



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

# **Submission to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

## **UN Women's Initiatives in Support of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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ARB	Autonomous Region of Bougainville
Beijing+20	20-year Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs in Vietnam
CSAGs	Civil Society Advisory Groups
FGE	Fund for Gender Equality
IASGII	Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ONIC	National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (Organización Nacional de Indígenas de Colombia)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SP	Strategic Plan of UN Women
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, or “Forum”
UNTF	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
WCIP	World Conference on Indigenous Peoples



## INTRODUCTION

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The mandate of the [United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#) (UN Women) is to support the United Nations (UN) and Member States to progress more effectively and efficiently towards women's empowerment and the goal of achieving gender equality. UN Women leads, coordinates and promotes the accountability of the United Nations system, working through mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. UN Women has a global presence, with its headquarters in New York and a number of regional, country, multi-country, and liaison offices.

There are many critical entry points and opportunities for demanding positive change for indigenous women and girls, including: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the 20-year Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20); the outcomes of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP, 2014); the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the reports of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) including the general recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

For UN Women, the six thematic areas of its Strategic Plan (SP, 2014-2017) serve as the core conceptual framework through which it operationalizes its commitments to women, including those who identify as indigenous. The six priority areas are listed and briefly described below as they would apply to situations of indigenous women.

**1. Women lead and participate in decision-making at all levels.** This aligns with intergovernmental resolutions and CEDAW and provides a framework for promoting and monitoring indigenous women's participation and leadership in decision-making in national and local decision-making bodies, including government, parliaments, councils and political parties, as well their participation and influence in civic engagement.

**2. Women, especially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered and benefit from development.** This presents an opportunity for UN Women to promote indigenous women's increased access to sustainable livelihoods, productive assets and decent work, increased resilience in disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation, poverty reduction, and their participation in economic policy formulation and implementation.

**3. Women and girls live a life free from violence.** This builds on international agreements/documents, such as CEDAW, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence

against Women and the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, which recognizes the particular marginalization that indigenous women experience. This priority area also supports the development and implementation of comprehensive laws, policies and strategies that aim to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, including those who identify as indigenous.

**4. Peace and security and humanitarian action.** This includes support for indigenous women in preventing and mitigating armed conflict; participation in peace processes; peace consolidation and economic recovery; protection from violence, truth-seeking and transitional justice; support to governments to adopt or implement national policies or action plans on women, peace and security; and the engagement of indigenous women in all forms of national and local public decision-making.

**5. Governance and national planning.** This reinforces accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities by engaging indigenous women's organizations, networks and gender advocates in support of gender-responsive national planning and budgeting processes through the development of capacities and systems of public institutions.

**6. A comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment.** This is an essential component of UN Women's substantive support to intergovernmental processes such as the WCIP, as well as strengthened coherence between normative guidance and operational support to national partners, including indigenous women's groups.

These six priority areas are vital catalysts for the rights of indigenous women, as set out in the UNDRIP and reflected in the outcome documents of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII, or "Forum"). Using the SP priority areas as a framework, the narrative below highlights some of the key activities that UN Women has undertaken most recently to support the empowerment of indigenous women, with a special focus on the theme of this year's Forum – *conflict, peace and resolution*.



## INTERVENTIONS ON CONFLICT, PEACE AND RESOLUTION

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As a result of both normative and global security developments, UN Women's SP priority area of *peace and security and humanitarian action* is an expanding area of work, with many initiatives that directly intersect with indigenous women and the UNPFII theme this year of *conflict, peace and resolution*. A pinnacle of UN Women's work in 2015 was the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. Through public messaging and advocacy with Member States, UN Women used the opportunity of the Security Council's coinciding High-level Review on Women, Peace and Security to heighten attention to the differential impacts of conflict on women, and to make the case for women's active involvement in all peace and security interventions, including peace mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Central to this effort was UN Women's facilitative role as the Secretariat to the team that produced the **global report** on the implementation of resolution 1325, titled [\*Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325\*](#).

The 400-page study was prepared under the leadership of Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Civil society consultations shaped the publication and indigenous women were active participants. The report provides a comprehensive and global review of the implementation of resolution 1325, including a description of its status at the time of publication as well as suggestions for the way forward. As part of its review, the report addresses the variety of circumstances in which indigenous women find themselves when in conflict situations. For example, it highlights the role of informal justice systems, traditional community leaders and women themselves in conflict prevention and resolution. It also describes how indigenous women from Sepur Zarco, a village in Guatemala, submitted the first legal complaint for crimes of sexual violence that occurred during the civil war in that country.

