



McKENNA
MUN

UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES



**CLAREMONT
MCKENNA
COLLEGE
APRIL 20 - 21, 2024**

Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

My name is Mia Balonick (she/her), and I'm super excited to welcome you to McKennaMUN and the UNPFII! This is my first year on CMC's Model UN team, although I also competed in Model UN in high school. I'm studying international relations but I'm also interested in literature and environmental policy. Outside of the classroom you can find me crocheting, posting lengthy book reviews on my Goodreads, or working towards my college radio DJ certification.

This committee will highlight two important topics that uniquely impact indigenous communities: environmental justice and cultural preservation. Although global issues like climate change and ethnocide affect a variety of groups, this committee will examine how indigenous people have been disproportionately impacted and collaborate on policy solutions. Rather than acting as countries, delegates will be assigned an indigenous group to research and represent. In this way, I hope that not only will debate center around indigenous-initiated policies and perspectives, but also that each delegate can walk away with knowledge about an endangered indigenous culture. Though this committee will mainly feature Central and South American indigenous groups, discussion will not be limited to that region, and delegates are encouraged to apply their specialized policy knowledge to the broader global issue.

I can't wait to see what innovative solutions you come up with! Please feel free to contact me at mbalonick81@cmc.edu if you have any questions or concerns. Looking forward to seeing you all soon!

Topic Introduction

Mandate

The UNPFII’s mandate is to “deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.”¹ Its duties include raising awareness for, providing advice on, and researching information about indigenous issues. The Forum meets annually for 10 days to discuss the aforementioned six mandated topics while focusing on a specific theme. For instance, the 22nd UNPFII session emphasized the theme of “Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent.”² To fund the programs created through the UNPFII, the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues serves as a parallel financial body that ensures the implementation of UNPFII recommendations.

History

Founded in 2000 by the UN resolution 2000/22, the Forum serves as an advisory body under the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and was the first of three indigenous-specific UN bodies to be established. The UNPFII was created after efforts in the 1990s to acknowledge the impact of indigenous people and address struggles that they face, such

¹ United Nations. “Permanent Forum.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-%20202.html>.

² United Nations. “UNPFII Twenty-First Session: 25 April-6 May 2022 | United Nations for Indigenous Peoples.” www.un.org, 2022. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-twenty-first-session-25-april-6-may-2022.html>.

as the declaration of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1993, and the subsequent commencement of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 1994.³ Notable contributions of the UNPFII include the creation of the System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) to achieve the goals of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and numerous language-preservation initiatives such as an International Decade on Indigenous Languages.

³ United Nations. "Permanent Forum." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-%202.html>.

McKenna MUN XI Sensitivity Statement

Claremont McKenna College's McKenna MUN conference is committed to promoting inclusivity, respect, and diversity among its participants. We recognize that participants come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and we are dedicated to creating an environment that is welcoming and safe for all. We also strive to ensure that our conference is accessible to everyone regardless of ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality.

For these reasons, McKenna MUN has a conference-wide zero-tolerance policy for any forms of discrimination or bigotry, including but not limited to homophobia, sexism, racism, and xenophobia. We insist that all delegates adhere to our zero-tolerance policy, even when representing characters whose beliefs would not fall in line with that policy. If you have any questions about how you can represent the policies of your allocated position with integrity while maintaining our conference-wide commitment to inclusivity, please ask your Chair, who will be more than happy to help you navigate that challenge.

When navigating General Assembly, ECOSOC, and Crisis Committees, the following restrictions will be imposed:

1. In light of COVID-19, any attempts to use biological warfare is expressly prohibited. Arcs or policies that deny real world events or facts such as COVID-19, genocides, or exoduses are expressly prohibited.
2. Arcs or policies involving the exploitation or oppression of historically marginalized communities, the invocation of ethnic cleansing, or the use of human trafficking are strictly prohibited.
3. Anything else that is deemed inappropriate, insensitive, or offensive by the conference staff will not be a part of proceedings.

We appreciate your cooperation in maintaining a safe and respectful conference environment, and thank you for your commitment to upholding our policies and values. We welcome feedback regarding our efforts to maintain an inclusive environment at McKenna MUN XI at Advisor Feedback sessions.

Rules of Procedure for General Assembly

Scope

The rules of procedure outlined below are offered as a framework for both delegates and conference staff. These rules are not perfect, nor absolute. In the event of confusion or conflict of information in this guide, ultimate discretion is given to the dais for their respective committee.

Plagiarism

McKennaMUN XI has a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism of any kind. This includes plagiarism in position papers, working papers, and draft resolutions. McKennaMUN also has a strict policy against the prewriting of clauses. If it is discovered a delegate has prewritten clauses, they will be disqualified from awards.

Electronics

Electronic devices including laptops, cell phones, and tablets may not be used at any point during the course of committee. All working papers and draft resolutions must be written on paper, and will be typed up by the chairs once all papers and resolutions have been written. Electronics are not permitted during moderated or unmoderated caucuses, and should not be out during

committee sessions at any time. Please print any research or notes you may need during committee, and we will provide paper and pens to write the working papers and draft resolutions.

Decorum

Delegates and conference staff must present themselves with respect and decorum throughout the entirety of the conference. This includes appropriate dress, restraint from interrupting other delegates, and interacting in a courteous manner. Conference staff and Secretariat reserve the right to penalize or disqualify delegates who do not adhere to decorous manners.

Working Outside Committee

Delegates in all committees are *not* permitted to work outside committee. The writing of working papers and draft resolutions and meetings to make alliances and cooperate must all be conducted during committee time. This is to ensure that delegates are able to put in the same amount of time into committee, and that all delegates are able to take the time they need to take care for themselves outside of committee.

Sponsors and Signatories

Working papers and directives must be supported by a minimum number of sponsors and signatories to be specified by the dais of each committee in order to be accepted by the dais and introduced in committee.

Points:

- Point of Personal Privilege:
 - At any point, delegates may rise to a point of personal privilege to signal to the chair they have a personal concern
- Point of Order:
 - A delegate may rise to a point of order to correct an error in parliamentary procedure during the course of debate. A point of order may not interrupt a speaker unless it pertains to the speaker's right to speak. A point of order is not appealable.
- Point of Parliamentary Inquiry:
 - A point of parliamentary inquiry may be raised at any time the floor is open to points or motions. Delegates may rise to this point to ask a question about parliamentary procedure, and should never interrupt the speaker.

Motions:

- Motion to Open Debate
 - Requires a simple majority
- Motion to Set the Agenda
 - Triggers two speeches in favor and two speeches against, with 30 second speaking time
 - Requires a simple majority
- Motion to Open the General Speakers List
 - Requires a simple majority
 - Has a default speaking time of 30 seconds
- Motion to Enter an Unmoderated Caucus
 - Requires a simple majority
- Motion to Enter a Moderated Caucus

- Requires a simple majority to pass
- Motions must specify the total caucus time and the speaking time for each individual speaker
- Motion to Extend a Caucus
 - Requires a simple majority to pass
 - Must contain a specific time for extension, not to exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ of the original length of the caucus
 - Each caucus can be extended a maximum of one time
- Motion to Introduce Working Papers
 - Requires a simple majority
 - This will trigger Author's Panel, per the discretion of the dais
- Motion to Introduce Draft Resolutions/Directives
 - Requires a simple majority
 - This will trigger Author's Panel, per the discretion of the dais (for GA)
- Motion to Enter Voting Bloc
 - Requires a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote from committee
- Motion to Divide the Question
 - Requires a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote from committee
- Motion to Introduce Amendments

- Requires a simple majority
- Prompts the dais to introduce all entertained amendments that have been submitted
- All friendly amendments are automatically added to the draft resolution/directive in question
- All unfriendly amendments are debated and then delegates take a substantive vote on the clauses
- Motion to Suspend Debate
 - Requires a simple majority
- Motion to Adjourn Debate
 - Requires a simple majority

Yields During Formal Speeches

- Yield to Comments
 - A speaker may designate their remaining time to be used for other delegates of the dais selection to make comments on their speech. Delegates will be allotted the time left in the speech
- Yield to Questions

- The speaker may designate the time remaining in their speech to be used to answer questions from other delegates as selected by the dais. Question time is not counted in the speaker's time.
- Yield to Another Delegate
 - The speaker may designate the time remaining in their speech to be used by another delegate, as specified by the speaker
- Yield to the Chair
 - Speakers may at any time during their speech choose to yield the remaining time to the chair

Right of Reply

The right of reply allows delegates to respond to a specific statement made against their person via motion, and approved speech. The right of reply is not intended to allow delegates to respond directly to an offensive statement about their country. Rather, it is intended to be used to respond to insults against the delegates themselves. Petitions for right of reply are left entirely to the discretion of the chair.

