

Handbook *for* Participants



United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Indigenous Issues

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Background of UNPFII

Origins

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is a culmination of decades of work to raise the profile of indigenous issues within the international community. One of the first attempts by indigenous leaders to engage the international community was in 1924, when Chief Deskaheh of the Cayuga Nation approached the League of Nations to make the voice of indigenous peoples heard. A concept of indigenous rights further crystallized in 1957 in the first international legal instrument related to indigenous peoples' protection, the Convention concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries (Convention No. 107). This convention was updated in 1989 by the Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Convention No. 169).

The groundbreaking study of UN Special Rapporteur José Martínez Cobo in the 1970s and early 1980s provided substantive information on the state of the world's indigenous peoples and issued a clarion call to the United Nations to act decisively on their behalf. Subsequently, a Working Group on Indigenous Populations was formed in 1982 and tasked with developing international standards on indigenous rights, the result of which was the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.





While this document has yet to be adopted by the General Assembly, it nevertheless established a benchmark to which States are urged to adhere.

In 1993, which was proclaimed by the United Nations as the “International Year for the World’s Indigenous People”, calls were first heard for a permanent forum to be established that could address indigenous peoples’ concerns. Nearly 10 years later, this dream was realized with the inaugural session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 2002, marking a new era in which indigenous-nominated experts sit at a level of parity with government-nominated experts to speak for themselves as full-fledged members of a United Nations body.

Mandate

The Permanent Forum was established by United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2000/22 on 28 July 2000. In this resolution, UNPFII was given a mandate to “discuss indigenous issues within the mandate of the Council relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights”. To substantiate this work, the Permanent Forum was called upon to provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN system through ECOSOC; raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of relevant activities within the UN system; and prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues.



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Membership

The Permanent Forum comprises 16 independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity, who serve for a term of three years as members and may be re-elected or reappointed for one additional term. Eight of the members are nominated by Governments and eight are nominated directly by indigenous organizations in their regions.

The members nominated by Governments are elected by ECOSOC based on the five regional groupings of States normally used at the United Nations (Africa; Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Western Europe and Other States).

The members nominated by indigenous organizations are appointed by the President of ECOSOC and represent seven sociocultural regions to give broad





representation to the world's indigenous peoples. The regions are Africa; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Arctic; Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific.

Serving UNPFII in their capacity as independent experts, members are not remunerated for their activities performed on behalf of the Forum. Members carry out their work under the legal status of "UN experts on mission" and are accorded the functional privileges and immunities that are specified in the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (SPFII)

The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established by the General Assembly in 2002 and began its work in February 2003. Based at UN Headquarters in New York in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSPD/DESA), SPFII works year-round to:

- Prepare for annual sessions of the Permanent Forum;
- Provide Forum members with logistical and communications support;
- Promote the coordination of implementation within the UN system of the recommendations that emerge from each annual session;


- Promote awareness of indigenous issues within the UN system, among Governments and the broad public;
- Serve as a source of information and a coordination point for advocacy efforts that relate to the mandate of the Permanent Forum and the ongoing issues that arise concerning indigenous peoples.

In preparation for the Permanent Forum's annual session, SPFII solicits and prepares documentation, manages pre-registration of attendees, arranges logistics for the meeting, coordinates the multitude of special events during the session (some 60 events during each session) and provides information notes on conference details (travel, accommodation etc.) for the indigenous and non-governmental organizations that attend, as well as facilitating the logistics for members themselves. SPFII also collects and disseminates reports from UN agencies on implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations that are studied and used by members as an important part of their dialogue with the UN system and Member States.

SPFII also prepares its report to the Permanent Forum—generally in March each year—which discusses developments in the mandated areas and ongoing priorities/themes of the Permanent Forum; and helps to inform the work of the annual session.

Throughout the year, SPFII provides logistical support to UNPFII members as they carry out their Forum-related work, including travel, coordination for events, and





preparation of background notes and draft statements. In addition, SPFII facilitates the flow of information, both among members and between the Permanent Forum and the general public. Specifically, this flow is managed by fielding public queries, maintaining a website (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii) and issuing a quarterly newsletter and other informational materials for circulation.

