

# Protecting indigenous peoples' rights 'is protecting everyone's rights' – UN

9 August 2017 – Ten years after the adoption of the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), progress in several countries has been made in formally recognizing indigenous peoples, but overwhelmingly they continue to face discrimination, marginalization and major challenges in enjoying their basic rights.

While indigenous peoples have made significant advancements in advocating for their rights in international and regional fora, implementation of the Declaration is impeded by [persisting vulnerability and exclusion](#), and exclusion, particularly among indigenous women, children, youth and persons with disabilities, said 40 UN system entities and other international organizations in a joint UN statement, issued on the occasion of the [International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples](#), marked annually on 9 August.

The Declaration, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 September 2007, establishes a universal framework of minimum survival standards for the dignity and well-being of the world's indigenous peoples. It is the most comprehensive international instrument on indigenous peoples' collective rights, including the rights to self-determination, traditional lands and culture.

*Declaration on indigenous rights stands as a beacon of progress*

The Declaration, which took more than twenty years to negotiate, stands today as a beacon of progress, a framework for reconciliation and a benchmark of rights, underscored Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in a joint statement on the Day.

**VIDEO:** In Bolivia, with an increased demand for labour, indigenous women are joining the construction industry, but are vulnerable to discrimination.  
Credit: UN News

But a decade on, we need to acknowledge the vast challenges that remain. In too many cases, indigenous peoples are now facing even greater struggles and rights violations than they did ten years ago, they added.

Protecting the rights and dignity of indigenous peoples is protecting everyone's rights UNESCO chief, Irina Bokova

Although some countries have taken constitutional and legislative measures to recognize their rights and identities, exclusion, marginalization and violence continue to be widespread.

With this in mind, Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) said that as [custodians and practitioners](#) of unique cultures and relationships with the natural environment, indigenous peoples embody a wide range of linguistic and cultural diversity at the heart of our shared humanity.

Protecting their rights and dignity is protecting everyone's rights and respecting humanity's soul, past and future," she said, noting that UNESCO's [latest Global Education Monitoring Report](#) provides concrete guidance and policy advice for the advancement of indigenous peoples' rights. The agency also launched the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme in 2002 to support governments in creating synergies between scientific and indigenous peoples' knowledge.



There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. The Shavante Indian in Brazil is preparing his son for the "oio," a ceremonial club fight young boys participate in to show their passage from boyhood to manhood. UN Photo/Joseane Daher



Indigenous peoples make up less than five per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest. Above, a member of the Dogons tribe in southern Mali uses indigenous irrigation techniques to grow vegetables and millet. UN Photo/John Isaac



An overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, who also represent 5,000 different cultures. Pictured here are indigenous Inuit women in the Uummannaq community of Greenland. UN Photo/Mark Garten



Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. Forced displacement, including from armed conflict as was the case with the Embera children from Colombia (above), can sometimes lead to the total collapse of traditional authority and cultural patterns. UN Photo/Mark Garten



Indigenous peoples retain cultural, economic and political characteristics distinct from the dominant societies in which they live. A baby from the indigenous Kadazandusun ethnic group sleeps in a traditional cloth cradle in Malaysia, where UNICEF supports programmes for indigenous and other marginalized children. UNICEF/Giacomo Pirozzi



Despite their cultural differences, indigenous peoples from around the world share common problems. Students in Peru, pictured here, walk home from school. UNICEF asserts that, in the Andean nation, classes taught in Spanish challenge those who speak only the native Quechua – often leading to students dropping out. UNICEF/NYHQ2011-1606/LeMoyné



On 13 September 2007, the General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – a milestone for the cooperation and solidarity between indigenous peoples and Member States. Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca Céspedes (left) speaks to journalists after the adoption in New York. UN Photo/Jenny Rockett



Although major progress has been made in implementing the Declaration, gaps continue to leave indigenous peoples facing exclusion, marginalization and challenges in enjoying their basic rights. For example, deforestation poses risks for the livelihoods of forest-dwelling indigenous peoples, such as those seen here in the Republic of Congo. Photo: UNFPA