General Precedence of All Motions

When more than one motion is presented, they are voted on in order from most to least disruptive. That order is:

1. Right of Reply
2. Extensions (longest extension first)
3. Unmoderated Caucus (longest first)
4. Round Robin (longest speaking time first)
5. Moderated Caucus (longest first, then by most number of speakers)

In voting procedure, motions have the following precedence:

1. Reordering of the Draft Resolutions
2. Voting by Acclamation
3. Division of the Question
4. Voting by Roll Call

Flow of Debate

1. Roll Call
 - a. At the beginning of every committee session, the dais will take the roll of the delegates
 - b. Delegates may respond with “present” or “present in voting”

- c. If a delegate indicates they are “present in voting” they may not abstain from any substantive vote
2. Debate is opened
 - a. A delegate may motion to open or resume debate once roll call has been taken
 - b. This must be passed by a simple majority of the committee
3. The General Speakers’ List is Opened
 - a. A delegate may motion to open the speakers’ list once debate has been opened
 - b. The motion must be passed by a simple majority of the committee
 - c. The delegate who made the motion is offered the opportunity to be the first speaker on the speakers’ list
 - d. The speakers’ list has a default time of 1 minute, unless otherwise stipulated in the motion that is passed
4. The agenda is set
 - a. A delegate may motion to set the agenda to one of the topics listed in the background guide
 - b. If there is only one topic in the background and committee materials, the agenda is automatically set to that topic
5. Moderated Caucus

- a. A motion to enter a moderated caucus may be made by any delegate whenever motions are entertained, debate is open, and the committee is not in voting bloc
 - b. If multiple motions are presented, motions will be voted on by most to least disruptive. This applies to moderated and unmoderated caucuses.
 - c. A motion for a moderated caucus must be passed by a simple majority
 - d. The delegate who made the motion is offered the opportunity to speak first or last in the caucus
 - e. The motion to enter a moderated caucus must specify a total time for the caucus, a maximum speaking time for each speaker, and a specific topic of discussion
 - f. The total time for the caucus must be divisible by the specified speaking time
 - g. A motion to extend the moderated caucus may only be made once the caucus has elapsed, have to specify a time for the extension that does not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ of the original time, and passes by a simple majority
6. Unmoderated caucus
- a. A motion to enter an unmoderated caucus may be made by any delegate whenever motions are entertained, debate is open, and the committee is not in voting bloc
 - b. A motion for an unmoderated caucus must pass by a simple majority
 - c. The motion to enter an unmoderated caucus must contain a total time for the caucus

- d. A motion to extend the unmoderated caucus may be made once the caucus has elapsed, must specify a time that does not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ of the original time, and must pass by simple majority
7. Author's Panel
- a. A motion to introduce working papers and draft resolutions may be made by any delegate once all working papers have been accepted by the dais and motions are being entertained
 - b. Papers will be presented in the order of submission to the dais unless otherwise specified by the motion that is passed
 - c. An Author's Panel for working papers will be left to the discretion of the dais based on the time left in the conference, but Author's Panel on draft resolutions are mandatory
 - d. A motion to introduce working papers and draft resolutions must pass by a simple majority
 - e. Author's Panel will consist of an allotted amount of sponsors to present their paper and resolution to the committee, followed by an allotted amount of time for committee to ask questions, to which sponsors will answer
 - f. The duration of presentations and Q&A sessions are determined by the discretion of the dais

- g. The time delegates take to ask questions will not be counted towards the timing of the Q&A
 - h. The number of representatives from each bloc allowed to present and answer questions are determined by the discretion of the dais
8. Voting bloc
- a. A motion to enter voting bloc may be made by any delegate after draft resolutions or directives have been formally accepted by the dais and motions are being entertained
 - b. A motion to enter voting bloc must be pass by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of committee
 - c. In crisis committees, a motion to introduce directives is often combined with a motion to enter the voting bloc. Such a motion should specify the procedure for the combined introduction and voting bloc, and such a motion constitutes a suspension of the rules which must pass by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of committee
 - d. The default speakers for/against each directive is two for, two against with 30 second speaking time
 - e. The delegate who makes the motion to enter voting bloc may specify a non-default order or for/against structure in their motion

- f. No person other than the authorized conference staff may pass notes, talk to other people in the room, enter the room, or leave the room during voting bloc unless directed to do so by a member of the Secretariat
- g. A delegate may motion to leave voting bloc, or the chair may move out of voting bloc at their discretion after all draft resolutions/directives have been voted on

9. Dividing the Question

- a. A motion to divide the question may be made at any point during voting bloc before the draft resolution/directive in question has been voted on
- b. Divided the question is the process by which one or more clauses of a draft resolution/directive may be voted on separately from the body of the draft resolution/directive
- c. The motion first must pass by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority, and is not a substantive vote
- d. If the vote passes by a simple majority to divide the question, that clause will be substantively voted on
- e. Preambulatory clauses may not be altered by division of the question
- f. Multiple motions on specific divisions may be accepted by the dais

10. Amending a draft resolution/directive

- a. At any point when the floor is open after a draft resolution/directive has been introduced and before it has been voted on, a delegate may make a motion to introduce an amendment to the draft resolution/directive
- b. Time permitting, the amendment is then read out by the dais
- c. If the amendment in question has been submitted to and entertained by the dais, a procedural vote on the motion to introduce the amendment takes place
- d. All amendments must garner a sponsor threshold determined by the dais
- e. An amendment with the support of all sponsors of the draft is a “friendly” amendment, and all other amendments are considered unfriendly and require a vote of $\frac{2}{3}$ to pass
- f. For unfriendly amendments, for/against speeches are triggered in which two speakers speak for and against, for a default speaking time of 30 seconds

11. Suspend debate

- a. This motion may only be entertained at the end of a committee session
- b. Passes by a simple majority of committee

12. Adjourn debate

- a. This motion may only be entertained at the end of the conference
- b. Passes by a simple majority of committee

Voting

- Procedural Voting
 - All votes on motions are procedural unless otherwise stated
 - All delegates present must vote on procedural matters
- Substantive Voting
 - Voting on draft resolutions, directives, specific divisions of the question, and amendments is considered substantive
 - All delegates must indicate a yes vote, no vote, or abstention during substantive voting
 - The dais may ask for a re-vote if the total number of votes is less than the total number of delegates present
 - Delegates who indicated they were “present and voting” at the beginning of the session must vote “yes” or “no”
- Voting by Acclamation
 - During a substantive vote with for/against speakers, the floor may be eligible to pass by acclamation
 - In such a case, the dais must remind the committee that if no delegate speaks against the matter, it will automatically pass by acclamation

- The dais must ask the committee once more, and if no delegate speaks against, it is automatically passed
- A delegate may motion to pass any matter that calls for a substantive vote by acclamation
- Roll Call Voting
 - Immediately preceding a substantive vote, a delegate may motion for a roll call vote
 - If entertained by the dais, a roll call vote will commence in which each delegate's allocation will be called out by the dais and they must either say yes, no, abstain, yes with right, or no with rights
 - All those who vote "with rights" indicate they wish to explain why they voted the way they did. The dais determines if they have the right to speak, and for how long

Any questions? Clarifications? Totally confused?