Within the UN system, SPFII takes advantage of its permanent presence at the New York Headquarters to advocate for implementation of the Permanent Forum's recommendations during the year. SPFII also advocates for indigenous issues through its substantive support and participation in the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (see the following section) as well as through convening the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Intradepartmental Task Force on Indigenous Issues. SPFII staff members maintain an active circuit during the year of attendance at relevant indigenous issues meetings and workshops, usually in concert with members of the Permanent Forum. SPFII actively promotes the integration of indigenous issues in the UN system by participating in a variety of inter-agency mechanisms, including the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and other bodies.

How UNPFII works

The annual session

Pre-sessional meeting

Prior to the start of the annual session, members of the Permanent Forum occasionally convene in a pre-sessional meeting. During the pre-sessional meeting, members exchange information on important developments and receive briefings from SPFII on relevant developments since the previous annual session, including preparations for the upcoming Permanent Forum session.

When new members join the Permanent Forum, an overview is given of standard UN operating procedures and logistics, and such topics as the member portfolio system, the process of the formulation of recommendations, the time frame of work, and engagement with other UN actors. Since the Permanent Forum's inception, two formal and two informal pre-sessional meetings have been held, as of 2006.

Duration and location

As per ECOSOC resolution 2000/22, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues meets for 10 working days each year, generally in the month of May. According to the resolution, this annual session may be held at UN Headquarters in New York or Geneva, or at an alternative location chosen by the Forum. To date, annual sessions of the Permanent Forum have been held in New York.





Participants

During the annual session each year, a number of key UN and other intergovernmental organization representatives, as well as hundreds of participants hailing from indigenous communities and non-governmental organizations around the world, join the 16 members of the Permanent Forum for an interactive dialogue. Some 1,200 people participate annually, including indigenous participants, civil society organizations, Member States and intergovernmental entities.

Agenda, theme and programme of work

During each annual session of the Permanent Forum, the theme for the subsequent year's session is determined. The draft programme of work for the annual session is prepared each year by SPFII in consultation with the Bureau of the Permanent Forum about two months in advance of the session start date and is publicly available one month prior to the session. In the opening meeting of the session, the Permanent Forum is addressed by high-level personalities, such as the Secretary-General or the Deputy Secretary-General, the Presidents of the General Assembly and ECOSOC, and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. At the opening meeting of each session, the Permanent Forum elects a Chairperson, four Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur. It also adopts the agenda and programme of work. The rules of procedure of the Permanent Forum are the same



United Nations Photo / Pablo Lasansky


as the rules of procedure of ECOSOC. These rules of procedure may be requested from the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum.

In accordance with ECOSOC resolution 2000/22, the Permanent Forum must adopt its recommendations by consensus.

Documents

Upon arrival at the annual session of the Permanent Forum, indigenous peoples and other civil society participants can receive official Permanent Forum documents from the conference officers. This documentation, including the report of the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum, the programme of work, and information/reports received from the UN system,





Governments, and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC, is also posted on the Permanent Forum website in advance of the session.

All these bodies provide annual updates on the implementation of past recommendations of the Permanent Forum and information on their overall activities that may help to inform recommendations of the Permanent Forum in the current session. Forum Members examine these reports with a special focus on topics that relate to their portfolios.

Plenary sessions and meetings

Speakers

A diverse array of speakers are invited to address the Forum each year. High-level and other representatives from UN bodies, representatives of Member States, indigenous representatives and other non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC who register to attend the Forum as observers deliver statements to the Forum.

Speaker lists for representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations, group statements and indigenous caucuses are arranged and finalized by SPFII during the session. Members of the Permanent Forum introduce items, ask questions and make statements whenever they judge appropriate. Time constraints are considerable given the great number of observers who ask for the floor. The Chairperson explains the procedure

to follow at the beginning of each plenary session regarding the list of speakers and also sets time limits for interventions (5 to 7 minutes is the practice).

Indigenous caucuses


Indigenous caucuses are a vibrant element of the annual session of the Permanent Forum, and they allow for consolidated advocacy and cooperation to take place across regions and groupings. In addition to the global indigenous caucus, indigenous caucuses have generally been organized along regional lines, as well as some thematic groups. An indigenous women's caucus and an indigenous youth caucus have also been organized. Where possible, rooms are made available for caucuses to gather in extra-session meetings. The global indigenous caucus also meets in New York during the weekend prior to the annual session of the Permanent Forum. In the past, indigenous caucuses have made collective statements and submitted recommendations for the consideration of members of the Permanent Forum.

