

# THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

## International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

### Leaving No One Behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract

Virtual commemoration on 9 August 2021  
(9-11 am EST/New York Time)

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated globally on 9 August. It marks the date of the inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982<sup>1</sup>. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is organizing a virtual commemoration of the International Day on Monday, 9 August 2021. Indigenous Peoples, Member States, UN entities, civil society, and the public are all invited.

#### Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract

There are over 476 million indigenous peoples living in 90 countries across the world, accounting for 6.2 per cent of the global population<sup>2</sup>. Indigenous peoples are the holders of a vast diversity of unique cultures, traditions, languages, and knowledge systems. They have a special relationship with their lands and hold diverse concepts of development based on their own worldviews and priorities.

Although numerous indigenous peoples worldwide are self-governing and some have been successful in establishing autonomy in varying forms, many indigenous peoples still come under the ultimate authority of central governments who exercise control over their lands, territories, and resources. Despite that reality, indigenous peoples have demonstrated extraordinary examples of good governance, ranging from the Haudenosaunee to the existing Sámi parliaments in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. According to Haudenosaunee Faithkeeper Oren Lyons, self-determination, as the basis of good governance means that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples.

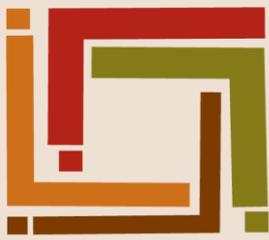
The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting populations all over the world that were already suffering from poverty, illness, discrimination, institutional instability, or financial insecurity. These

---

<sup>1</sup> A/RES/49/214.

<sup>2</sup> *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future*, International Labour Organization (February 2020):  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_735607/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_735607/lang--en/index.htm)





# THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

inequalities cannot and must not be ignored. Meanwhile, trust in some of the most important institutions, such as legislatures, law enforcement, media or the private sector continues to erode, threatening the very fabric of our societies. In many of our societies, the social contract – the unwritten agreement that societies make to cooperate for social and economic benefits – is at the very least, in need of some revision.

From the perspective of indigenous peoples, the contrast is even starker. In many countries, where indigenous peoples were driven from their lands, their cultures and languages denigrated and their people marginalized from political and economic activities, they were never included in the social contract to begin with. The social contract was made among the dominant populations.

Over recent years and decades, various societies have sought to address this, including through apologies, truth and reconciliation efforts, legislative reforms, as well as constitutional reforms, while at the international level, these efforts have included the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and advisory bodies such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

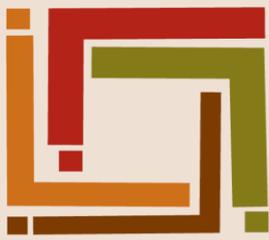
Despite the existence of international instruments to respond to these inequalities, not all are embarked on the collective journey to ensure that no one is left behind, including indigenous peoples. Therefore, the building and redesigning of a new social contract as an expression of cooperation for social interest and common good for humanity and nature is needed.

The new social contract must be based on genuine participation and partnership that fosters equal opportunities and respects the rights, dignity, and freedoms of all. The whole of society, not only governments but also social activists: indigenous peoples, women, academia, scientists, all have a role to play in building and redesigning a new social contract that serves the interest of “We, the peoples”. Indigenous peoples’ right to participate in decision-making is a key component in achieving reconciliation between indigenous peoples and States. Therefore, a new social contract must combat the legacy of exclusion and marginalization affecting indigenous peoples through their meaningful and effective participation and the obtainment of their free, prior, and informed consent.

## **Format and invited speakers**

The virtual commemoration will include an opening segment with a traditional ceremony, followed by pre-recorded videos of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The interactive dialogue segment will be with the participation of two invited speakers, led by a session moderator.





# THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

Invited speakers are:

- **Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces**, President of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly; Former Minister of Foreign Affairs & Minister of National Defence, Ecuador.
- **Prof. James Anaya**, University of Colorado Law School; Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples; international human rights lawyer.

Moderator:

- **Mr. Ghazali Ohorella**, indigenous rights advocate, Host of Gomaluku Podcast.

Invited speakers will comment on the distinct elements to be considered when building and redesigning a new social contract that is inclusive of indigenous peoples, where their own forms of governance and ways of life (which were not previously accounted for) must be respected and based on their free, prior and informed consent and genuine and inclusive participation and partnership. Some of the questions to be discussed are:

- What are the key areas to be considered for building and redesigning a new social contract that serves the well-being of indigenous peoples and other excluded social groups of society?
- What new roles can indigenous peoples, civil society, and academia play to ensure that building back better after COVID-19 is based on agreed principles and rights?
- What is the role of multilateralism in reimagining a new social contract that strengthens the inclusiveness and responsiveness of institutions to achieve the 2030 Agenda?
- How can a new social contract best support peace and development?