Please route all questions to zkhera58@students.claremontmckenna.edu, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Topic A: Environmental Justice

What is Environmental Justice?

Defined by the Environmental Protection Agency, environmental justice is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”⁴ In order to achieve environmental justice, international and national governing bodies must pass policies that ensure the “same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards.”⁵ Topic A of the UNPFII requires delegates to consider the factors preventing the “same degree of protection,” specifically the challenges faced by indigenous people, in order to mitigate environmental inequity.

Historical Background

Prior to European colonization, indigenous groups did not majorly impact the environment. Because most indigenous communities have a spiritual connection to nature and needed to maintain their land for survival, the natural environment wasn't largely altered, a fact of history made clear by the recent evidence that indigenous people did not originally contribute to deforestation.⁶ For instance, researchers found that ancient indigenous populations in North

⁴ EPA. “Environmental Justice.” US EPA, November 3, 2014.

<https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice#:~:text=Environmental%20justice%20is%20the%20fair>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brhel, John. “Native Americans Did Not Make Large-Scale Changes to Environment prior to European Contact - Binghamton News.” News - Binghamton University, January 17, 2020.

<https://www.binghamton.edu/news/story/2238/native-americans-did-not-make-large-scale-changes-to-environment-prior-to-european-contact>



SEVEN CIRCLES

America barely modified their environment even after thousands of years of settlement: ““Even though we know that Native Americans were in New England for at least 14,000 years with, at certain times in history, fairly large population densities, the ecological signal was essentially invisible...If one did not know there had been humans on the landscape, it would be almost impossible to detect them on a regional scale. After the arrival of Europeans, large-scale cutting and burning of forests is very clear in the ecological record.””⁷ Although each indigenous community holds unique beliefs and practices, a few universal themes inform their reciprocal, protective relationship with nature. For example, many indigenous spiritual practices stem from a feeling of deep connection with nature, which discourages the unsustainable exploitation of the environment. Another recurring belief is the Seventh Generation Principle. Though based in

⁷ Brhel, John. “Native Americans Did Not Make Large-Scale Changes to Environment prior to European Contact - Binghamton News.” News - Binghamton University, January 17, 2020. <https://www.binghamton.edu/news/story/2238/native-americans-did-not-make-large-scale-changes-to-environment-prior-to-european-contact>.

Haudenosaunee philosophy, this idea reverberated throughout other indigenous cultures and can be found in communities ranging from North American located-groups to even those living in the Congo. The Seventh Generation Principle urges people to ensure that their decisions result in a sustainable future for at least seven generations, relating the protection and stewardship of the Earth to personal, familial, and community wellbeing.⁸

Overall, indigenous communities had already incorporated sustainability into their cultural practices for tens of thousands of years. But beginning in the late 1400s, the age of discovery launched a wave of colonization that uprooted indigenous people from their lands, traditions, and, ultimately, their sustainable actions. Fueled by the immense opportunity for profit and resource extraction, colonizers exploited the environments that indigenous people had lived in and preserved. Though many factors contributed to an unsustainable relationship with nature, the introduction of the linear economy provides a clear example of how European capitalistic goals conflicted with sustainable indigenous practices. Compared to the introduction of European linear economies that produced unchecked material production and consumption, Indigenous societies often revolved around circular economies that produced very little waste, partially because such groups relied on subsistence living and also due to ancient recycling and reuse practices.⁹ Ultimately, it only took a few hundred years of development and industrialization to

⁸ Joseph, Bob. "What Is the Seventh Generation Principle?" Ictinc.ca, 2018.

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/seventh-generation-principle>

Graph: Seven Circles. "Seven Circles." Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://sevencircles.co.uk/>.

⁹ Acciona. "This Is How Indigenous Peoples Embody Sustainable Development." www.activesustainability.com, n.d.

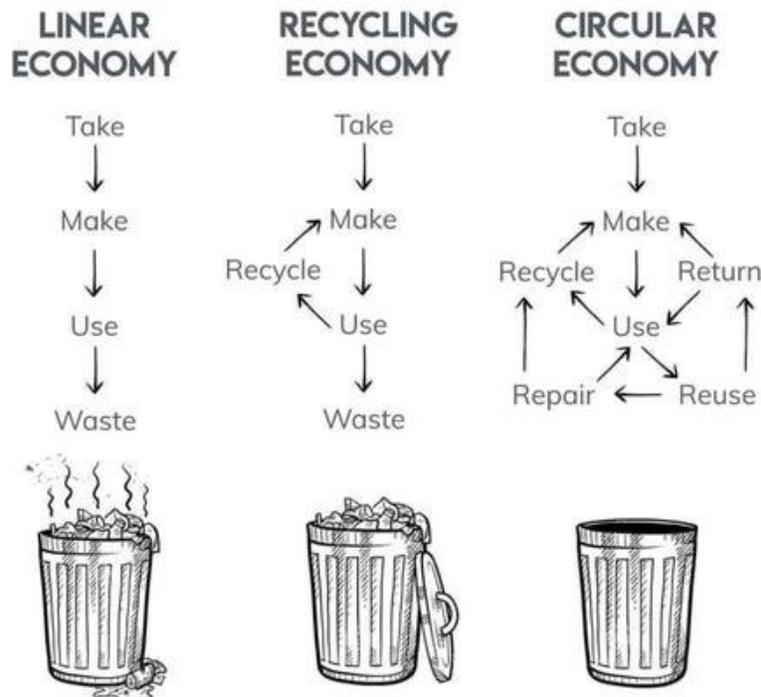
unravel the reciprocal relationship between nature and humans that indigenous people had fostered over thousands of years.

Due to their traditional ties to nature and disproportionate suffering of environmental issues, indigenous people have majorly contributed to movements that call for natural preservation and protection. A key area of indigenous resistance is protest against detrimental government policies. One of the most famous examples of indigenous-led opposition is the Cochabamba Water War. In 1999, the Bolivian government contracted a group of private water companies to facilitate water access in majority-indigenous city Cochabamba and the surrounding area. However, the privatization of water led to increased rates and decreased access, initiating citizen protest against the injustice. When the government responded by deploying soldiers and firing on innocent Bolivians, the people of Cochabamba counterattacked and the Cochabamba Water War began. After six months of conflict, the Cochabamba forces won, and the Bolivian government rescinded the law.¹⁰ A more recent instance can be found in Canada, where the Wet'suwet'en people sued the Canadian government in 2020 for failing to cut carbon emissions.¹¹

https://www.activesustainability.com/sustainable-development/indigenous-peoples-sustainable-development/?_adin=02021864894.

¹⁰ Hines, Sarah. "How Bolivians Fought for — and Won — Water Access for All." UC Press Blog, March 22, 2023. <https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/58831/how-bolivians-fought-for-and-won-water-access-for-all/>.

