

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# World Issues

### AS YOU READ

Aboriginal peoples in Canada are not alone in the challenges they face. Indigenous peoples around the world face issues such as discrimination and land claims. Today, indigenous peoples from different countries co-operate to share knowledge and ideas that will further their inherent rights.

Rigoberta Menchú Tum is a refugee from Guatemala's thirty-six-year-long civil war. She became an influential spokesperson for the struggles of indigenous peoples around the world. Shortly before she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, the thirty-three-year-old Maya woman spoke with journalist Anders Riis-Hansen. Riis-Hansen is associated with the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America.

Menchú Tum has changed the way many people think about indigenous peoples' rights. As you read, notice how she makes her case by providing specific examples and recommending specific action. Do you think this is an effective strategy? What themes connect the examples she gives? Make a list of the themes you see and share it with a partner. Relate these themes to issues raised by Aboriginal peoples in your area, in Alberta, and across Canada.

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

As you read this chapter, consider these questions:

- ▲ What cultural characteristics are shared by indigenous peoples around the world?
- ▲ What issues do indigenous peoples from different countries have in common?
- ▲ How have indigenous peoples been affected by natural resource development?
- ▲ What role does the United Nations play in resolving issues faced by indigenous peoples?
- ▲ What progress have indigenous peoples made in human rights, education, and self-determination?
- ▲ What role do Aboriginal youth play in the future of indigenous peoples around the world?

## An Interview with Rigoberta Menchú Tum

By Anders Riis-Hansen

**Riis-Hansen:** On the twelfth of October, a great number of countries will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. Do you see this as an insult to the indigenous people?

**Menchú Tum:** We have seen repeated occupations of our land, long lines of colonists have arrived, and they remain today. For me, to celebrate the twelfth of October is the absolute expression of triumphism, occupation, and presumptuousness, and I think that anyone who has mature and responsible politics should not celebrate it. History will remember those that celebrate it.

On the other hand, the 500th anniversary has opened a lot of space in international forums. With respect to this, I am deeply gladdened that 1993 has been declared the International Year of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations. It is the first year we have had in 500 years. This is thanks to the struggle of many untitled, unnamed indigenous brothers who, without understanding international law, patiently walked the corridors asking for some time. Thanks to them this international year has been declared.

In addition, I think that the current situation has generated an understanding of the cultural diversity of America. We were the first to talk about cultural diversity, the need to respect the Maya and the environment.



**Riis-Hansen:** The last country of the continent abolished slavery more than 100 years ago. How is repression and racism expressed today?

**Menchú Tum:** For example, in the case of my country, Guatemala, 65 per cent of the inhabitants are indigenous. The constitution speaks of protection for the indigenous. Who authorized a minority to protect an immense majority? It is not only political, cultural, and economic marginalization, it is an attempt against the dignity of the majority of the population. The human being is to be respected and defended, not protected like a bird or a river.



**Riis-Hansen:** Do you fear for your life when you visit Guatemala?

**Menchú Tum:** Not only in Guatemala, but everywhere. Our lives are no longer our own; they can take them away any time.

The Mayas, our grandparents, always said: every human being occupies a small piece of time. Time itself is much longer, and because of this they always said that we must care for this earth while we are on it because it will be part of our children and the children of our grandchildren. They know that life is short, that it can end so soon, and that if one gets lost on the way, others will come to take their place.



*Rigoberta Menchú Tum became an activist while still a teenager and has devoted her life to indigenous people's rights in her own country and elsewhere. Prepare a report on the causes of the Guatemalan civil war or Rigoberta Menchú Tum's book I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala.*

**Riis-Hansen:** Do you believe that a Nobel Prize can contribute to peace in Guatemala?

**Menchú Tum:** I believe that it has already contributed a lot. We have broken the silence around Guatemala. We have entered into the governmental tribune and we have been able to demand that there be no more blank checks for the governments that violate human rights....

The gap between rich and poor must be eliminated, or we will continue to be the example of conflict in America.

#### REFLECTION

1. Use the Internet to find out more about Rigoberta Menchú Tum. From what you learn, how do you feel about Menchú Tum and her work? How has she contributed to her people?
2. Rigoberta Menchú Tum's fame has helped her cause, but has also exposed her to criticism. Some critics question her account of her life as a member of a peasant family in Guatemala. They say she embroidered her story with details that could not be true, or that if they were true, they were true of other people's lives and not her own. Would your feelings about her contributions change if you found she had embellished her own life story with events that happened to other people? Discuss this issue in small groups or as a class.



