States and the United Nations system, including identifying good practices and addressing challenges."[70] Thus, UNPFII delegates should keep the inclusion of UNDRIP at the forefront.

UNPFII can prepare and disseminate information on Indigenous issues, so it will report on trends. As countries move toward clean energy, many new projects like wind farms, solar panels, and hydroelectric dams are built. UNPFII is an advisory body to ECOSOC, so it cannot halt projects, but it does issue recommendations and convene dialogue. While these projects are meant to help the planet, they can harm Indigenous communities when they are built on or near traditional lands without proper permission. These communities often face land loss. Environmental damage is left out of important decisions. At the same time, Indigenous Peoples have a long history of protecting nature, and many are already leading the way in sustainable energy efforts.

UNPFII can write reports, give strong recommendations, and create guidelines to help make sure Indigenous Peoples are treated fairly. Delegates can promote good examples of projects where Indigenous communities are included and respected. Most importantly, they can give a voice to those who are often ignored in global conversations. As delegates, your job is to learn deeply about this issue and come ready to work together.

69 UN Human Rights Council, *Final Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Good Practices and Challenges in Implementing UNDRIP*, A/HRC/EMRIP/2017/2 (2017), https://undocs.org/A/HRC/EMRIP/2017/2

70 United Nations, *UNPFII Twenty-fourth Session: "Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within United Nations Member States and the United Nations system, including identifying good practices and addressing challenges"* (21 April–2 May 2025), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii/24th-session.

Research and Preparation Questions

The following research and preparation questions are meant to help you begin your research on your country's policy. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. How did colonization, the creation of schools, and government rules, including laws that banned Indigenous language, affect the use and passing on of Indigenous languages?
2. How do changes in family life, such as moving to cities, and the role of elders and the community affect whether Indigenous languages are passed down to children?
3. How are Indigenous languages linked to identity, spirituality, ways of seeing the world, and knowledge about nature and the environment?
4. How does losing a language affect community strength and independence?
5. What laws, movements, and new tools (apps, online dictionaries, AI) helped recognize Indigenous languages, and how have they successfully been brought back?
6. How do global efforts (like the UN Decade of Indigenous Languages), social media and digital tools affect support local work and languages, and how can they be funded for better support?

Topic B

1. How have colonial land policies affected present-day land rights for Indigenous communities?
2. Why are so many renewable energy projects being developed on or near Indigenous land?
3. How has international advocacy and legal action influenced government or corporate accountability in Indigenous land disputes?
4. What is the role of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) & Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in this topic?
5. What lessons can be drawn from countries that have adopted UNDRIP and FPIC into their laws, and what challenges arise when enforcing Indigenous land rights through already existing legal systems, in contrast to those who have not?
6. What does it mean for Indigenous communities to co-own or lead energy projects?
7. What policy tools can reduce conflict and build trust between Indigenous peoples and energy developers?

Important Documents

Topic A

International Labour Organization, Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Convention No. 169), adopted 27 June 1989, entry into force 5 September 1991, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

"Indigenous Languages Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples," United Nations, accessed June 8, 2025, www.un.org/development/desa/Indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites /19/2018/04/Indigenous-Languages.pdf.

UNESCO. "Digital Preservation of Indigenous Languages: At the Intersection of Technology and Culture." UNESCO, July 14, 2023. www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-preservation-Indigenous-languages-intersection-technology-and-culture.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, State of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2009), www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP/en/SOWIP_web.pdf.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032)," International Decades (UNESCO), last updated 16 January 2024, www.unesco.org/en/decades/Indigenous-languages/about/action-plan.

United Nations, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the General Assembly in Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007, www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

Topic B

International Labour Organization, Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Convention No. 169), adopted June 27, 1989, entered into force September 5, 1991, Normlex, https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE,P55_LANG,P55_DOCUMENT,P55_NODE:REV,en,C169,/

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/FreePriorandInformedConsent.pdf

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sustainable Development Goals, https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

United Nations, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted 13 September 2007, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

United Nations, State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Sales No. 09.VI.13 (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009), https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP/en/SOWIP_web.pdf

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Written by Malaika Khan and Alonndra Santiago Negron.

Edited by Devansh Bhartia, Ana Margarita Gil, Aurora Lai, Tom Scheer, Tyler Schmied, Althea Turley, Nastasja Vasquez, and Sofia Velasco.