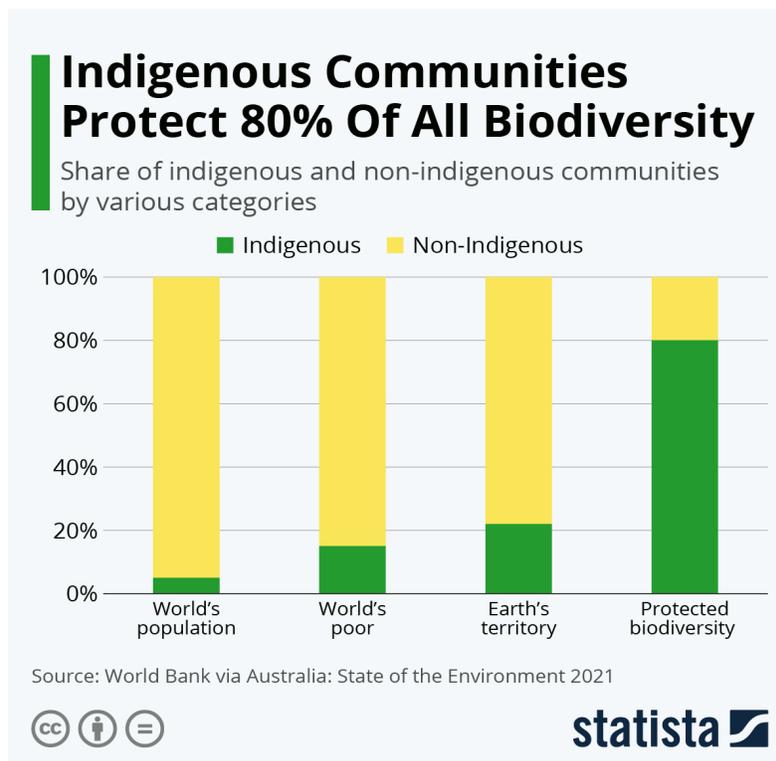
¹¹ UN Environment Programme. "As Climate Crisis Alters Their Lands, Indigenous Peoples Turn to the Courts." UNEP, August 8, 2023. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/climate-crisis-alters-their-lands-indigenous-peoples-turn-courts>.



Graph: Lorenz, Jo . “Circular Economy vs. Linear Economy.” The R Collective, July 17, 2019.

<https://thercollective.com/blogs/r-stories/circular-economy-vs-linear-economy>.

But beyond organized resistance, indigenous stewardship of the environment directly protects and sustains nature and the resources within it. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs explains the real impact that indigenous groups have on a thriving environment: “Although they account for only around 5 percent of the world’s population, they effectively manage an estimated 20-25 per cent of the Earth’s land surface. This land coincides with areas that hold 80 per cent of the planet’s biodiversity and about 40 per cent of all terrestrial



Graph: Fleck, Anna. “Infographic: Indigenous Communities Protect 80% of All Biodiversity.” Statista Infographics, July 19, 2022. <https://www.statista.com/chart/27805/indigenous-communities-protect-biodiversity/>.

protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes.”¹² Yet even though indigenous people remain essential to biodiversity and environmental function, they disproportionately suffer the harms of environment-related issues.

¹² UN Environment Programme. “As Climate Crisis Alters Their Lands, Indigenous Peoples Turn to the Courts.” UNEP, August 8, 2023. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/climate-crisis-alters-their-lands-indigenous-peoples-turn-courts>.

Indigenous Environmental Issues

Global issues like climate change, unsustainable resource extraction, and pollution impact everyone. However, these issues disproportionately impact indigenous groups due to traditional connections to the natural environment, institutional barriers, and marginalization. The following environmental problems either uniquely inhibit indigenous people from living and thriving in their communities, or impede their ability to attain environmental justice.

I. Loss of Land & Climate Migration

Traditionally and historically, indigenous groups have maintained a special relationship with nature through their reliance on the environment for spiritual practices and sustenance: the natural world is integral to only their personal survival, but also the survival of their cultures. Unfortunately, forced climate migration and land loss resulting from climate change destroy the land on which indigenous groups foster their livelihood, community, and traditions. There are three major causes of this land degradation and subsequent resettlement.

A. Climate disasters

The rise of extreme weather events closely correlates with the increase in global temperature. Land loss from sea level rise, flooding, wildfires, and other natural disasters disproportionately impacts indigenous communities that are more likely to live in rural areas

than non-indigenous groups (60% of indigenous people live rurally as compared to 27% of non-indigenous people).¹³ With less connection to the vast amount of resources and infrastructure typically found in more developed locations, entire indigenous communities can be erased from a deadly wildfire or a severe flood. Island communities. For example, in Canada, extreme wildfires “burned more than 47,000 square miles of forest, an area the size of New York State, and... displaced more than 25,000 Indigenous residents from British Columbia to Nova Scotia.”¹⁴ Further, sea level rise threatens the existence of islander indigenous groups, such as the Guna people from Panama and the people native to the Torres Strait in Australia. Indigenous communities are more vulnerable to climate disasters because they heavily rely on the natural environment for food, shelter, and traditional practices, so the extreme destruction of their surrounding habitat can force them to migrate elsewhere, often leaving sacred places and practices behind as well as the established security of a home.

B. The expansion of agricultural technology

The second main cause of land loss and forced migration is the propagation of new agricultural technology that exacerbates environmental degradation. When the direct or surrounding land that indigenous people live on is chemically or physically damaged to the point

¹³ OECD. Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada. OECD Rural Policy Reviews. OECD, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1787/fa0f60c6-en>.

¹⁴ McDonald, Brent, Matt Joyce, and Ben Laffin. “Canada Is Ravaged by Fire. No One Has Paid More Dearly than Indigenous People.” The New York Times, July 29, 2023, sec. World. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/29/world/canada/canada-wildfires-indigenous-communities.html#:~:text=Since%20May%2C%20hundreds%20of%20wildfires>.

of desertification, communities must uproot to find land that will be able to sustain them. For instance, chemical fertilizers and pesticides result in agricultural runoff that can pollute streams and rivers that indigenous groups may fish or gather water from. Further, the promised efficiency of novel technologies incentivizes the expansion of agricultural projects that encroach on indigenous land, transforming acres originally used for cultural practices or sustenance farming into mass production cash crop farms. And with institutional barriers such as marginalization and lack of access to land rights, indigenous people often can't fight back against the corporations that effectively exploit their land.

C. Industrial development

Similar to the expansion of agricultural production, other forms of industrial development such as dams, mining activities, and tourism have displaced “thousands” of indigenous families.¹⁵

D. The impact on mental health

Beyond the physical effects of forced relocation, indigenous climate migrants also face severe mental health implications. Leaving an ancestral and spiritual home, especially one that has been completely eradicated due to a climate disaster, can exacerbate the separation between indigenous people and their traditional cultures while also compounding the trauma of colonization and cultural loss. The United States Environmental Protection Agency explains the

¹⁵ United Nations. “Environment | United Nations for Indigenous Peoples.” Un.org, 2018. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/environment.html>.

link between indigenous and environmental wellbeing, stating “In many Indigenous communities, relationships among people, wildlife, and the natural environment are important to mental and spiritual health. A changing climate is disrupting these connections and threatening social networks and knowledge-sharing. This can increase the risk of mental health impacts.”¹⁶

II. Natural Resources

Due to their dependence upon and close relationship with the natural world, indigenous people are disproportionately vulnerable to the loss of natural resources, specifically water and food.¹⁷

A. Water

The rise of both sea level and temperature threatens the existence of islander indigenous communities that rely on either the ocean or freshwater nearby. Increased water temperatures can lead to algal blooms that cause illness, while rising sea levels can contribute to the saltwater contamination of freshwater that’s necessary for potable purposes. Even on the other side of the world, the thaw of permafrost in the Arctic can destabilize water infrastructure and lead to runoff. Another compounding factor is the lack of water treatment infrastructure in remote areas,

¹⁶ US EPA, OAR. “Climate Change and the Health of Indigenous Populations.” [www.epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-indigenous-populations#:~:text=In%20many%20Indigenous%20communities%2C%20relationships), March 21, 2022. <https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-indigenous-populations#:~:text=In%20many%20Indigenous%20communities%2C%20relationships>.

¹⁷ UNEP. “Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples’ Sustainability | DISD.” [www.un.org](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2021/04/indigenous-peoples-sustainability/#:~:text=Indigenous%20peoples%20are%20stewards%20of), August 23, 2023. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2021/04/indigenous-peoples-sustainability/#:~:text=Indigenous%20peoples%20are%20stewards%20of>.

which already limits access to sanitized water. Finally, the persistence of drought can threaten indigenous livelihoods and even force communities to migrate in search of more abundant water.