## Common Cultures, Common Issues

### AS YOU READ

Pages 210–219 discuss some of the similarities in the cultures of indigenous peoples around the world and how colonization has led to common issues among indigenous peoples today. As you read, note the challenges that indigenous peoples have faced — and continue to face. With your class, discuss why the struggles of indigenous peoples are important. What gains have been made? What challenges remain to be resolved?

**A**T LEAST 5000 INDIGENOUS CULTURES EXIST TODAY, WITH ABOUT 300 MILLION INDIGENOUS PEOPLE SPREAD ACROSS THE WORLD IN SEVENTY COUNTRIES. DESPITE ENORMOUS DIVERSITY, MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S CULTURES HAVE CHARACTERISTICS IN COMMON.



### COMMON CULTURES

“We share the same vision and the same experiences, and we are alike in our traditional ways,” says Grand Chief George Manuel, of the Secwepemc First Nation and the first president of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. He travelled to many countries in the 1970s, including Argentina, Sweden, Chile, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Peru, to meet with other indigenous people. He discovered that nearly all the

We recognize that we must all live together in this land, that we must share, and that in the end our interests are much the same. We want peace, health, and well-being for our children. We strive for clean water and air, happiness and freedom. We insist on mutual recognition and respect for dignity, fundamental rights, and the principle of equality of peoples.

— Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Cree (Canada)

Our first relationship is to nature. You are part of nature, not the master of nature.

— Mari Boine, Sámi (Norway)



*In all indigenous cultures, day-to-day activities are imbued with educational, social, and spiritual ways of life. Here Barbara Joe and her granddaughter Ravenlyn Wilson pick medicinal tea at Burns Bog in Tsawwassen traditional territory.*

indigenous people he met included the concepts of the four sacred directions and the circle in their cultural ceremonies.

The word *indigenous* refers to things that originate in a particular region or environment and live, grow, are produced, or occur naturally there. Most indigenous peoples gain their cultural identity from the place where they originate. The world’s indigenous peoples descend from the original inhabitants of their lands. The names of many — Ainu,

Indigenous peoples are the environment and the environment is indigenous peoples — we are one and the same with the air, water, and the soil of our Mother Earth. We are connected to every living species and every living species is spiritually and culturally connected to us.

— Tom Goldtooth, National Coordinator, Indigenous Environmental Network

Dene, Dogon, Huaorani, Inuit, Maori, Naga, Yup'ik — simply mean “the people” in their language.

### Spirituality and the Land

Though indigenous cultures differ one from another, distinct similarities exist. For example, all have a spiritual connection to the land and the natural world. Many indigenous cultures respect and care for the land and its resources as a part of their community. Most have practices that express spirituality in daily interactions with the natural world, such as during hunting, fishing, or gathering plants, as well as ceremonies tied to natural cycles, such as seasonal change or phases of the moon.

### Oral Traditions

Most indigenous peoples pass on cultural beliefs and values through oral traditions that can be traced back to their ancestors. Indigenous oral traditions, including poetry, song, story, and dance, explain spiritual beliefs and pass knowledge on from generation to generation. For thousands of years, for example, the indigenous peoples of Australia have told stories that trace the path that a spirit ancestor travelled across the land. This path is connected to a mapping system that divides traditional lands using natural boundaries, such as rivers, lakes, and mountains. Children learn these “story maps” of their homeland and how places relate to each other and to people.

### Extended Family

The extended family unit provides the basis for social organization among many indigenous peoples. Like many other indigenous cultures around the world, First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit cultures include mutual support systems that centre on the extended family. These support systems helped to care for individuals in times of need.

### Respect for Diversity

Sometimes indigenous peoples within one country are painted with a single brushstroke — a stereotype that does not account for their true diversity. Prior to European contact and colonization, each indigenous people lived in a traditional territory, sometimes overlapping with other groups. Most cultures respected other peoples’ differences, allowing diversity to thrive. The diverse cultures and their territories do not necessarily conform to the boundaries of countries.

For example, Australia’s indigenous peoples include the Torres Strait Islanders as well as the Awabagal, Darkinung, Eora, Darug, Gundungurra, Yuin, and others — each people with its own culture, beliefs, and language. At the time of European contact, approximately 700 indigenous languages existed in Australia.

### Community

Indigenous people’s cultures usually emphasize the welfare of the community over the individual. In Scandinavia, Sámi society is organized around the *siida*, a community of about a dozen families living together, usually along a river, lake, or fjord. The *siida* council decides how the territory’s resources should be used throughout the year, much like a First Nations band council that makes decisions for the benefit of the community as a whole.

