



UN-HABITAT



**REPORT ON UN-HABITAT  
ACTIVITIES REGARDING INDIGENOUS ISSUES**  
Submitted to the Tenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
16-27 May 2011, United Nations, New York

**Executive summary**

UN-HABITAT works towards improving living conditions, ensuring adequate shelter for all and contributing to the development of sustainable human settlements, while focusing on the needs of the poor and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples. The Habitat Agenda, Millennium Development Goals and other relevant international instruments and frameworks related to spatial, economic and social development, as well as human rights, provide guidance to UN-HABITAT's work.

UN-HABITAT's ongoing activities are contributing to the five main objectives of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People in several ways. Economic and social empowerment of indigenous peoples; urban economic development and green economy; rural-urban linkages; secure land and property rights; promoting civic engagement, social integration, participatory urban planning and management; gender mainstreaming are key areas of activities.

These activities contribute to the efforts underway to ensure the realisation of the right to adequate housing for all, and contributing to sustainable urban development.

UN-HABITAT provides technical assistance and elaborates guidance for policy makers and local leaders to assist in the development of public policies and participatory decision-making processes to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of indigenous peoples in urban areas. UN-HABITAT is coordinating a policy guide series initiative to respond to the outcome and requests from the previous sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to better understand the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in cities.

UN-HABITAT has developed a Policy Guide to Housing for Indigenous Peoples in Cities<sup>i</sup>, which was adapted and implemented in various countries, in particular those in the Latin America and Caribbean region. UN-HABITAT has produced a new United Nations Housing Rights Programme (UNHRP) report entitled 'Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration: A review of Policies, Programmes and Practices'<sup>ii</sup>. This eighth report of UNHRP was officially launched at the roundtable on 'Indigenous Peoples, Sustainable Urban Development with Culture and Identity', on 23 March 2010, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As a follow-up outcome to this roundtable, UN-HABITAT also produced a Policy Guide to Secure Land and Property Rights for Indigenous Peoples<sup>iii</sup>, in partnership with the Global Land Tool Network.

In 2010-2011, UN-HABITAT focused on some of the specific challenges Indigenous Peoples are facing in cities, in particular with regards to health, the negative impacts of climate change to vulnerable urban settlements, but also to indigenous peoples' contribution to sustainable urban development and green economy.

UN-HABITAT is expected to contribute to the more effective realisation of indigenous peoples' right to the city, including their right to adequate housing, towards sustainable urban development with culture and identity.

This report has been prepared in response to recommendations of the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues addressed to the UN System, and in other paragraphs as related and relevant to the mandate and activities of UN-HABITAT.

**A. Response to recommendations addressed to the UN System at the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and to UN-HABITAT in the past sessions of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

1. In recognising the challenges related to urbanisation and indigenous peoples, notably the urgent need to further the research and documentation undertaken by the United Nations Housing Rights Programme (UNHRP), the Permanent Forum recommended in its Fourth session that an expert group meeting on this topic should be organised. At its Fifth session, the Permanent Forum reiterated its recommendation to expand the scope of this endeavour beyond the field of housing, and to cover urban issues comprehensively under the general title of “Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration”.
2. In response to this recommendation, and as a follow-up to experts consultations, a publication entitled ‘Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration: a Review of Policies, Programmes and Practices’, UNHRP report No. 8, was published and was presented at the Fifth Session of the World Urban Forum, on 23 March 2010, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
3. The overall goal of this publication is to contribute to improving the living conditions of urban indigenous peoples and the realisation of their human rights. The specific objectives of the UNHRP report No. 8 are: (i) to assess the impacts of the migration process on indigenous peoples; (ii) to analyse the living conditions and human rights of indigenous peoples in urban areas with the aim of generating comprehensive knowledge based on the latest findings; (iii) to evaluate current policies and practices and their effects on living conditions and the realisation of human rights of indigenous peoples in urban areas; and (iv) to elaborate recommendations on how to improve the living conditions of urban indigenous peoples and contribute to the realisation of their human rights.

4. In response to the recommendations of the sixth session of the Permanent Forum and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup>, particularly Articles 21 and 23, as well as a direct follow-up activity for the EGM on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration, and as requested by the 2007 Annual Meeting of the United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (IASG) (Montreal, 17-19 September 2007), UN-HABITAT, under the United Nations Housing Right Programme (UNHRP) and in collaboration with the IASG, is coordinating the elaboration of policy guides for policy makers, national governments and local authorities to assist in the development of public policies to address the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in cities<sup>2</sup>.
5. UN-HABITAT developed a Policy Guide to Housing for Indigenous Peoples in Cities as well as finalised in 2011 a new Policy Guide to Secure Land and Property Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Cities. Additional policy guides will be produced in collaboration with other relevant UN agencies to address specific urban challenges, such as health for example. The policy guides are a first step in formulating practical toolkits and training materials, adapted to regional and national contexts to facilitate implementation of policy recommendations at national and city levels.
6. As a follow-up to the adaptation of the Policy Guide to Housing for Indigenous Peoples in Cities of the Latin America and Caribbean region, UN-HABITAT has produced a regional research project, in partnership with regional partners and academia. This research project assessed the specific challenges facing indigenous peoples' right to adequate housing, in the capital cities of five Andean countries. The research findings contribute to the formulation of policy recommendations for policy makers and city managers to promote the realisation of the right to adequate housing for all. The research studies are currently under review and will soon be published.
7. UN-HABITAT is inviting United Nations agencies and Member States to further support the implementation of the policy guides initiative in order to provide policy makers with specific guidance on challenges facing indigenous peoples in cities and human settlements.