B. Food

Though indigenous communities already face higher rates of food insecurity than non-indigenous groups, climate change has also hindered the success of cultivating crops and gathering food in traditional ways. For indigenous groups on the coast, ocean acidification (caused by increased carbon dioxide content in the seas) kills off marine populations that they rely on for sustenance, while increased ocean temperatures force fish to change their migration patterns in order to seek colder water. Another example of climate change impacting indigenous food sources is in Canada. According to Human Rights Watch, “As the climate warms, there are fewer animals migrating and traditional plants growing on First Nations’ traditional territories. Unpredictable weather hampers the ability of hunters, who rely on traditional knowledge, to safely navigate potentially treacherous terrain to access hunting grounds. And as transport options like winter roads—constructed from snow and ice—become less reliable in warming winters, communities increasingly rely on more expensive air transport to deliver food, driving up the cost of purchased foods.”¹⁸ And not only is the inability to traditionally hunt and gather food detrimental to the survival of indigenous culture, but the lack of consistent nutrition also leads to a variety of health issues. In the US alone, “about one in four Native Americans

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch. “My Fear Is Losing Everything.” Human Rights Watch, October 21, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/21/my-fear-losing-everything/climate-crisis-and-first-nations-right-food-canada>

experience food insecurity, compared to 1 in 9 Americans overall, and 1 in 12 white/non-hispanic individuals.”¹⁹

III. Air Pollution

Due to lack of access to medical treatment, industrial expansion, and environmental reliance, indigenous groups are more likely to suffer from exposure to air pollution than their non-indigenous counterparts. Although the most at-risk indigenous communities live in remote natural areas, natural resource extraction corporations and projects seek these environments out in order to gain from the untouched land. However, this development of industrial technologies that disrupt the environment and emit tons (literally!) of carbon dioxide threaten the health of indigenous people that already lack access to affordable medical care. Compounded with the increase in wildfires, air pollution and lung health has become a serious issue in indigenous communities. For instance, in the Amazon Basin, indigenous people are twice as likely to die prematurely from smoke exposure due to wildfires than any other group in South America.²⁰ Another instance is in the Aamjiwnaang community near Ontario, Canada, where air pollution due to industrial development has resulted in immense health concerns. The National Library of Medicine finds that “About 40% of Aamjiwnaang residents require use of an inhaler, and 17% of

¹⁹ Move for Hunger. “How Hunger Affects Native American Communities | Move for Hunger.” moveforhunger.org, 2023. <https://moveforhunger.org/native-americans-food-insecure>.

²⁰ Boston University. “Indigenous People in South America Are Twice as Likely to Die from Wildfires than Broader Population.” www.bu.edu, June 15, 2023. <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2023/indigenous-people-in-south-america-are-twice-as-likely-to-die-from-wildfires/>.

adults and 22% of children are reported to have asthma.”²¹ Even non active pollutant sites, such as mines or waste incinerators continue to damage the surrounding area that indigenous groups inhabit. Researchers from McGill University estimated that “[greater than]600000 Native Americans in the Western United States live within 10 km from an abandoned mine, having an increased likelihood of elevated exposures to several pollutants.”²²

IV. Institutional Barriers

Besides bearing a disproportionate impact of environmental issues, indigenous people also face immense institutional and systemic barriers to seeking environmental protection, compensation, and justice. These barriers manifest in three main areas.

A. Land Rights

Although the right to land is critical to indigenous self determination and cultural prosperity, the actual attainment and respect of those rights proves a universally challenging process. Most countries don’t even recognize indigenous peoples’ land rights, and those that do often lose land right legal filings in bureaucratic inefficiencies and government debate. Further, states often lease out indigenous peoples’ land without their consent in order to serve

²¹ Hoover, Elizabeth, Katsi Cook, Ron Plain, Kathy Sanchez, Vi Waghiyi, Pamela Miller, Renee Dufault, Caitlin Sislin, and David O. Carpenter. “Indigenous Peoples of North America: Environmental Exposures and Reproductive Justice.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 120, no. 12 (December 2012): 1645–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1205422>.

²² Mazerolle, Frederique. “Indigenous Peoples around the Globe Are Disproportionately Affected by Pollution.” Newsroom, May 19, 2020.
<https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/indigenous-peoples-around-globe-are-disproportionately-affected-pollution-322211>.

resource-exploitative companies.²³ And since most indigenous communities live in remote or rural areas, access to any legal representation, not even specific land rights advocacy experts, is hard to come by.

B. Implementation gap

Even when land rights or other entitlement laws have been recognized, an “implementation gap” exists: policies created with the intent of protecting indigenous land rights are not properly followed or enforced. Although legal delays can contribute to a lack of enforcement, it’s critical that policies are properly implemented in order to yield substantial effect. Another issue is the lack of indigenous consultation on such legal efforts. When the people affected are not included in the policy process, critical details are overlooked, and the problem isn’t truly solved.

C. The problem with conservation

Conservation, or the protection and maintenance of natural resources, has played an important role in catalyzing environmental protection. From saving nearly 50 animal species

²³ United Nations. “Environment | United Nations for Indigenous Peoples.” Un.org, 2018. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/environment.html>.

from extinction and leading to the creation of the US national parks, the act of conservation carries a positive reputation in environmentalist circles.²⁴ However, the nuances of conservation have led to an ideological conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, with the former facing mass displacement due to conservation projects. Zhaawnong Webb, an indigenous content creator and member of the Crane Clan of the Anishinabe Tribe of Canada, explains the conservation issue as a conflict of the human's proper place in nature: "Westernized thinking separates human beings and the natural world. The Anishinaabe on the other hand, see the natural world as a living breathing entity just like us. We believe there's a relationship to be had with those beings."²⁵ Most conservation projects revolve around the restriction of access to a certain part of the environment; for example, the establishment of national parks encloses a segment of natural land to remain untouched by humans. However, in order to create some of the national parks in the United States, indigenous groups were forcibly removed from their home located in the conservation area.²⁶ Thus, a tension exists between the conservation movement and indigenous self-determination, an issue that has persisted into the present.

²⁴ Nuwer, Rachel. "Extinction Is Not Inevitable. These Species Were Saved." The New York Times, September 12, 2020, sec. Science. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/12/science/extinction-species-conservation.html#:~:text=Conservation%20efforts%20have%20saved%20up>.

²⁵ Luthy, Quinn. "Conservation and the Displacement of Indigenous People." Earth.org, March 8, 2023. <https://earth.org/conservation-indigenous-people/#:~:text=In%20most%20cases%2C%20these%20conservation>.

²⁶ National Parks Conservation Association. "National Parks Are Native Lands." National Parks Conservation Association, 2020. <https://www.npca.org/case-studies/national-parks-are-native-lands#:~:text=In%20some%20cases%2C%20Tribes%20were>.

Regional Analysis

The following section exists to explain the significance of certain regions that will be represented in the UNPFII. This isn't an effort to exclude continents in favor of others, but rather to add a special addendum to a few regions for a specific reason.

I. Central and South America

A. The environmental and indigenous diversity of this region makes it a particularly interesting place to examine the intersection of environmental issues, indigenous rights, and the role of government policy in mitigating indigenous-related environmental problems. Thus, a little over half of the delegates in this committee will represent indigenous groups from Central or South America. However, such groups face vastly different environmental issues depending on location and history. For instance, the Yanomami people from Brazil who must adapt to deforestation will contribute different perspectives and policies than the Quechua people from the Andes who suffer the impacts of glacial melt. Meanwhile, indigenous groups in Central America may be more vulnerable to drought depending on location. Delegates from the Central and South American regions should be careful to analyze their indigenous group's goals from a more narrow lens in order to specialize on a few specific environmental issues.

II. Islander indigenous groups

A. Delegates representing indigenous groups that are located near or heavily rely on the ocean should pay extra attention to issues that revolve around water, i.e. saltwater contamination, ocean acidification, and general sea level rise.

III. Canada

A. Similar to Central and South America, Canadian indigenous groups and environmental issues prove especially intriguing due to ecosystem diversity and indigenous-government relations.