Specific meetings

During the annual session, a number of specific meetings take place outside the plenary meetings of the Permanent Forum that help to inform the work of developing recommendations and advancing indigenous issues.

Friends of the Forum, a group of representatives from Member States who support the work of the





Permanent Forum, attend specific meetings to contribute to the Forum's work. During the annual session, Member States also participate in bilateral (States and members of the Permanent Forum) and trilateral (States, members of the Permanent Forum, and UN agency representatives) meetings. The annual session also includes a plenary briefing in which Member States' representatives are invited to a dialogue with the members of the Permanent Forum.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people has also attended the UNPFII annual sessions. Under the human rights item of the agenda, the Permanent Forum has held dialogues with the Special Rapporteur, who also hears public statements by indigenous organizations.

UN agency representatives from the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) are also provided with space to hold their own daily meetings during the annual session of the Permanent Forum.

Given the time constraints during plenary meetings and the need for members of the Permanent Forum to consult among themselves on their work, closed meetings are held daily from 8.30 to 10 a.m. and in the evening after 6 p.m. if required. The members also set aside time for some closed plenary meetings during the session to facilitate discussion and the processing of recommendations.




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Cultural and other special events

In addition to the meetings described above that comprise the official work of UNPFII during the annual session, the organizing of side events is facilitated and encouraged by SPFII.

Past sessions have included up to 60 special events that touch on a variety of relevant issues and are generally hosted by UN agencies, States, indigenous organizations and other non-governmental organizations attending UNPFII. In addition to the annual indigenous art exhibit, a rich sampling of culture is made available during each annual session, including arts and crafts, music, dance and theatrical performances. A list of scheduled special events is posted on the UNPFII website one week prior





to the session. Training sessions are organized before or during the session by non-governmental organization and academic partners.

Recommendations

The outcome of the annual session of the Permanent Forum is the issuance of official recommendations to ECOSOC, as well as programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, Governments, indigenous and other organizations, civil society, the media and the private sector. These recommendations serve as the primary platform for advocacy and programme implementation during the year. The recommendations have a thematic focus and outline specific action that is needed to promote and protect the human rights of indigenous peoples and to improve their lives overall.

There is great time pressure on the members of the Permanent Forum to prepare their recommendations according to deadlines set by UN conference services so that they can be reproduced and circulated in the six official UN languages. This is a crucial point given the fact that Forum members do not have a lingua franca. Thus, the drafting and elaboration of recommendations can be a complicated process until the Forum finally adopts its recommendations by consensus. The annual session comes to a close with the adoption of the report of the Permanent Forum to ECOSOC. ECOSOC then considers the report at its regular session in July.

The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues


The Inter-Agency Support Group—comprising staff members from several UN agencies—was established to support and promote the mandate of UNPFII and indigenous issues in general within the United Nations system. It helps the United Nations system to analyse recommendations made by the Forum with a view to facilitating comprehensive and coordinated responses.

IASG organizes a three-day meeting once a year—generally in September—around a chosen thematic focus relevant to indigenous peoples. IASG uses this meeting to discuss specific agency concerns, address system gaps, develop common statements and papers, and submit an annual report to the Permanent Forum. The chairmanship of IASG rotates annually among agencies, and receives substantive support from SPFII. Over two dozen intergovernmental entities—UN system and others—are members of IASG.

Expert workshops

The Permanent Forum and ECOSOC annually mandate an international expert workshop on a topic of relevance and complexity. This workshop consolidates the expertise of the members, indigenous experts and UN agency experts and interested Member States in a collaborative exchange. The expert workshop is generally





organized by SPFII in January and submits its recommendations to the annual session of the Permanent Forum. Topics of recent workshops have included data disaggregation and collection, free, prior and informed consent, indigenous traditional knowledge and the Millennium Development Goals.

Trust Fund for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

The Trust Fund for the Second Decade supports activities included in the Programme of Action of the Second Decade. It also funds the implementation of recommendations made by the Permanent Forum through ECOSOC.

As part of its responsibilities, the Bureau of the Permanent Forum, which comprises the Chairperson, Rapporteur and four Vice-Chairs, acts as an advisory group on project proposals submitted to this Fund, which is administered by the Secretary-General through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The Trust Fund accepts voluntary contributions from Member States, foundations, and other private and individual donors.



