

20th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2021) on Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of Indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16

Side event: “Child Rights for All: ending and preventing discrimination against Indigenous children”

Monday 26 April 11 am NY time/5pm Geneva time

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

What is the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues?

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is a high-level advisory body to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established in 2000 to deal with Indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. The Permanent Forum is one of three UN bodies and mechanisms mandated to focus specifically on Indigenous Peoples’ rights. The other two are the Experts Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Forum consists of sixteen members appointed by Member States and the president of the ECOSOC in consultation with Indigenous organizations who are mandated to:

- Provide expert advice and recommendations on Indigenous issues to the ECOSOC, as well as to programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, through ECOSOC;
- Raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of activities related to Indigenous issues within the UN system;
- Prepare and disseminate information on Indigenous issues; and
- Promote respect for and full application of the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration (Art. 42 UNDRIP).

Previous recommendations on child rights by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The Permanent Forum makes recommendations on an annual basis to various stakeholders including Member States, the UN system, international financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, media, civil society, and Indigenous peoples organizations. In previous years, recommendations from the Permanent Forum have focused on a range of child rights related issues such as:

- Indigenous children’s access to information about their rights (including through child friendly versions of the CRC Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure, the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples);
- Indigenous children and youth participation in matters that affect them and in UN entities’ work;
- The promotion and protection of Indigenous languages including in the context of supporting mother-tongue, bilingual and intercultural education;
- Inclusive access for Indigenous children to culturally sensitive health services and to culturally sensitive sexuality education;
- Addressing maternal mortality of Indigenous women and girls; and
- Access to WASH for Indigenous children.

Focus of the 20th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The upcoming 20th session of the Permanent Forum will be focused on “Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of Indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16”. This is a critical opportunity to highlight the situation of Indigenous children, the multiple and overlapping discriminations they face, as well as the role that they often take on as human rights defenders to claim and exercise their rights for themselves and for their communities.

SIDE EVENT ON “CHILD RIGHTS FOR ALL: ENDING AND PREVENTING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIGENOUS CHILDREN”

Rationale

Indigenous children continue to face **widespread, multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalization** which denies them the full enjoyment of their rights and jeopardizes their potential and opportunities for life and for generations. Across the world, Indigenous children are indeed more likely to be poor and to face multidimensional poverty, with barriers to access to birth registration, health, housing, water and sanitation - those living in rural or reserved areas often suffer from the underfunding of public services. They face higher risks of infant mortality and malnutrition; high incidence of communicable and non-communicable diseases including much higher rates of suicide and self-harm compared to other children; higher protection risks including to violence in its different forms, higher lower school enrollment rates attendance, implicit bias from their teachers, and fewer years of education, which is often not provided in Indigenous languages and/or using an intercultural approach; as well as a lack of information about their rights in Indigenous languages. Indigenous children are also overrepresented in the juvenile justice system and face limited legal protection and may not have access to mechanisms for redress. They are often removed from their families and placed in alternative care in large numbers. They experience forced relocation and loss of land, and environmental pollution. These patterns of inequalities have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and school closures for example which have impacted disproportionately Indigenous children who often do not have access to internet or computers.

In light of the systematic discrimination they face, **many Indigenous children have stood up for their rights**, often taking the lead in the defense of Indigenous lands and territories, being at the forefront of movements to protect the environment and advocating for Indigenous peoples’ collective rights worldwide. But in doing so, they also face high levels of risks, as children, as Indigenous children, and as human rights defenders. We have witnessed in the past few years an increased targeting of Indigenous peoples who stand for the promotion and protection of their individual and collective rights as relates particularly to their land, territories, resources, traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.

In this context, UNICEF and OHCHR are taking the opportunity of the 2021 Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to organize a **virtual side event on the rights of Indigenous children** to take stock of the situation faced by Indigenous children and provide recommendations on addressing the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination they continue to face, in relation specifically to the SDG 16 Target 16.3 on access to justice for all and 16 B on non-discriminatory laws and policies.

Objectives

- Take stock of, and draw attention to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that Indigenous children face
- Present and discuss examples of programmes and policies that help tackle discrimination against Indigenous children
- Reflect on the role of Indigenous children themselves in defending their individual and collective rights, and the risks they may face in doing so
- Identify recommendations made by various stakeholders on ways to address discrimination faced by Indigenous children and their communities

Agenda

The event will be moderated by **Elsa Stamatopoulo**, Director of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Program, Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University.

11:00	Welcome	Elsa Stamatopoulo, Moderator of the event, Director of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University
11:05	Opening Remarks	Sanjay Wijesekera, Director of Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ
11:10	Overview of how discrimination impacts Indigenous children and key recommendations from a human rights perspective	Belkacem Lounes, Member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), lead on the EMRIP study on Indigenous children.
11:20	Ensuring access to justice for Indigenous children: Canada's Indigenous Peoples experience	Lisa Wolff, Director, Policy and Research, UNICEF Canada and Cindy Blackstock (Gitxsan First Nation), Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and Professor, School of Social Work, McGill University

11:30	Climate change and its impact on Indigenous children and their future: Perspectives from an Indigenous Human Rights climate change lawyer and advocate	Sasha Purcell, Indigenous Human Rights climate change lawyer and advocate
11:40	Supporting the rights of Indigenous children disproportionately impacted by COVID-19: Latin American and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples experience	Elena Burga Cabrera, UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office, and Myrna Kay Cunningham Kain, President of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC)
11:55	Discussion	
12:25	Closing	Allison Thomas, Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section, Focal Point for EMRIP study on Indigenous children, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Expected participants

Member States representatives, Civil Society organizations, Academics, Indigenous peoples organizations and individuals including Indigenous children and youth, Members of the Permanent Forum, UNICEF, OHCHR and other UN entities, etc.