## ETHNOCENTRISM

- ❖ Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultures. Ethnocentric people have a cultural bias — they use their own standards to measure all other cultures, and they view differences as signs of inferiority.
- ❖ Anyone can be ethnocentric, regardless of their cultural heritage. In a multicultural country, if some groups believe themselves to be inherently superior to others, this can lead to tensions or even conflict.
- ❖ Ethnocentrism can be complicated when one group holds more political or economic power than other groups. The powerful group then has some ability to impose their way of life on other groups.
- ❖ Colonizing cultures tended to be ethnocentric. Explorers and settlers often failed to realize that other cultures had valid social and

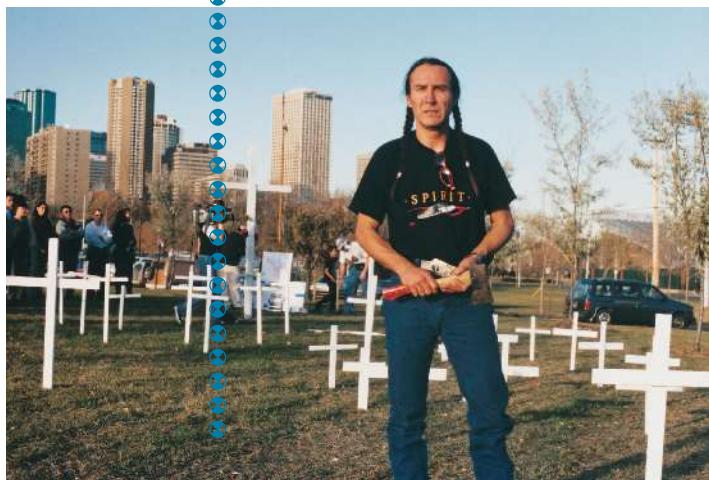
### REFLECTION

- ❖ In small groups, think of contemporary examples of

## COLONIAL HISTORY

Indigenous cultures share cultural features, but also share a common history of colonization. In most cases, contact with colonizing countries led to a drastic decline in indigenous populations through armed conflict or disease. Indigenous peoples were in some cases destroyed. During the Spanish conquest of South and Central America in the sixteenth century, twenty-five million indigenous people died or were killed. By the end of the 1890s, the Caribbean peoples were almost entirely eliminated. Indigenous populations in Australia plummeted from at least 500 000 (some estimates say as many as one million) to 60 000 after colonization, and the Maori population in New Zealand plunged from 200 000 to 42 000.

Despite the atrocities committed against indigenous peoples in the colonial period, many survived with their cultures intact. Indigenous peoples around the world share a strong will to preserve their lands, languages, customs, and beliefs for future generations.



*Edmonton's Rossdale Flats served as a burial site and gathering place for First Nations for thousands of years. Here Duane Goodstriker sets up commemorative crosses to honour Aboriginal people buried in the river valley. Controversy arose when proposals to expand a power plant in the area threatened to destroy the site. Such controversies are familiar to indigenous peoples throughout the world. Research this issue and the stakeholders involved. What is going to happen to the site?*

## COMMON ISSUES

Indigenous peoples share histories that include cultural suppression, economic hardship, discrimination, and racism. They now face common issues as a result of their histories.

Some of the challenges faced by indigenous peoples have a **geopolitical** aspect: a combination of geographic and political factors that relate to or influence a nation or region. For example, in many areas, national borders drawn across ancestral lands have physically divided populations of indigenous peoples. The Blackfoot and Mohawk nations now exist on both sides of the United States–Canada border. Inuit people live in four countries: Canada, Greenland, Russia, and the United States.

Issues shared by indigenous peoples can be grouped into nine general areas: land and resources, the environment, war, language and culture, education, self-determination, health, human rights, and intellectual property rights.

### Land and Resources

Regaining ancestral lands and sacred sites is a struggle shared by almost all indigenous peoples. Some want to protect certain sacred or burial sites from development. Some seek a fair share of the wealth generated from their land's resources.

National governments are morally and sometimes legally obliged to respect and protect the rights of indigenous peoples, but often they do not. Even when governments have designated land for indigenous peoples, they sometimes find ways to re-acquire it.

For example, one of the most densely populated places on Earth is

the Indonesian island of Java, home to 120 million people. In an attempt to ease overcrowding, the Indonesian government began a relocation program in 1969. Over the next three decades, the government moved up to ten million people onto other Indonesian islands, many of which are traditional territories of the country's indigenous peoples. This massive intrusion led to simmering resentment and many violent flare-ups. Hundreds of people have been killed, and many others have been forced to leave the areas they settled in. More than 400 000 people now live in camps awaiting resettlement.



Melina Laboucan-Massimo's experience as the Latin American Regional Co-ordinator for TakingITGlobal (a worldwide youth action organization) made her all the more passionate about what it is to be indigenous and who she is as a Cree person. She hopes that completing a Master's Degree in Indigenous Governance will help her in her work addressing issues facing indigenous peoples.