Questions to Consider

Here are a few questions to help guide delegate research:

- What technologies or processes does your indigenous group use to preserve the environment? Are there ancient practices that could be adapted into modern methods to battle climate change or environmental degradation?
- How do the environmental issues that your indigenous group face impact the physical and mental health of community members? How can policy solutions address both the root cause and lasting impacts of such issues?
- How can regional governments collaborate with indigenous people and uplift their voices in order to achieve environmental justice?
- Can the conflict between indigenous environmental values and material use of the land be reconciled? How can policy be utilized to encourage sustainable resource use?

Further Reading

Any of the footnotes hyperlinked on this document contain extra information that could not be provided on the background guide for purposes of clarity and brevity. However, the websites that published the articles included will prove helpful in the research process. Here are a few extra resources to help along the way:

- First and foremost, I would encourage all delegates to search for any previous UNPFII themes that align with this issue. The UNPFII website is linked [here](#), but a quick google search should also work.
- [National Park Service- Indigenous Knowledge](#)
- [University of Denver- Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America](#)
- [UN- Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' Sustainability](#)
- [Braiding Sweetgrass](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer: If you are really interested in the nexus of eco-consciousness and indigenous practices, this book is on my to-be-read list and is highly rated. This is by no means a requirement for this committee, just an extra resource if you enjoy learning about this topic.

Topic B: Cultural Preservation

Introduction

Although indigenous people represent a racial minority, their communities constitute most of the world's cultural diversity. The United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs finds that “[T]here are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples occupying 20 per cent of the earth's territory [and] representing as many as 5,000 different indigenous cultures.”²⁷ However, many indigenous communities face the threat of cultural extinction as the legacy of colonialism continues to impact indigenous people today. In order to preserve the surviving rich and diverse indigenous cultures around the world, delegates should prepare to discuss policy that addresses both the root causes and immediate impacts of ethnocide.²⁸

The Impacts of Colonization on Indigenous Culture:

European colonization of North America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Australia destroyed physical and cultural aspects of indigenous society. While Topic A explored the impact of both

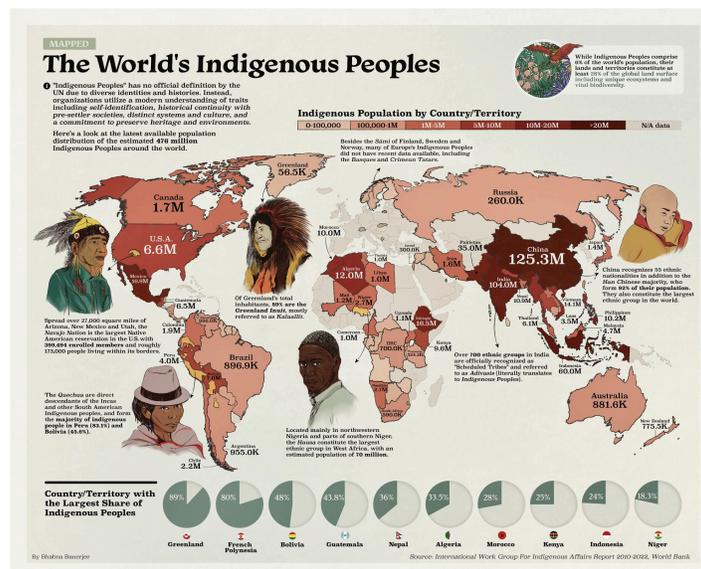
²⁷ United Nations. “Environment | United Nations for Indigenous Peoples.” Un.org, 2018. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/environment.html>.

²⁸ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “ethnocide” refers to the “deliberate and systematic destruction of the culture of an ethnic group, especially an ethnic minority.”
Source for graph: The World's Indigenous People: Banerjee, Bhabna. “Mapped: The World's Indigenous Peoples.” Visual Capitalist, March 18, 2023. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cp/mapped-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples/>.

past and present forced displacement on the wellbeing of indigenous communities, Topic B will focus more deeply on the social and political causes behind cultural erasure.

I. Assimilation

A critical social component of colonization was the imposition of European cultural values, religious practices, and languages on the indigenous communities that the Europeans encountered.²⁹ The change from one culture to another was drastic, partly because the transition was forced and partly because the values of European society and the values of indigenous society greatly differed from each other. For example (and as addressed in Topic A), indigenous communities and Renaissance-era Europeans held near opposite beliefs on the proper



²⁹ Wilson, Kory. "Colonization." Opentextbc.ca. BCcampus, September 5, 2018. <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/chapter/43/>.

relationship between humans and nature. Tragically, the colonizers forewent the prospect of peaceful coexistence and forced indigenous groups to assimilate to European culture.

Assimilation, or the process by which a minority population is absorbed into a prevailing dominant culture, proved especially destructive as colonial governments enforced assimilation policies that coerced indigenous peoples into abandoning their traditional languages, customs, and values in order to “become civilized” like Europeans. One of the most notorious examples of forced assimilation is the Canadian residential school system that systematically abused indigenous children. Operating from the 1880s until the last school shut down in 1998, these government-funded residential schools were created with the purpose of “eliminating all aspects of Indigenous culture.”³⁰ Indigenous children were separated from their families, forced to follow strict European dress and custom codes, and received harsh punishment if they attempted to speak in their native tongue. Though shocking and abhorrent, this seemingly extreme example of a government-backed assimilation program is not an isolated historical event, and nearly every indigenous community has suffered some degree of forced assimilation that aimed to destroy indigenous culture.

II. Erasure of traditional knowledge

Another element of colonized cultural elimination is the erasure of traditional indigenous knowledge. Although some efforts at knowledge erasure were formerly administered like the

³⁰ Hanson, Erin. “The Residential School System.” indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca, 2009. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/#:~:text=The%20residential%20school%20system%20officially.

residential schools, others stemmed from unofficial imposition. For instance, many landmarks, mountain ranges, and bodies of water already had indigenous names by the time that colonization began. However, colonizers disregarded these names and replaced them with their own, erasing a key part of indigenous history and knowledge.

III. Theft of cultural items

Cultural items— art, tools, and sacred objects— preserve the rich history of indigenous tradition in the face of colonialist destruction. However, many indigenous cultural items have been stolen from the communities that value them by government agencies or art collectors that aim to preserve the object in a federal building or put it on display in a museum. Not all indigenous cultural artifacts are displayed with ill-intent; often, a federal government or renowned museum wants to either ensure the preservation of an object or feature it to educate the general public on indigenous ways of life. The issue stems when cultural items are stolen from indigenous communities and used without their consent. Even with cultural objects that haven't been in indigenous possession for hundreds of years, it's critical to formally return these important items to the communities that originally owned and culturally value them.³¹ But beyond the issues associated with displaying cultural items, the act of preserving or making duplicates of certain indigenous objects has raised controversies in recent years. When a non-indigenous person or agency creates a copy of a spiritual symbol or records a traditional

³¹ Office, U. S. Government Accountability. "Efforts to Protect and Repatriate Native American Cultural Items and Human Remains." www.gao.gov, November 1, 2022.
<https://www.gao.gov/blog/efforts-protect-and-repatriate-native-american-cultural-items-and-human-remains>.

song, they raise the possibility of future misuse without the consent of its indigenous original creators.³² Thus, the concept of intellectual property also comes into play when analyzing this complex issue.

Aspects of Cultural Preservation:

I. Language

The revitalization of indigenous languages may represent the most significant challenge in maintaining indigenous cultures. Though essential to the preservation of important cultural values, traditions, and practices, indigenous languages globally face endangerment or extinction. According to UNESCO, “There are over 7,000 languages spoken globally, of which nearly 6,700 are indigenous languages: 40% of them are at risk of disappearing at an alarming rate.”³³ In fact, Harvard University finds that “Every two weeks, an Indigenous language dies.”³⁴ The extinction of indigenous languages, especially from small communities, may seem like an unfortunate but expected event: when the number of people who know the language has dwindled to an extreme low, most people expect and accept that the language accompanying and informing their culture will die as well. However, the true catastrophe and tragedy of indigenous language death extends far beyond an isolated ripple; losing a language sends a seismic shock through the diverse sea of

³² Vézina, Brigitte. “Traditional Cultures, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Institutions.” www.wipo.int, April 2010. https://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2010/02/article_0009.html.