The 2017 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, observed on 8 August, marks the tenth anniversary of the Declaration and offers a push for nations to demonstrate political will, and financial commitment, for its implementation. Bright colours and bold patterns adorn the house of the Ndebele tribeswoman above in South Africa. UN Photo/P Mugubane

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### ***Voice and empowerment of indigenous women &#8220more important than ever&#8221***

For its part, the UN labour agency said the international community must also renew its commitment to promote the empowerment and voice of indigenous women, according to a

While commending the tenth anniversary of the Declaration, along with its own [Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 \(No. 169\)](#) as instruments guiding public policy and empowering &#8220indigenous communities to pursue their own development priorities,&#8221 the International Labour Organization's ([ILO](#)) underscored that the situation is far from acceptable.

&#8220Indigenous peoples constitute a disproportionate 15 per cent of the world's poor whereas they are an estimated five per cent of the world's population. [Indigenous women are commonly the poorest of the poor](#), discriminated against because they are indigenous and because they are women,&#8221 ILO stressed in a statement.

The statement pointed out that their marginalization and social exclusion must be addressed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) of the UN [2030 Agenda](#).

“Our combined efforts – governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, indigenous peoples and their organizations, UN partners and others – can go a long way in ensuring that indigenous peoples are not left behind,” concluded the ILO statement.

**AUDIO:** Indigenous still face ‘harsh conditions’ despite UN Declaration say UN human rights experts. Credit: UN News

### *Marking the International Day*

As Indigenous experts from Canada, Republic of the Congo, Ecuador and Namibia will celebrate the Day at a special event at UN Headquarters in New York, UN offices globally are also holding events and activities, including in Australia, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico.

The UN partnered with Twitter to create a special emoji for the Day, which, with the hashtags [#WeAreIndigenous](#) and [#IndigenousDay](#), will be live from 8 August to 15 September as a new way to engage broader audiences in promoting indigenous peoples’ rights.

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## [With devastating impact on civilians, conflict is ‘major cause of famine’ – UN Security Council](#)

9 August 2017 – Expressing its grave concern about the threat of famine facing some 20 million people in conflict-affected Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria, the United Nations Security Council today requested the Secretary-General to provide early warning when a conflict could lead to famine.

Through the adoption of a Presidential Statement, the 15-member body also requested the Secretary-General to provide an oral briefing in October 2017 on impediments to an effective response to the [risk of famine in these countries](#), and make specific recommendations on how to address country-specific impediments in order to enable a more robust short- and long-term response.

The Council emphasized, with deep concern, that ongoing conflicts and violence are a major cause of famine as they have devastating

humanitarian consequences and hinder an effective humanitarian response in the short, medium and long term.

Deploing that in these four countries, certain parties have failed to ensure unfettered and sustained access for deliveries of vital food assistance as well as other forms of humanitarian aid, the Council reiterated its calls on all parties to allow the safe, timely and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to all areas and to facilitate access for essential imports of food, fuel and medical supplies into each country, and their distribution throughout.

The Council further urged all parties to protect civilian infrastructure which is critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid in the affected countries.

The Council expressed its readiness to continue to support the Secretary-General's call to action to avert famine in conflict-affected countries and commits to engage constructively on his specific recommendations.

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## **[Venezuela: UN urges Government and opposition to relaunch political talks](#)**

8 August 2017 – Concerned that recent developments in Venezuela could lead to further escalation of tensions and hamper a peaceful solution to the crisis, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres again today urged the Government and the opposition to relaunch negotiations for the benefit of the



Venezuelan people.

A statement from Mr. Guterres' spokesman said the UN chief is [closely following events](#) in the country and is convinced the crisis cannot be solved through the imposition of unilateral measures, but requires a political solution based on dialogue and compromise.

At this critical time, the Secretary-General urged the Venezuelan Government and the opposition to relaunch negotiations for the benefit of the country's people, said the statement, adding that Mr. Guterres is strongly supporting the ongoing efforts of the international facilitators and regional actors who are seeking to contribute to this end.

The Secretary-General and other top UN officials have been calling for calm amid the escalating political and economic crisis in Venezuela when mass street demonstrations began in the country in April.

