

THE UN WANTS TO HEAR YOUR VOICE!

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is the main office for our people at the UN. We are calling on all indigenous peoples especially youth to attend the annual UN meeting where our issues will be discussed. The Forum pays particular attention to children and youth and the role you play in keeping indigenous culture alive. In 2003, “children and youth” was the special theme of our session and since then this priority has been echoed through the UN system. Meet people from other continents. Make new friends. Make a difference. Join more than 1,000 indigenous participants at the Forum’s annual two-week session in May in New York.

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the first and only international human rights treaty to explicitly cover the situation of indigenous children. While all the provisions of the Convention apply to children worldwide, Article 30 specifically recognizes and addresses the realities of indigenous children. The CRC states:

- » Children and youth should live long lives, free from poverty and discrimination.
- » Children and youth should receive good medical attention.
- » Proper housing with adequate essential services such as water, sanitation and proper roads should be provided.
- » They should be sent to school and to university if they so choose.
- » Full protection of the law should be provided.
- » Children and youth should be proud of their identity.

In reality, large number of indigenous children and youth do not enjoy basic human rights:

- » Life expectancy of indigenous children and youth is often twenty years less than others.
- » They continue to suffer from preventable diseases and lack of adequate medical care.
- » Children often live in houses without running water or sanitation.
- » They have limited access to basic education.
- » They are regularly harassed by police and authorities.
- » They are often made to feel ashamed of their identity.



WHY SHOULD YOU GET INVOLVED?

More young indigenous peoples are needed in the work of the Forum to voice their views and concerns. Through your involvement you can help shape the advice the Permanent Forum gives to UN agencies, particularly those concerning indigenous youth.

At the annual May sessions, the operating agencies of the UN system report on their activities which cover subjects like poverty, health, education, environment, culture and human rights. For several years, indigenous peoples have pressed UN agencies to make indigenous youth a top priority and these agencies now report on their youth-specific initiatives. The yearly meetings help the Forum monitor the directions these agencies are taking and better coordinate indigenous issues across the UN system.

Most importantly, through these sessions the Forum advocates for indigenous-related policies to reach the local level and create change in the lives of people. When you return home after the meeting, you can share your experiences with family and friends. In this way you will also let others know about the UN, the Forum and its work and help us to spread the word.

Go to the Forum's website and find out about meeting dates, location, agenda, visa requirements and registration details.

Funding is available if you want to attend the Forum's meetings. Grants are also made if you want to participate in other UN meetings. If you are interested in applying, visit www.ohchr.org/english/about/funds/indigenous, or contact the secretariat. Funding requests are considered in the year before the meeting. Applications close 1 October in the year prior to the meeting.

There are also other ways of getting involved. The UN has developed online resources for schools. Go to <http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/indigenous/index.asp> and you will find educational materials on our issues. Tell your teacher about this website, which was produced to let more people know about indigenous culture and heritage.

HOW DOES THE FORUM WORK?

The Forum is the focal point for our issues at the UN. The Forum has 16 members, half from indigenous nominations and half from government nominations. The indigenous members come from the seven indigenous socio-cultural regions: Asia; Africa; Eastern, Central Europe and the Caucasus; the Arctic; Latin America and the Caribbean; North America; and the Pacific. If you want to learn about your regional member, go to the UNPFII website at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii>

From the beginning, the Permanent Forum has made strong recommendations on young people and children. It has urged action on: culturally-appropriate education, including in indigenous languages; adequate health services; education on epidemics like HIV/AIDS; discrimination by the law; and over-policing of indigenous youth. We have called attention to youth suicides, poverty and malnutrition, sexual exploitation, child labour, trafficking, children in armed conflicts, unemployment and education opportunities.

Want your friends to find out more? Watch “Indigenous peoples and the United Nations” at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii>

WE MUST NOT LET INDIGENOUS CHILDREN DOWN.

They embody the will of indigenous peoples to survive and prosper into the future, with their dignity and human rights respected and their voices heard at all levels of national and international society.

— MR. OLE HENRIK MAGGA,
Permanent Forum Chairperson
February 2004

LET US ALL LISTEN to the voices of indigenous peoples, and act as their partners to protect indigenous rights, particularly those of indigenous children. This will not only help to right historic wrongs and remove current injustices. It will truly enrich us all. With our help, the indigenous children of today can be leaders of tomorrow.

— **UN SECRETARY-GENERAL, KOFI ANNAN**

from a speech delivered in November 2003 in Cuzco, Peru, a sacred site for many indigenous peoples.

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