³³ UNESCO. “Request Rejected.” www.unesco.org, May 21, 2021. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-can-latin-american-and-caribbean-indigenous-languages-be-preserved>.

³⁴ Toth, Katalina. “The Death and Revival of Indigenous Languages.” Harvard International Review, January 19, 2022. <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-death-and-revival-of-indigenous-languages/>.

indigenous culture, endangering the existence of traditions and values. Because indigenous languages evolved around concepts and beliefs central to indigenous ways of life, identity is interwoven within the words that constitute the languages. Studying an indigenous language provides historical and cultural context for the community by illustrating the particular worldview that contributed to the language's creation. For instance, certain indigenous words capture the essence of the indigenous connection to nature. In the Māori language, words for both natural and human activity are used interchangeably, such as the phrase “Ko wai au” which means both “who am I” and “I am water.” Another example is the word for land – “whenua” – which doubles as the word for placenta, which illustrates the extent to which Māori people find a sense of origin and home from the environment.³⁵ Ultimately, maintaining indigenous languages plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity by conveying values and beliefs.

Unfortunately, many indigenous languages are at risk of becoming endangered or dying out altogether. Though assimilation has been previously discussed as a contributing factor to language erasure, other issues such as educational trade offs also impact the status of indigenous languages. Many indigenous peoples, especially those located in more remote or rural parts of the world, must leave their communities in order to access Western higher education opportunities that may improve their financial status, allow them to make an impact in less accessible policy circles, or allow them to pursue a special academic interest. Although the

³⁵ IUCN. “People and Nature Blur in the World’s Indigenous Languages.” HuffPost, November 9, 2016. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/people-and-nature-blur-in_b_12881508.

pursuit of higher education is not inherently detrimental, the flight of indigenous youth from their original communities can deteriorate the use of their inherited language in two main ways. First, leaving a community that speaks an uncommon and largely unknown language decreases the chances of using that language in day to day life and thus carrying on the tradition of speaking it. But second, because there's little indigenous representation in higher education due to generational and institutional barriers, prestigious institutions will require a near native fluency level of the non-indigenous language that is most dominant in the specific region, and nearly no classes (except in special programs) will be taught in an indigenous language. And even if a higher education institution did happen to teach a course on or in an indigenous language, the subject is unlikely to encompass the lesser known languages that may only be spoken in a few remaining communities. Even beyond the scope of education, general life outside of indigenous lands revolves around non-indigenous language, severing the cultural ties of traditional language.³⁶

Similar to the abandonment of indigenous language in order to progress through Western society, language barriers often bar indigenous voices from the policy circles that could take concrete steps to address the problem. Starting in the mid-1990s, governments initiated a legislative movement to encourage the use of one official language in order to standardize law-making, legal customs, and other federal affairs. Although this streamlining of translation

³⁶ Toth, Katalina. "The Death and Revival of Indigenous Languages." Harvard International Review, January 19, 2022. <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-death-and-revival-of-indigenous-languages/>.

and replication into one main language undoubtedly made government work more efficient, the chosen language of policymakers acted as another systemic hurdle that indigenous groups could not overcome without abandoning their traditional language. Indigenous access to legislature was a zero-sum gain: either indigenous communities could not contribute to policymaking at all, or they were forced to prioritize the non-indigenous dominant language in order to participate.³⁷

Even after governments realized that preserving indigenous languages proved crucial in sustaining cultural diversity, taking concrete action to reinvigorate the use of such languages proves challenging. For example, in Chile, policy exists to protect 9 indigenous languages, but only four of the languages can be taught in schools and only when more than 20% of a class consists of indigenous students, which is a challengingly high percentage to reach because most Chilean indigenous people live outside of the urban areas where schools are concentrated.³⁸

Another problem stems from lack of funding. Although the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues funds the recommendations and programs set in place by the UNPFII, regional governments do not prioritize language revitalization in their comparably smaller budgets.

II. Traditional Knowledge

Another critical component of indigenous cultural preservation lies in the protection of traditional knowledge and practices. Due to centuries of knowledge erasure and traditional

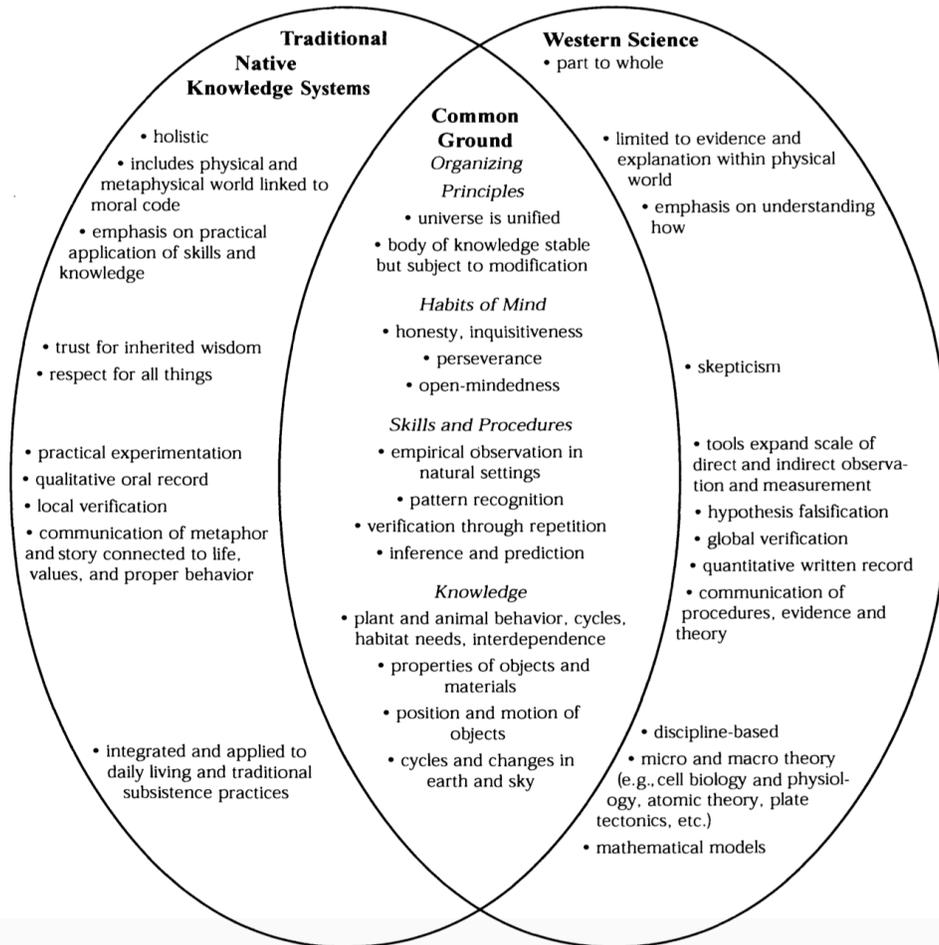
³⁷ BIA. "Bureau of Indian Affairs Native Language Revitalization," 2023. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bia_native_american_revitalization_lit_review_draft_08182023.pdf.

³⁸ "Indigenous Languages Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples." UN Department of Public Information, n.d. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/04/Indigenous-Languages.pdf>.

practice bans, this aspect of indigenous culture also faces extinction across different regions and communities. But to really examine why this loss of knowledge is a problem in the first place, one must identify the key differences between indigenous knowledge and other types of Western or common knowledge. According to the University of British Columbia, “Traditional knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldviews.”³⁹ Though the graph below may help the visualization of what sets traditional knowledge apart from other types of knowledge, some key differences include the indigenous emphasis on: a holistic approach, long term perspectives, dynamicity, and community values.⁴⁰

³⁹ University of British Columbia Blog Site. “What Is Indigenous Traditional Knowledge? | Traditional Knowledge and Technology,” n.d. <https://blogs.ubc.ca/traditionalknowledgetechnology/reevaluation-of-indigenous-cultures/what-is-indigenous-traditional-knowledge/>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.