*Melina Laboucan-Massimo*

Like in North America, indigenous peoples in Latin America have faced harsh conditions and many injustices – some are prepared to do combat to protect their land. In Canada, we were forced to give up our languages, cultures, and land and this has been devastating to our communities. In many cases, our cultures have been appropriated and turned into a commodity for tourists. We need to keep our culture intact and make it an integral part of our lives. I feel distinct from mainstream society and a resistance to ethnocentric assimilation policies. I feel frustrated at the lack of understanding that mainstream society has towards marginalized First Nations people.

How is Laboucan-Massimo using her frustration in a positive way? What frustrations could you turn to positive action?



## PROFILE

### CHERITH MARK

#### Nakoda First Nation



Cherith Mark

As the fast drumming and low chanting begin, the spotlights come up on a shimmering, golden spirit-being floating across the stage.

Cherith Mark, performing in *Miinigooweziwin...the Gift* at The Banff Centre, is moving her body to the music and exalting in the physicality of her eagle dance. The twenty-eight-year-old Nakoda (Stoney) woman from Morley, Alberta, offers an energetic mix of traditional and modern forms of movement. She is destined to become one of Canada's most sought-after Aboriginal contemporary dancers.

"When I dance, I feel grounded," Mark says. She first powwow danced when she was five years old, and then performed in a junior high school troupe in her teens. In 1997, she travelled to the United States with Calgary's Red Thunder Native Dance Theatre to dance in Arizona's Spirits in the Sun festival. There, she witnessed contemporary dances led by choreographer Alejandro Ronceria.

"I wanted to elaborate on my dancing. Alejandro referred me to the Aboriginal Arts Program at The Banff Centre. A year later, in 1999, I was performing in the centre's Chinook Winds dance production and I've been back to Banff every summer since," says Mark. This multi-disciplined performer has studied at the Aboriginal Arts Program in Banff, and The Centre for Indigenous Theatre in Toronto. She has also earned her dance diploma from Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton and plans to major in dance at Burnaby's Simon Fraser University.

Mark cherishes her experiences studying performance art with international teachers and dancers.

"The Maori people from New Zealand are especially honourable. When they enter their homes, they chant their genealogy — that's how grounded they are in their nationality. Singing and dancing is a part of who they are as Maori people."

"And Alejandro, who is from Columbia, is an amazing teacher. He shares what he's been given in many cultural exchanges and always explains the origin of where it comes from."

Once she has gone further in her studies, Mark plans to be a choreographer and hopes to teach dance in her community.

"A lot of Aboriginal youth know about powwow dance, but they don't know there is such a thing as contemporary dance. I would like to teach and inform them that contemporary dance has many possibilities. The sky's the limit. It's another way of storytelling that many people don't know about."

#### REFLECTION

Have you ever participated in an exchange with students from other cultures or seen a performance of dance or singing from an indigenous culture from outside North America? If you have, what did you learn about the similarities and differences between their culture and your own?

## The Environment

Environmental damage can harm indigenous cultures, because they are closely connected to the natural environment. The Yanomamo, for example, who live deep in the jungles of southern Venezuela and northern Brazil, depend on their environment for survival. Miners, loggers, and road builders have intruded into their territories, bringing physical attacks and disease, as well as damage to Yanomamo homes and food supply. So far, neither country's government has adequately defended the Yanomamo by protecting their environment.

## War

Some indigenous peoples have been subjected to direct efforts to destroy them. For example, in Guatemala, an estimated 200 000 people were killed in the country's civil war. Most who died were indigenous people. Hundreds of thousands of Mayans fled their homelands, and 440 ancient Mayan villages were completely destroyed.

## Language and Culture

Since 1492, more than 2000 indigenous languages and cultures in the western hemisphere alone have been wiped off the face of the Earth. From North America, these extinct cultures include the Wappo, Beothuk, Takelma, Natchez, and Massachusett, among many others. Many indigenous peoples today struggle to maintain their beliefs, values, languages, spirituality, and traditions.

Language and culture are intertwined. About 6000 indigenous languages are spoken in the world today, but many are nearly extinct.



*This Maori girl in traditional dress is cooking maize in a hot pool in New Zealand. Why is preserving ancient cultures difficult in the contemporary world? Do you think school education programs are an effective technique to ensure cultural preservation? Explain your answer.*

The cultures associated with them are also in peril. Unless drastic changes occur soon, half of them may disappear within your lifetime, and 90 per cent of them within the lifetime of the next generation.

For many years in Norway, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, it was often forbidden to speak indigenous languages in schools. Today, indigenous nations in these countries and others are lobbying for indigenous language programs in schools.