In the months that followed, clashes erupted between security forces and protestors opposing elections for the so-called Constituent Assembly. According to media reports, President Nicolás Maduro has since declared victory in elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by him. The new body could replace the current legislative body, the National Assembly.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, today warned that since the wave of demonstrations began in April, there has been a clear pattern of excessive force used against protesters.

Several thousand people have been arbitrarily detained, [many reportedly subjected to ill-treatment and even torture](#), while several hundred have been brought before military rather than civilian courts. And these patterns show no signs of abating, said the High Commissioner in a statement from his spokesperson.

**VIDEO:** UN human rights office urges Venezuela's national security forces to handling protests in line with international humanitarian law. Credit: UN News

***Responsibility for violations lies at 'highest levels of Government' UN human rights chief***

In the absence of responses from the Venezuelan authorities to requests for access, the High Commissioner deployed a team of human rights officers to conduct remote monitoring of the situation in the country from 6 June to 31 July, including from Panama.

The team conducted some 135 interviews, including with victims and their families, witnesses, first responders and the Attorney-General's Office and also received written information from the Ombudsperson's Office.

Witnesses told of security forces firing tear gas canisters at short range; buckshot marbles and nuts and bolts were also discharged as ammunition at

anti-Government protestors without warning; and deadly force was used against demonstrators as well.

“These violations have occurred amid the breakdown of the rule of law in Venezuela, with constant attacks by the Government against the National Assembly and the Attorney-General’s Office,” Mr. Zeid continued. “The responsibility for the human rights violations we are recording lies at the highest levels of Government.”

The team’s findings also indicate patterns of other rights violations, including violent house raids, torture and ill-treatment of detainees in connection with protests.

**AUDIO:** After interviewing victims and witnesses of the violence in Venezuela, the UN human rights office says that it “shows no signs of abating”.

Witness accounts suggest that the National Guard, National Police and local police forces have systematically used disproportionate force to instil fear, crush dissent and prevent demonstrators from assembling with rare condemnation from Government authorities.

Without official data, estimates suggest that more than 5,051 people have been arbitrarily detained between 1 April and 31 July, when mass demonstrations, began with some 1,000 reportedly still detained.

Several cases reviewed by the UN rights office revealed credible reports of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by security forces of detainees, some amounting to torture. Tactics included electric shocks, long periods of suspending detainees by their wrists, suffocation with gas and threats of killings. There were also sexual violence threats against detainees or their families.

“I call on all parties to work towards a solution to the rapidly worsening tensions in the country, to renounce the use of violence and to take steps towards meaningful political dialogue,” concluded Mr. Zeid.

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## [Recovery in Iraq’s war-battered Mosul is a ‘tale of two cities,’ UN country coordinator says](#)

8 August 2017 – Even as schools and markets begin to re-open in war-torn eastern Mosul, whole neighbourhoods of the western part of the Iraqi city have been destroyed and nearly a quarter of a million people have nowhere to

return anytime soon," a senior United Nations official said today.

Speaking to the press in Geneva, Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, said the contrast between the east and the west of the city could not be clearer. Indeed: "Everyone's gone home to eastern Mosul except for 20,000 people."

"Mosul's really a tale of two cities. Eastern Mosul is a city that's recovering, people are home, schools are open, businesses are open, markets are open. Conditions aren't great but it's a city on the mend," she said.

Yet, the situation is very different in western Mosul, explained Ms. Grande, who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)). "In the 15 completely destroyed neighbourhoods, there are 230,000 civilians who come from those districts who are not coming home anytime soon."

Overall, she said that Mosul, which had been the site of the single largest urban battle since World War II, had also witnessed the largest managed evacuation in modern history, with nearly one million civilians assisted out of the city. "Very exceptionally, humanitarian agencies were not near the front line, they were on the front line," she stated.

In all, some 3.3 million people across Iraq remain outside their homes, including those recently displaced from Mosul. In the wake of the Iraqi campaign to oust the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) from Mosul, she said that there are three more military operations that are expected: in Tal Afar; in Hawija; and in the Euphrates Valley, western Anbar Province.

We think that by the end of those military operations several hundred thousand more civilians are likely to be displaced. [As such] when the military campaign in Iraq is over, we are possibly looking at 3.5 million civilians who will need to go home."