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<sup>1</sup> A/RES/61/295 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

<sup>2</sup> IASG (2007), Report of the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Interagency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples (Montreal, 17-19 September 2007); see p. 6, para 28

**B. Response to recommendations addressed to one or more agencies or to the UN system in general under one or more items of the Permanent Forum’s mandate**

8. UN-HABITAT has a clear position on indigenous peoples’ rights. UN-HABITAT promotes socially and environmentally sustainable cities and human settlements with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all;
9. UN-HABITAT works towards improving living conditions, ensuring adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development, while focusing on the needs of the poor and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples. The Habitat Agenda<sup>3</sup>, Millennium Development Goals and other relevant international instruments and frameworks related to spatial, economic and social development, as well as human rights, provide guidance to UN-HABITAT’s work in the area of addressing indigenous peoples’ issues.
10. UN-HABITAT’s work on indigenous peoples issues is in response to and mandated by the adopted Resolution A/RES/61/295 “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, which in its Article 21 reads “*1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security; 2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities*” and Article 23: “*Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions*”.
11. UN-HABITAT acknowledges in particular recommendations 11, 12, 14, 93, 114, 146, 147 and 164 made at the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the UNPFII and is working to the

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<sup>3</sup> Habitat II, 3-14 June 1996, Habitat Agenda, paragraph 122 a-d on indigenous peoples.

improvement of living conditions of indigenous peoples in cities, towards sustainable urban development with culture and identity.

**C. Obstacles hindering the implementation of recommendations of the Permanent Forum, including those addressed specifically to UN-HABITAT**

12. The main obstacle UN-HABITAT faces in implementing policies and programmes relevant to indigenous peoples is the inadequacy of human and financial resources.
13. UN-HABITAT wishes to pursue its efforts to strengthen existing partnerships and create new joint activities, in close collaboration with the UNPFII, the IASG and other partners, in order to promote the realisation of the right to adequate housing for all, and to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples in urban areas, towards sustainable urban development with culture and identity.

**D. Factors which facilitate the implementation of recommendations of the Permanent Forum, including those addressed specifically to UN-HABITAT**

14. UN-HABITAT wishes to acknowledge the continuous collaboration and generous support from the Government of Canada and its partners in facilitating the implementation of UN-HABITAT's programme and activities to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples in cities, in particular in promoting their right to adequate housing, land and security of tenure;
15. UN-HABITAT was able to strengthen existing partnership with the IASG, UN sister agencies and specifically the United Nations Environment Programme, and other partners such as the Global Land Tool Network, to develop and implement key activities of its work programme with regards to the implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum;
16. The United Nations Housing Rights Programme (UNHRP), jointly implemented by UN-HABITAT and OHCHR, the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE), and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) are other UN-HABITAT instruments directly contributing to address indigenous peoples' issues. They actively contribute to the much needed advocacy work, research and tool development to promote the realisation of indigenous peoples' right to adequate housing, land and security of tenure.

**E. Other significant information regarding recent policies, programmes, budgetary allocations or activities regarding indigenous issues within UN-HABITAT**

17. UN-HABITAT wishes to acknowledge the continuous collaboration and generous contribution from the Government of Canada and its partners in facilitating the implementation of UN-HABITAT programme and activities to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples in cities;
18. UN-HABITAT has several instruments, programmes, projects and activities that are relevant to indigenous peoples in relation to climate change and livelihoods issues. For example, UN-HABITAT is coordinating activities related to green buildings for affordable housing solutions, promoting indigenous building materials and traditional building knowledge.

**H. Name and contact information of the focal point on indigenous issues in UN-HABITAT:**

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**I. List of conferences and other meetings under UN-HABITAT regarding indigenous issues in 2010-2011**

- (i) Roundtable on ‘Urban Indigenous Peoples, Sustainable Urban Development with Culture and Identity’, which was held at the Fifth Session of the World Urban Forum, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 23 March 2010.
- (ii) Workshop to launch the Policy Guide to Secure Land and Property Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Cities, to be organised in 2011.

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<sup>i</sup> UN-HABITAT (2009), ‘Housing Indigenous Peoples in Cities: Policy Guide to Housing for Indigenous Peoples in Cities’

<sup>ii</sup> UN-HABITAT/ OHCHR (2010), ‘Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration: A Review of Policies, Programmes and Practices’, United Nations Housing Rights Programme, Report No. 8

<sup>iii</sup> UN-HABITAT (2011, to be published), ‘Policy Guide to Secure Land and Property Rights for Indigenous Peoples in Cities’, Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)