About the Publication

The first UN publication on the state of the world's indigenous peoples reveals alarming statistics on poverty, health, education, employment, human rights, the environment and more.

The first chapter, written by Joji Cariño, emphasizes both **self-determination and the principle of free, prior and informed consent**, which in practice, means that indigenous peoples themselves must be free to determine their own development. Indigenous peoples' rights to their own lands and territories must be respected and indigenous peoples need to develop their own definitions and indicators of poverty and well-being. Although global statistics on the situation of indigenous peoples are not readily available, it is clear that they suffer disproportionately from poverty, marginalization, lack of adequate housing and income inequality. Traditional livelihoods are under a great amount of stress from phenomena such as privatization, deregulation, climate change, conflict and unsustainable development. The chapter concludes that…"Indigenous peoples have vital contributions to make in addressing the contemporary challenges to renew ecological and social ethics and relationships, and in the fulfilment of peace, human rights and sustainable development."

In the second chapter, Naomi Kipuri discusses the remarkable contribution that indigenous peoples make to **cultural diversity** across the globe. Although it is estimated that indigenous peoples make up less than 6 per cent of the global population, they speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and are the stewards of some of the most biologically diverse areas, accumulating an immeasurable amount of traditional knowledge about their ecosystems. Indigenous cultures face the dual and somewhat contradictory threats of discrimination and commodification. Indigenous peoples continue to face racism and discrimination that sees them as inferior to non-indigenous communities and their culture as a hindrance to their development. Yet indigenous peoples are increasingly recognized for their unique relationship with their environment, their traditional knowledge and their spirituality, leading to external efforts to use and/or profit from their culture which are frequently out of their control, providing them no benefits, and often a great deal of harm.

The chapter on **environment**, written by Neva Collings, begins by looking at the major environmental issues that indigenous peoples are facing today. The chapter emphasizes indigenous peoples' spiritual, cultural, social and economic connection with their traditional lands and their tradition of collective rights to land in contrast with dominant models of individual land ownership, privatization and development which frequently lead to dispossession of indigenous peoples' land. In addition to these threats, indigenous peoples face the consequences of rapid climate change. The chapter then reviews some of the international legal frameworks and mechanisms for environmental protection, focusing on their implementation and how indigenous peoples have used them. Finally, it identifies the major gaps and challenges indigenous peoples confront at the local and national levels.

The **education** chapter by Duane Champagne illustrates the stark contrast in access to education between indigenous and non-indigenous students. At all levels, and in all regions of the world, indigenous peoples tend to have lower levels of literacy, enjoy fewer years at school and are more likely to drop out of school. Education is seldom provided to indigenous children in their native languages and it is frequently offered in a context that is culturally inappropriate and has few and inadequate facilities. Far too often, those who do get an education are forced to assimilate within the dominant culture, unable to find jobs in their communities. Despite discouraging

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overall trends, there are a great number of initiatives that point the way forward for indigenous education, where the community as a whole is involved, where teachers are bilingual and indigenous peoples have the freedom to choose whether they pursue their careers in their own communities or elsewhere.

The **health** chapter, written by Myrna Cunningham,[1] emphasizes the interdependence between health and other factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, marginalization, environmental degradation and (the lack of) self-determination. These forces, inherited from colonization, make indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women and children in particular, vulnerable to poor health. The result is that indigenous peoples register disproportionately high in virtually all indicators of poor health. Indigenous peoples have poor access to state health systems, while there is a palpable lack of recognition and support for indigenous peoples' own health systems. Any successful plan to provide health care for indigenous peoples must involve a multicultural health system where Western and indigenous health systems are practiced with equal human, technological and financial resources and where indigenous peoples are involved in all decision-making processes.

In the **human rights** chapter, Dalee Sambo Dorough stresses the indivisibility and interrelatedness of indigenous peoples' rights and how their human rights are intrinsically related to their right to self-determination. Despite a significant number of international instruments that protect their human rights and marked improvements in recent years, indigenous peoples continue to face grave human rights abuses on a daily basis, from dispossession of land to violence and murder. Often the most serious of these abuses are committed against indigenous persons who are defending their rights and their lands and territories. The gap between recognition and enjoyment of those rights in reality needs to be addressed through human rights education, more effective oversight and greater commitments from states.

The last chapter, written by Mililani Trask, looks at some of the **emerging issues** affecting indigenous peoples, including violence and militarism, effects of conservation, globalization, migration and urbanization, and indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation. A common theme is indigenous peoples' vulnerability in the face of outside pressures and the need to develop specific policies that address this vulnerability, while simultaneously ensuring that the principle of free, prior and informed consent is respected and that indigenous peoples participate in decision-making processes that affect their well-being. Indeed, this is the overarching theme of the whole publication.

The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples was authored by seven independent experts and produced by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

For more information, see: www.un.org/indigenous

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[1] Written in collaboration with the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Autonomy and Development (CADPI) in Nicaragua.