## GLOBAL STATISTICS

- Guatemala is one of the few countries where indigenous peoples form the majority of the population, yet only 150 of 25 000 students enrolled in higher education are indigenous people.
- Indigenous Australians are imprisoned at a rate sixteen times higher than non-indigenous Australians. In some regions, the rate is twenty times higher.
- In Canada, 45 per cent of Aboriginal adults living off-reserve reported one or more chronic health conditions, including arthritis, diabetes, rheumatism, and high blood pressure. Rates of arthritis or rheumatism among Aboriginal populations are almost twice that of the non-Aboriginal population.
- Almost three-quarters of the 120 armed conflicts in the world today are battles between central governments and indigenous peoples living within their borders.



## PROTECTING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Many mechanisms to protect the rights of indigenous peoples exist, but they are not consistently implemented. Education is essential for the many indigenous peoples who remain unaware of the laws and agreements protecting their rights.

Realizing that they have similar struggles, indigenous peoples around the world have joined forces. They share information on how to use legal means to assert land claims, to force governments to recognize existing treaties, and to claim the right to live the way they choose.

The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) was established in the 1980s to represent Inuit concerns in the United States, Canada, Greenland, and Russia and Sámi people's concerns in Norway. Each country has its own national office. ICC members came together to fight pollution and global warming, and to preserve Inuit culture and traditions. The ICC is vocal about environmental change and its impact on the Arctic regions of the world.

Other regional, national, and international groups working to improve the lives of indigenous peoples include the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, Four Directions Council, the Indian Council of South America, the Indian Law Resource Center, the Indigenous World Association, the International Indian Treaty Council, the International Organization of Indigenous Resources Development, the National Indian Youth Council, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. In this chapter, you will also read about the United Nations' efforts in this area.

### REFLECTION

Choose one international organization of indigenous peoples mentioned on this page or elsewhere in the book and prepare a brief oral report to your class on the organization's mission, history, and accomplishments.



Nigerian poet Ken Saro-Wiwa was the inspirational spokesperson of the Ogoni people in Nigeria until he was executed by the Nigerian government in 1995, along with eight other activists. The activists fought ecological damage to Ogoni land by Shell, one of the world's largest oil companies. Worldwide protests against the executions prompted Shell to incorporate a human rights policy into its business plan. How effective do you think public pressure is as a tool for indigenous populations to effect change?

### Education

Many indigenous peoples have suffered from both substandard education and education designed to extinguish traditional cultures. For example, almost half of indigenous Mexicans cannot read or write, and 58 per cent of their five year olds do not go to school. Many indigenous peoples have found that their ancestral cultures have been eroded, and that they have not been educated well enough to take a strong role in the mainstream culture.

### Self-Determination

Many indigenous peoples share the desire to pursue economic, social, and cultural development under their own authority. Some national governments have responded flexibly to this issue. In 1979, for example, Greenland's Home Rule Act granted

Inuit people autonomy for domestic issues, without disintegrating the territorial unity of Denmark.

### Health

Levels of health and standards of health care for indigenous peoples often lag behind mainstream cultures. In indigenous communities from central Australia, for example, 40 per cent of children under the age of three have been hospitalized for respiratory illnesses, and three times more babies die than the national average.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia die, on average, twenty years earlier than other Australians. About 53 per cent die before age fifty, compared to 13 per cent of the general population.

Some of the world's indigenous peoples are better off than others. In general, indigenous peoples in developed countries tend to live longer, healthier lives than non-indigenous peoples in developing nations.

### Human Rights

Laws in many parts of the world have infringed on the basic rights of indigenous peoples. Between the 1870s and 1969, for example, about 100 000 indigenous children in Australia were taken from their families and placed in government-run institutions, or adopted into non-indigenous families. This policy was intended to erase the existence of indigenous peoples as a distinct group.

In one example from Canadian history, First Nations people needed written passes to leave reserves until the 1950s. They were once forbidden to sell products or livestock without written permission. They

were denied the right to vote until 1960, and they were banned from owning land unless they gave up their inherent rights. Indigenous populations in other parts of the world have had similar experiences, and continue to face such human rights violations.

### Intellectual Property Rights

Mainstream cultures have often taken an interest in — and profited from — indigenous cultures and traditional knowledge. Cultural knowledge or artifacts are sometimes appropriated, or made the property of non-indigenous people or corporations. Furthermore, indigenous peoples often receive no share of the wealth created when traditional knowledge is used by others.

Climate change has real and serious implications on Inuit life because much of the traditional knowledge is based on the times of seasons and not traditionally on temperatures. For example, caching caribou is done in the fall after flies stop flying, not only to prevent maggots but because meat shouldn't be too fermented or too fresh. Now with climate change and warmer temperatures, much meat is going to waste because of over-fermentation and botulism is becoming a real hazard....