United Nations Photo / Pablo Lasansky


Other Permanent Forum–related matters

The portfolio system

In order to ensure broad coverage of relevant issues and to capitalize on the areas of expertise held by individual members of the Permanent Forum, UNPFII organizes its work through a portfolio system.

Members indicate their preferences regarding the topics they would like to include in their individual portfolios. These topics include the six main areas of the Permanent Forum’s mandate—economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights—as well as additional items suggested by members. Other portfolio topics have included administration of justice, housing, children and youth, gender and





women's issues, data and statistics and many others, based on expertise available within the Forum and pressing issues for indigenous peoples.

During the year, members focus their work mostly on topics within their portfolio, often attending relevant meetings on behalf of the Forum. Portfolio topics can be shared between members to create better coverage and collaboration on these issues of concern.

Meetings to further the mandate of UNPFII

Members of the Permanent Forum are invited during the year to a host of meetings in which their advocacy and expertise are desired. These include meetings organized by intergovernmental bodies and regional indigenous organizations. Assisted by SPFII, members respond to these invitations and travel to participate in meetings in their official capacity.

Participation in such meetings throughout the year enables the members to advocate widely on indigenous issues and for the Forum's recommendations. Special visits to agencies by a few members take place at the invitation of agencies.

Issues of concern

During the year, certain urgent issues faced by indigenous peoples may arise on which members can make a crucial intervention. Both SPFII and

members of the Permanent Forum act as eyes and ears for such issues, and they coordinate specific responses when needed. An example of this is a policy statement made by Forum members after the tsunami in December 2004.



Practical information

Essential information for participants at the Forum's annual session

Pre-registration and accreditation

Each participant must pre-register for the annual session of the Permanent Forum. The necessary information and forms for pre-registration are placed on the website (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii) a few months in advance of the Permanent Forum session. Only three categories of participants can pre-register for the annual session: (1) indigenous peoples' organizations; (2) non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC; and (3) academic institutions. Based on evolving UN practice, it is left up to each indigenous peoples' organization to nominate a reasonable number of representatives to attend the annual session of UNPFII.

Pre-registration does not mean final registration, which requires the prospective participant to register in person at the UN registration desk in the United Nations Secretariat Building. However, pre-registration is imperative for participants from outside the United States of America to receive a pre-registration confirmation letter for the purpose of obtaining a visa from the nearest United States embassy or consulate.





Passport and visa

Each participant is responsible for having a valid passport to enter the United States. It is recommended that participants contact the nearest United States embassy or consulate to determine whether a visa is required to enter the United States. If justification for the trip to New York is required, the pre-registration confirmation letter should be produced for the relevant embassy or consulate. The Permanent Forum and its Secretariat are not responsible for assisting participants to obtain the United States visa.

Travel

Expenses related to attending the annual session of UNPFII are entirely the responsibility of the participant or his/her sponsoring organization/institution. Representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations are encouraged to apply to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). This Voluntary Fund is organized to fund the participation of indigenous peoples in meetings related to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the annual session of UNPFII. The deadline for submission of applications is 1 October each year. More information may be obtained from the OHCHR website www.ohchr.org/english/about/funds/indigenous.

Accommodation

Participants need to make their own accommodation arrangements during the annual session.

The Forum website (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii) has a list of area hotels and other logistical information.


Security and grounds passes

Those attending meetings at United Nations Headquarters in New York must follow security instructions. Participants are required to enter Headquarters at the “Visitors’ Entrance” located on 1st Avenue between 45th and 46th Streets (via the security tent). Once in the lobby, participants proceed to the registration desk (which will be marked “Registration for UNPFII”) with their pre-registration confirmations, where they will receive grounds passes. Attendees should wear the grounds passes at all times while on the premises; the passes are necessary to enter and leave the building.

Medical clearance/insurance

Participants are responsible for making their own insurance arrangements, including life, health and other forms deemed appropriate. Make sure that you are covered by your health insurance provider during your stay in New York. The United Nations does not take responsibility for the ill health of any participant during his or her stay in New York.





There is a Medical Service on the 5th floor of the Secretariat Building. In case of emergency, call 1 212 963 7777.

Local information

Upon the arrival of attendees at the annual session in New York, SPFII staff will provide a variety of useful details on local issues and amenities, including transportation, food and recreation, and business support services at the global caucus meeting preceding the annual session.



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on Indigenous Issues

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