



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

BACKGROUND

Indigenous Youth

Twelfth session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Discussion on Monday, 20 May 2013

Youth account for approximately 18 per cent of the global population. With some 370 million indigenous peoples in the world, there are approximately 67 million indigenous youth globally.

In many countries, indigenous youth have low school enrolment, high drop-out rates and lag behind other groups in terms of academic achievement. High illiteracy rates are a direct result of educational exclusion in the form of poor access, low funding, and culturally and linguistically inadequate education.

In 2006, 21 per cent of 15-year-old indigenous children in Australia were not enrolled in schools, compared with 5 per cent of non-indigenous children, while indigenous students were half as likely to complete year 12 of school education as their non-indigenous counterparts.

Indigenous youth tend to experience higher unemployment rates and lower incomes compared to non-indigenous youth workers, due to a range of factors such as geographic disadvantages, lower education and training levels, discrimination, and difficulties in accessing labour markets. In the United States, Native Americans and Alaska Natives suffer from significantly higher unemployment rates – 16 per cent in 2007 – than other parts of the population.¹

Life in urban areas, away from the community, makes indigenous youth vulnerable to losing their cultural identity. Young indigenous women often suffer from double-discrimination, because of their indigenous identity and their gender.

Geographic and cultural isolation limit many indigenous youth's access to health and preventive services, including those concerned with HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. Mental health represents an urgent priority. Where data is available, it has been demonstrated that indigenous youth suicide rates are significantly higher than those of their non-

¹ United Nations (2010), State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, ST/ESA/328, p. 135.



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indigenous peers. Data collected on suicide trends in two Guaraní communities from 2000 to 2005 suggests that the suicide rate among Guaraní peoples was 19 times higher than the national rate in Brazil and that it disproportionately affected adolescents and youth. In Canada, overall suicide rates among First Nations communities are 5 to 7 times the rate for Canadian youth overall.²

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made ‘youth’ one of his priority areas – he has launched the development of a System-wide Action Plan on Youth to deepen the youth focus of existing UN programmes, and appointed Mr. Ahmad Alhindawi of Jordan as his Envoy on Youth.

The Permanent Forum, at its twelfth session, will also focus on indigenous youth. On its opening day, the Forum will consider the report of the Expert Group Meeting, held in January 2013, on Indigenous Youth, titled, “Identities, challenges and hopes: Articles 14, 17, 21 and 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”.

Five side events on indigenous youth are expected to take place, including on issues of health and reproductive rights, investing in indigenous youth, education, the launch of an adolescent-friendly version of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as of a study on violence against indigenous girls, adolescents and young women. The Permanent Forum will also present a study on the right of indigenous youth in the Nordic countries to participate in decision-making processes.

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For more information on the twelfth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please see: <http://social.un.org/index/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>

For a list of all side events, please see:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/2013/side-events.pdf>

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² United Nations (2010), State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, ST/ESA/328, pp. 169-170.