Graph source: Koob, Amanda Rybin. "Research Guides: Indigenous Research & Knowledges in North America:

Indigenous Ways of Knowing." libguides.colorado.edu, n.d.

<https://libguides.colorado.edu/c.php?g=1052968&p=7645909>.

Though clearly distinct from Western knowledge with its own set of merits and flaws, the oppressive nature of colonialism that thrives on the notion of an "inferior" and a "superior" led to

the ridicule of traditional knowledge use, as colonizers perceived traditional knowledge as a primitive way of thought.⁴¹ However, they couldn't have been farther from the truth. Although the narrative that indigenous nations were unadvanced fueled the justification for colonialism, modern investigation into the traditional knowledge has yielded different conclusions: “As more researchers understand the value of different ways of doing science, there have been calls for there to be an integration of long disregarded indigenous knowledge into the academy’s scientific process. Traditional knowledge often values a more nuanced, contextual, and holistic view of information from observation and thought, not just piecemeal experimentation of discrete, individual components of a system.”⁴² Overall, the revitalization of traditional knowledge invigorates not only indigenous cultures but also scientific research, and delegates are encouraged to draw on traditional knowledge to inform their policy solutions for both topics in this background guide.

III. Cultural Rights

In order to form both societal and legal norms that amplify indigenous voices, it’s imperative to create policy that reaffirms indigenous cultural rights. According to UNESCO, cultural rights include the ideas of cultural self-determination; the ability of indigenous groups to reclaim their heritage and cultural objects; the establishment of intellectual property rights over

⁴¹ Luu, Chi. “What We Lose When We Lose Indigenous Knowledge | JSTOR Daily.” JSTOR Daily, October 16, 2019. <https://daily.jstor.org/what-we-lose-when-we-lose-indigenous-knowledge/>.

⁴² Ibid.

traditional knowledge; and the right to not endure assimilation.⁴³ Essentially, cultural rights protect the ability of indigenous communities to preserve their culture in whichever way they deem is the most appropriate and effective. Expanding the scope of cultural rights will prove essential in efforts to preserve indigenous culture, especially as UNESCO also finds that only 15% of indigenous communities live in the 23 countries that have ratified documents that establish indigenous cultural rights and protection.⁴⁴

Indigenous Culture and Environmental Protection

Because indigenous languages and traditional knowledge are founded on the principles of environmental protection and sustainability, delegates will find that Topics A and B are closely linked. For instance, the integration of traditional knowledge into environmentalist movements and subsequent policy has risen in popularity, as researchers and lawmakers utilize the holistic approach and natural emphasis of indigenous knowledge to inform their content and suggestions. And while previous examples of the emphasis indigenous language place on the close relationship between nature and humans have been discussed, here is one final translation to consider: in the Lakota language, the word “Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ” means “all is related” or “all my relatives,” encompassing both human and non-human life forms.⁴⁵ Ultimately, indigenous

⁴³ UNESCO. “Cutting Edge | Indigenous Languages: Gateways to the World’s Cultural Diversity | UNESCO.” [www.unesco.org](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-indigenous-languages-gateways-worlds-cultural-diversity), January 5, 2022.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-indigenous-languages-gateways-worlds-cultural-diversity>.

⁴⁴ UNESCO. “Cutting Edge | Indigenous Languages: Gateways to the World’s Cultural Diversity | UNESCO.” [www.unesco.org](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-indigenous-languages-gateways-worlds-cultural-diversity), January 5, 2022.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-indigenous-languages-gateways-worlds-cultural-diversity>.

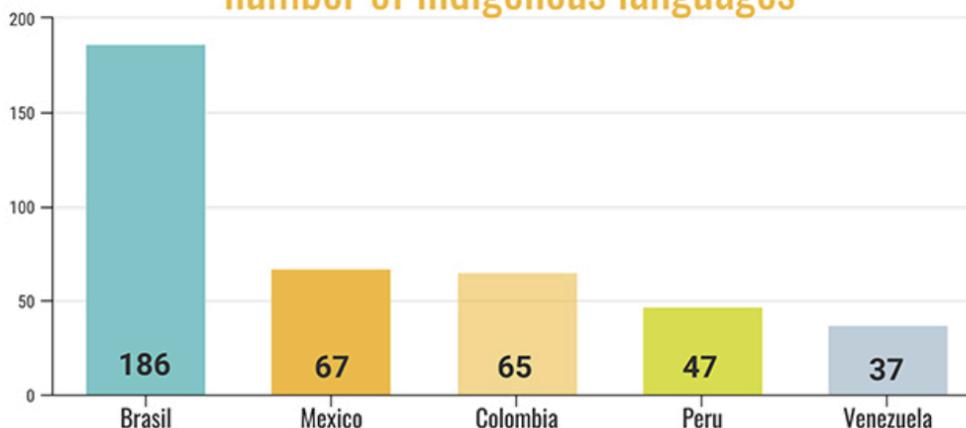
⁴⁵ Ibid.

language contributes to a system of knowledge that can be utilized to solve global environmental challenges.

Note on Central and South America

Similar to the findings presented in the regional analysis of Topic A, Central and South American indigenous groups were mostly chosen as potential allocations due to the diversity, history, and current approaches that aim to tackle cultural preservation on the two continents. Solely focusing on the topic of language revitalization, the empirical evidence highlights the intense situation in the region: according to the World Bank, “42 million indigenous people live in Latin America and the Caribbean. 560 indigenous languages are spoken, but 1 out of 5 indigenous populations have lost their native language over the past few decades. 26% of indigenous languages are at risk of disappearing.”⁴⁶

The five countries with the largest number of indigenous languages



The urgency and scope of cultural preservation in Central and South America will (hopefully!) lend itself to an engaging, multi-perspective discussion on the status of indigenous ways of life and the potential solutions to cultural endangerment. And because the indigenous landscape in Central and South America has occupied policymakers more than in other parts of the world, analyzing the existing policies – such as multilingualism rights, language programs in schools, and the incorporation of indigenous principles into law– will enhance an already rich conversation. But that’s not to say that delegates representing countries outside of Central or South America should be concerned– rather, the opportunity to collaborate and examine issues across different historical and regional backgrounds will be more present than ever.

Questions to Consider

1. How can traditional knowledge enhance or provide another perspective on environmental policy? And vice versa- how does environmental justice contribute to the preservation of indigenous culture?
2. What are the root causes of institutional barriers that indigenous people face in regards to achieving cultural rights, language inclusion, and other similar issues? How can policy begin to address the sources of such problems?
3. What can federal governments do to foster inclusion and accessibility in legislation? How can policymakers ensure that indigenous voices are heard, especially on indigenous issues?

4. How did the International Year of Indigenous Languages attempt to revitalize indigenous languages? What are some of its successes? Alternatively, in which ways has the program failed?

Further Reading

Any of the footnotes hyperlinked on this document contain extra information that could not be provided on the background guide for purposes of clarity and brevity. However, the websites that published the articles included will prove helpful in the research process. Here are a few extra resources to help along the way:

- As stated in Topic A's "Further Reading" section, I would encourage all delegates to search for any previous UNPFII themes that align with this issue. The UNPFII website is linked [here](#), but a quick google search should also work.
- [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights- Colonization's Impacts on Indigenous Communities](#)
- [Harvard- The Death and Revival of Indigenous Languages](#)
- [Bureau of Indian Affairs- Language Revitalization](#)
- [Teach for America: The U.S. Launched a War Against Indigenous Children. My Father Survived.](#): If you want to learn about the residential school system in more detail, this second-hand account of the cruelty experienced in these schools is beautifully written and incredibly heartbreaking. Includes graphic/disturbing material.

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