Inuit have been careful caretakers of the Arctic for a long time.... Our customs and laws were designed to ensure our survival.

What it all came down to was respect for the earth and to do your part to keep the world in its original state. Inuit see themselves as part of the ecosystem and want to be included, not as victims, but as a people who can help.

I believe Inuit can provide the rest of society with useful and timely information because we are at the forefront where the impacts and effects of climate change are felt first and may be the most severe.

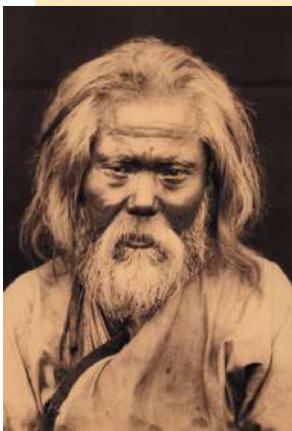
— Jose A. Kusugak, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami,  
*Above & Beyond: Canada's Arctic Journal*



## THE AINU IN JAPAN

Europeans were not the only colonists. The Ainu people are descendants of the original inhabitants of the Japanese islands. They lived mainly on Hokkaido, off Japan's north coast, making a living by fishing, hunting, and gathering plants from the nearby forests. About 1000 years ago, the Japanese Wajin people migrated northward, beginning a period of conflict that lasted for about 600 years.

In 1669, an Ainu rebellion under the leader Shakushine ended when Japan, fearing defeat, proposed a peace treaty.



*This Ainu giliak (spiritual leader) lived in the village of Agrevo in the late nineteenth century.*

The land-lease system lasted until the nineteenth century. Deprived of their traditional means of sustenance and subjected to unfair trade policies, the Ainu people were forced into debt. Some were placed in labour camps to repay their debts, where they were treated cruelly. Many Ainu died there, killed by their jailors or disease, such as smallpox, cholera, and syphilis.

In 1873, the Japanese government decreed that Hokkaido was unowned land and would henceforth be state property. Colonists were offered homesteads, swelling the island's

population to over one million people. The Ainu continued to be an oppressed minority, their land gone and their customs and language still prohibited, though the government eventually abolished unfair trade practices.

The Hokkaido Kyu-Dojin Protection Act (Kyu-Dojin meaning “former Aboriginals”), a Japanese law passed in 1899, provided the Ainu with small parcels of land to be used only for agricultural purposes. However, the best farmland had been handed out years before to settlers from the south, and what was left was usually unworkable. Though the Ainu had never been farmers, they were forbidden from having any other occupation. Anyone caught fishing in rivers or cutting wood in forests was arrested. Any land not fully cultivated within fifteen years was taken away. Many people lost their land and died of starvation.

Over the next hundred years, attitudes in Japan towards indigenous peoples changed. In 1997, a new Japanese law was passed to provide funding to research and promote Ainu culture. Approximately 24 000 Ainu people now live in Hokkaido. Many are working to preserve their language, oral tradition, traditional dances, and other elements of their culture.

### REFLECTION

Research current efforts by the Ainu people to preserve their culture. What challenges do they face? How do these challenges compare to issues faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada? What role does ethnocentrism play in the issues faced in both countries?

## DESCRIBING THE EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION

What are the effects of colonization on indigenous peoples?

### WHAT TO DO

- Working in groups of three or four, select an indigenous population from outside North America that has experienced colonization. Examples include Aboriginal peoples in Australia, the San of Southern Africa, and the Sámi of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.
- Using your textbook, the library, and Internet, research the main events of the colonial period and their effects on the indigenous people you are studying. Focus on the questions that follow:
  - What did the actions of the colonizing country reveal about its values and worldview?
  - How did the colonizing country's values and worldview compare to those of the indigenous peoples? Provide specific examples.
  - How has the colonial experience affected the indigenous culture today?
  - What general statements can you make about the effects of colonization on indigenous cultures? Include examples from Canada that show similar effects.
- Using your research, create a museum display that focuses on the effects of colonization on indigenous peoples. Your display should incorporate at least three different ways of presenting the story, such as
  - an information pamphlet
  - an automated PowerPoint™ presentation
  - artifacts
  - maps
  - quotations from those who experienced the events
  - a timeline
  - newspaper clippings

*Marina Murdilinga and Billy Nalakandi with their children at Kubumi, in Arnhem Land, Australia. Arnhem Land is a vast Aboriginal reserve in the far north-western tip of Australia's Northern Territory. The Aboriginal people in the area won their land claim in 1976 with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory), the first time the Australian government acknowledged inherent Aboriginal rights to land. Many people in the region want to be left alone to live their lives as their people have for over 40 000 years. Visitors may enter the territory only with permission.*



- As a class, display your research around the class or other display space in the school. If possible, invite another class to see your displays, or host an evening for your parents to experience your work.