Another large-scale, **global** level project that UN Women undertook recently was the revision of the world's first [\*constitutional database on gender equality\*](#). The revision of the database occurred in preparation for the database's relaunch in 2016, which now includes a new searchable category of *indigenous peoples*, in addition to a number of categories that already hold relevance for indigenous women in conflict and post-conflict settings, such as the *rights of women* and the *status of religious or customary law*. UN Women is poised to use the database as a basis for advocacy and engagement on the implementation of the UNDRIP, with and through legislatures, academics, civil society organizations and judicial and constitutional reform bodies. By highlighting the sorts of provisions that are likely to be of interest for indigenous women, this database will serve as a resource for those engaging in constitutional design, which so often occurs in the aftermath of conflict and during the project of consolidating peace.

At the global level, UN Women continues to **coordinate** the UN system's normative work and follow-up on system-wide monitoring and accountability frameworks. This includes collaboration with the Peacebuilding Support Office to support the implementation of the Secretary-General's Seven Point Action Plan on gender-responsive peacebuilding. In addition, UN Women has supported **women's engagement in peace talks** in several countries, such as Colombia, South Sudan, and Syria. UN Women has also supported women-led peacebuilding initiatives in Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, and Kyrgyzstan. To promote **accountability**, UN Women has deployed expert investigators of sexual and gender-based violence to assist States, UN entities and regional organizations to document and investigate international crimes.

UN Women also supports indigenous women's efforts at pursuing transformative initiatives for themselves and their communities through two **global funding methods**: (1) the Fund for Gender Equality (FGE), a UN Women grant-making mechanism; and (2) the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF), an inter-agency mechanism managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system. During the year 2015, UN Women provided and administered funds for selected organizations, including at least one organization performing critical work at the intersection of indigenous women's rights and *conflict, peace and resolution*.

UNTF selected the **National Indigenous Organization of Colombia** (Organización Nacional de Indígenas de Colombia, ONIC) as a grant recipient in 2014. During the following year, the ONIC documented violence against indigenous women, raised awareness among community leaders and other relevant authorities, trained indigenous women as advocates of indigenous women's rights and provided social, legal and psychological support to indigenous women survivors of violence and their families. A milestone achievement was the issuance of a **joint resolution** by ONIC and its implementing partners entitled *Women, Violence and Access to Justice* on 29 May 2015. To complement the resolution, and in order to build an operational path forward for organizations working in this area, ONIC and one of its key partners also finalized **guidelines** on how to respond to cases of sexual violence and the provision of comprehensive care for women victims of armed conflict. Through the geographical scope of the non-governmental organizations represented in the agreed upon resolution and guidelines, approximately 3115 indigenous women have successfully been reached.

UN Women also directly engages in supporting indigenous women and their needs at the local level. In **Mexico**, for example, a joint project between UN Women, the Judicial Power and the National Institute for Women was implemented under the theme *Strengthening of the Justice Administration with a Gender and Intercultural Perspective*. Through this project, more than 1000 justice staff successfully concluded the three editions of an online course to strengthen justice administration with a gender and intercultural perspective, the first of its kind in Mexico. This course, which targets justice staff in indigenous areas, aims to strengthen the knowledge and competencies necessary to incorporate gender-sensitive and intercultural perspectives into the details of analysis and the decisions behind cases related to indigenous individuals, people and communities. In part, the project was undertaken in response to the concluding observations of

the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, calling for improved access to justice in the context of violence against women, femicide and a lack of accountability while acknowledging the additional barriers and discrimination that exist against indigenous women generally.

Another example of UN Women's direct role in *conflict, peace and resolution* can be found in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB) in **Papua New Guinea**, where UN Women has been engaged in substantial programming to support indigenous women emerging from a protracted civil war. Through the Secretary General's Peace Building Fund, UN Women supports women leaders including parliamentarians and community level decision-makers to promote the rights of women and girls in this traditionally matrilineal society. For example, UN Women supported a gender analysis of the ARB general election in 2015, which led to the publication of a report with conclusions and recommendations that reflected the valuable involvement of stakeholders and research participants. In turn, this supported the development of a Strategic Plan for Women's Political Leadership, which will serve as one of the essential frameworks for ongoing peacebuilding in ARB.

The empowerment of indigenous women in the context of *conflict, peace and resolution* requires a multi-dimensional approach. UN Women's work in support of indigenous women in other contexts serves to bolster and further assist in the important task of addressing the status of indigenous women in *conflict, peace and resolution*. Examples of UN Women's related work are described in the next section.