### LOOKING BACK

What cultural characteristics are common to many indigenous peoples around the world? For each characteristic, offer one example from outside North America and one from Canada. What issues are shared by indigenous peoples around the world? For each issue, give one Canadian and one international example. What is ethnocentrism and how did it affect colonized indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world? In what ways do indigenous peoples co-operate with each other to achieve their goals today?



## Natural Resources and Conflict

### AS YOU READ

The demand for natural resources, such as timber, oil, gas, and minerals, has had many effects on indigenous peoples around the world. As the opening story for this section shows, resource development has sometimes had tragic consequences. How do you think the companies involved in resource development and extraction explain or justify their actions?

An important term used in this section is *sustainable development*. Development that is sustainable meets present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. As you read further in the chapter, think about why sustainable development is significant for indigenous peoples.

**G**REAT BEAR LAKE, IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, IS CANADA'S SECOND LARGEST LAKE AND ONE OF THE DEEPEST IN NORTH AMERICA. ITS BLUE WATERS ARE FROZEN FOR ALL BUT FOUR MONTHS OF THE YEAR. FOR THOUSANDS OF

years, the Sahtú Dene people have lived along its shores, following a traditional lifestyle of fishing and hunting caribou.

About 150 years ago, Louis Ayah, a respected spiritual leader, had a vision. Terrible things would happen, he said, when the white man started taking “dangerous rock” out of the ground. The water

Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth.

— Chief Seattle, Suquamish

Uranium mining in Canada has left over 120 million tons of radioactive waste. This amount represents enough material to cover the TransCanada Highway 2 metres deep across the country.

— Winona LaDuke, Co-Chair, Indigenous Women's Network

would become yellow and poisoned, and what looked like a metal bird would take the rock to a faraway land and use it to harm the people living there, who look much like the Dene. Ayah warned his people to stay away from this area.

Ayah’s vision came true. In 1930, uranium was discovered at Great Bear Lake. The area was mined for almost thirty years, first under private ownership and then, from 1942–60, under the Crown corporation Eldorado Mining and Refining. Eldorado’s primary customer was the United States Army. At 8:15 A.M. on August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber dropped a bomb containing the “dangerous rock” on Hiroshima, Japan. Up to 200 000 people died as a result. World War II ended soon afterwards.

While it operated, Eldorado hired Dene men for \$3 a day to carry 45-kilogram gunnysacks of radioactive ore from the mine and transport it downriver. The men worked twelve hours a day, six days a week during the four months that Great Bear Lake was ice-free. While working and travelling, the men ate and slept on the huge sacks, and swept the dust from the docks and barges. Sacks were sometimes used later for tents and clothing. Dene Elders remember the men coming home covered from head to toe in dust, the same dust that settled onto the lake, causing the ice and snow to melt faster.

Before the uranium supply ran out, more than 1.7 million tonnes of radioactive waste from Eldorado’s operations were dumped into and around Great Bear Lake.

In 1953, the first Port Radium miner died of cancer. The first Dene ore carrier died of cancer in 1960. Since then, cancer has killed at least 50 people in Délina, a Dene community of 650. After learning about scientific evidence linking health problems and uranium, as well as evidence that the Canadian government knew of these dangers as early as 1932, the Dene began in the 1970s to seek restitution. For decades, while caribou herds migrated across radioactive wastelands, the Canadian government denied any problems.

In 1998, widows of the Délina mine workers were horrified to learn of the connection between their lands and the atomic bombs detonated during World War II. One wrote an apology to the people of Hiroshima, and six community members travelled to Japan to express their sorrow.

Finally, in 1999, the Délina Dene and the government of Canada initiated a joint investigative program, the Canada-Délina Uranium Table. These talks will look for ways to deal with community concerns over the old mine site.

### INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE DEMAND FOR RESOURCES

Almost everything produced today depends on natural resources. Petroleum products supply plastic, wax, cosmetics, food preservatives, inks, detergents, film, bandages, fertilizers, synthetic fabrics, carpets, certain medicines, non-leather shoes, tires, and CDs. Homes and other buildings are heated by wood, coal, oil, or natural gas. Electricity often comes from burning fossil fuels, such as coal, or from hydroelectric generation.



*Ore carriers, many of whom were Sahtú Dene men, worked long hard days at the Eldorado uranium mine during the brief Arctic summer. Many later got ill or died because of exposure to radiation.*

Demands for new consumer goods and technological advances, along with rising expectations and increased populations, place a huge strain on the natural world. In the search for more resources and new supplies, industries look in even the most inaccessible areas, often the homelands of indigenous peoples.