## OTHER SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN

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In addition to the programmes that UN Women leads at the intersection of indigenous women's rights and *conflict, peace and resolution*, UN Women has delivered a range of interventions with the aim of improving the status of indigenous women in general. The prioritization of gender equality in the 2030 Agenda and other global agendas points to the amplification of UN Women's mandate and scope of work. Examples of UN Women's work to improve the status of indigenous women cut across the priority areas of the SP as may be appreciated from the examples provided below.

UN Women has achieved a variety of advances in increasing **women's political participation**, including that of indigenous women. For example, UN Women established [Civil Society Advisory Groups \(CSAGs\)](#), which inform UN Women's work at a **global** level. The institutionalization of decentralized CSAGs provides a mechanism for communicating and coordinating with civil society. All CSAGs engage in conversations on all aspects of UN Women's work from policy, programming, and operational activities to normative and intergovernmental work. CSAGs are largely organized along regional and national lines, but there is also a Global Advisory Group. The Global CSAG has 25 members, who include leaders of grassroots, rural and community-based groups as well as indigenous peoples' organizations. UN Women's collaboration with, and support to, various civil society groups, including those that identify as indigenous, is a key component for effective development and coordination, providing ideas and perspectives, fruitful partnerships and valuable support.

At a regional level, the UN Women Regional Office for **Asia and the Pacific** supported the publication of [The Impacts of Land Dispossession on Indigenous Women](#). The report was published by the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, a regional organization founded by indigenous peoples' movements. The report's coverage includes Cambodia, India and Indonesia. It is the outcome of a project implemented during 2013 and 2014, with a goal of increasing the capacity of indigenous women to advocate for their own rights. The paper serves as evidence of increased documentation abilities and advocacy skills. Not only does it document the human rights situation of indigenous women, it also provides forward-looking direction by offering a set of recommendations for future engagement with indigenous women.

UN Women **Brazil** provides an example of a country level programme that successfully improved the political participation of indigenous women. The country office supported a group of indigenous activists from approximately 20 Brazilian states. These activists **collected demands from 51 ethnic groups**, in the form of 77 written and 18 multimedia interviews. In the process, the project mobilized hundreds of indigenous women in local conferences for indigenous policies.

The demands will ultimately be used to form the basis of a common agenda for Brazilian indigenous women and support advocacy efforts.

UN Women has also engaged in a variety of work to **end of violence against women**, including that which occurs against indigenous women. At the **global** level, UN Women jointly launched the [Safe Cities Global Initiative](#) with a large number of global and local partners, such as UN Habitat and UNICEF. The Initiative includes more than 20 cities around the world that have pledged to make their cities free from violence against women and girls. Some of these cities are located in countries with significant indigenous populations, such as Papua New Guinea and Canada.

In **Samoa**, where there is a large indigenous population, UN Women is supporting the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system for the Family and Domestic Courts through a database of indicators. This will provide important information on how to improve **access to justice**. Similarly, in **Vanuatu**, where rates of violence against women are as high as 67 percent, UN Women commissioned research on access to justice that is the first of its kind in the Pacific. The research is investigating how women and children seek remedies for violence, especially domestic violence, under Vanuatu's Family Protection Act and Criminal Code provisions. The information-gathering phase recently came to an end and the researchers are now analyzing their findings. Some of the initial findings show that access to justice is hampered by factors such as the distance and cost associated with accessing Circuit Courts as well as an overarching lack of understanding of rights and how to seek protection through the formal justice system.

In **Vietnam**, UN Women supported a gender audit of the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) in 2014. Through this audit, a capacity gap was identified. In order to address this capacity gap, UN Women co-hosted a workshop in 2015 for 175 senior managers of CEMA (118 men, 57 women, 53 indigenous) at national and sub-national levels. The workshop promoted **skill development in gender integration** to support the implementation of an Action Plan to ensure the SDGs reach indigenous regions of the country.

As part of UN Women's work on **global norms and standards**, UN Women has drafted a forthcoming **Guidance Note on the promotion of indigenous women's rights** at a global level. Once the Note is finalized, it will guide the integration of priorities identified by indigenous women themselves into the programming and operations of regional and country offices. This will increase the consistency and strength of UN Women's approach, internally and externally, when leading and coordinating the mainstreaming of indigenous women's rights in the wider UN system and engaging in global advocacy.

To enhance global visibility of the multifaceted nature of discrimination faced by indigenous women and girls, UN Women provided both **technical and financial support to the [Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples](#)** to produce her first report to the Human Rights Council on the situation of indigenous women and girls. The report details the risk factors that lead to

violence against indigenous women and girls and specifically notes that “indigenous women and girls experience complex, multidimensional and mutually reinforcing human rights violations.” The report was presented to the Human Rights Council in July 2015 and was well received by Member States. The report supports the implementation of the WCIP outcome document, which calls on “the Human Rights Council to consider examining the causes and consequences of violence against indigenous women and girls.”

Another undertaking that works towards strengthening coherence between normative guidance and operational support and builds on the report to the Human Rights Council is the commissioning of a **comparative study** that will address some of the severe gaps in knowledge that exist around indigenous women and girls and their **access to essential services to respond to domestic violence** in particular. In partnership with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the study will adopt a multi-dimensional approach, using both primary and secondary sources of information and including an in-depth analysis of the vulnerabilities and drivers that sustain domestic violence as well as the identification of constraints and opportunities that exist in combatting it. The study will provide firsthand information on the difficulties facing indigenous women survivors of domestic violence in accessing available services in addition to lessons learned and promising practices. Its policy-oriented approach and programmatic perspective will be used to better inform and more strategically engage on the ground with our partners.



## IMPLEMENTATION OF FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS

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There are a number of recommendations that the UNPFII has delivered over the years. As the Entity with a mandate to support Member States in their implementation of gender equality standards and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, UN Women works towards the implementation of many of the Forum's recommendations. For example, the UNPFII made a recommendation in the outcome document of the thirteenth session calling on States to promote access to justice for indigenous peoples, making specific mention of indigenous women. In response to this recommendation, as well as the potential increase in the scale of access to justice programming that the implementation of SDG 16 brings, UN Women is working to produce a **toolkit on women's access to justice**. The toolkit will assist UN Women staff, those of the broader UN system and other practitioners in identifying the practical and strategic needs of women in the context of access to justice as well as how and when such needs are to be integrated into the programming cycle. UN Women's justice agenda is an inclusive one, which means that all women, regardless of income level, age, religion, race, ethnicity, disability, location, sexual orientation and gender identity shall be entitled to access justice. For indigenous women, this means that careful attention must be paid to customary justice systems and the interaction between formal and informal justice systems. As such, one module of the toolkit will be dedicated to enhancing technical support in plural legal system, such as those in which indigenous women often live.

In its thirteenth session, the UNPFII also called on Member States to review their laws and put an end to sex discrimination in nationality and citizenship laws. The global **constitutional database** on gender equality supports this process by including a category entitled *citizenship and nationality*. UN Women continues to keep up-to-date and support the use of the database through ongoing additions, such as the development of an interactive dashboard, where users can select categories of information for visual presentation.

UN Women has and will continue to mainstream an intersectional analysis into its activities. At its thirteenth session, the UNPFII recommended that UN Women develop a "road map" with "actions" and "outcomes" and work towards even stronger integration of "indigenous women's priorities in global, regional and national programmes." The forthcoming **Guidance Note** on the promotion of indigenous women's rights will support a deepened and more consistent mainstreaming of indigenous concerns. The guiding framework for UN Women, the SP, already places a high priority on protecting and promoting the rights of marginalized and excluded women, including those who are indigenous. This Guidance Note will assist UN Women in advancing even further on the achievements that it has made thus far.



## LOOKING FORWARD

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UN Women is well placed to continue delivering on its mandate of leading and coordinating the inclusion of women across UN institutions. In addition to continuing to build upon its own work in support of Member States, UN Women will also continue to build upon its work supporting the inclusion of indigenous women in the UN system. CSAGs, with representation of indigenous women, will continue to provide key input into UN Women's work. UN Women will also continue to encourage gender and indigenous mainstreaming throughout the UN system, through established networks and knowledge sharing, using fora such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASGII). As part of its work through the IASGII, UN Women has contributed to the development of a UN System-Wide Action Plan on indigenous peoples, with the aim of maximizing cooperation and coherence in delivering results as one UN system at all levels — national, regional and global.

UN Women will soon begin drawing lessons learned and carefully considering how best to design its new strategic plan, which will take effect beginning in 2018. In so doing, UN Women remains energized and committed to the ambitious agenda of the SDGs and their special emphasis on women's inclusion. As part of the emphasis on women's inclusion, UN Women takes important note of intersectionality and the multiple forms of discrimination against women and will continue to work towards ensuring the inclusion of the most marginalized, including indigenous women. The development of the Guidance Note on the promotion of indigenous women's rights, the expansion of the constitutional database on gender equality, efforts at knowledge generation and other initiatives will lay the groundwork for further successful interventions in the empowerment of indigenous women going forward.



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