This global search creates opportunities for developing countries to bring in income and pay off debt. However, decisions to exploit natural resources, typically with the involvement of foreign companies and international financing, frequently displace indigenous peoples from ancestral lands.

Recognizing this, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development acknowledged that, although countries have the right to exploit their natural resources, this right does not override the rights of indigenous peoples: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."



The Oldman Dam in southern Alberta was built to support farmers' needs for water, but it is capable of generating power. The dam, built on the traditional lands of the Piikani First Nation, destroyed First Nations cultural artifacts. Research reasons for the dam and reasons why many people opposed it.

Which reasons do you think are most compelling?

### • **Tourism**

Tourism is sometimes an excellent way for indigenous peoples to use their natural resources sustainably. For example, the Calgary Zoo has established a partnership with Wechiau communities in Ghana to preserve and promote a hippopotamus sanctuary in the northern part of the country. The zoo helps fund the park and promotes it to tourists. The project gives local people a way to make a living from the animals, and helps preserve endangered species at the same time.

With less consultation and care, however, tourism can encroach on the rights of indigenous peoples. For example, tourism in the Cordillera region of the Philippines has resulted in hotels on ancestral lands, and the commercialization of indigenous cultures and traditions. Elsewhere as well, governments and corporations investing in tourism routinely fail to consult with indigenous peoples and to ensure that they benefit from such ventures.

### **Mining**

Mining extracts valuable metals and minerals from the earth, including diamonds and other jewels, the copper essential for electrical wiring, the iron needed to make steel, and the silicon necessary for computer chips. The mining industry provides raw materials for almost everything used in our daily lives. It feeds the industrial world and provides thousands of jobs.

But the process of mining disfigures the Earth and pollutes land and water. Its environmental impact spreads beyond the mine site itself, stretching along access roads, rivers, lakes, airstrips, and power lines. Mining often displaces indigenous people and sometimes destroys their sacred places. When mines close, they often leave a legacy of scars, danger, and contamination.

For example, mining development on Spirit Mountain, once a sacred site to Assiniboine and A'aninin (Gros Ventre) nations living in what is now Montana, has left serious surface and ground water pollution. In 1994, the first lawsuit over the poor clean-up resulted in a \$37 million settlement for local communities.

### **Hydroelectricity**

Hydroelectric power supplies 19 per cent of the world's electricity. In some countries, it supplies 90 per cent. Hydroelectricity is promoted as economical, reliable, and respectful of the environment. Some hydroelectric stations harness the power of waterfalls, but most require dams, which are costly to build and often create large bodies of water close to populated areas.

The larger the dam, the wider the area of flooding, which damages valley and river ecosystems. The World Commission on Dams states that dams have displaced forty to eighty million people, a disproportionate number of them indigenous.

The Itaipu Dam on the Parana River, between Paraguay and Brazil, is now the world's largest hydroelectric complex. Its eighteen turbines produce 12 600 megawatts of electricity, enough to illuminate 120 million 100-watt lightbulbs at once. About 1500 indigenous families were forcibly relocated in the 1970s to make room for the dam. Forced to move onto distant reservations — where they suffered economically, socially, and spiritually — these people have never been compensated.

### Forestry

Fifty million indigenous people live in rainforests. The world's forests are also home to diverse species of animals, birds, plants, and other organisms, which interact in complex ways. A shared belief among indigenous peoples is that every form of life on the planet has a reason for being. Science increasingly agrees.

Forests are essential to the quality of life for all humans and animals on the planet. They moderate climates, absorb carbon dioxide, produce oxygen, and filter air and water, acting much like global lungs.

From a resource perspective, forests provide lumber, the raw material for building products, paper, and fuel. They also provide other useful plants. Seventy-five per cent of prescription drugs in the western world are derived from native plants.



*At Long Galoh, a Penan village on the island of Borneo, Chief Pada No fires a blow pipe armed with poison darts at wild birds. His people have hunted with blow pipes for centuries, but the logging industry has destroyed much of his people's traditional hunting grounds. Most Penan have been relocated by the government. Research the background of this situation and find reasons for and against the logging development. If you were in charge of the Borneo government, what decision would you make about the Penan people and their land?*

Western scientists are still learning about the potential uses of many plants that indigenous healers have used for centuries.

Half of the world's forests have disappeared through logging, agriculture, and urban development. Tropical rainforests are destroyed at a rate of over 130 000 square kilometres per year, and 9 per cent of the world's tree species are at risk of extinction. An estimated 137 species of plants and animals disappear from the world every day.

The forestry industry is slowly improving its practices, though clear-cutting and slash-and-burn techniques remain common. In Malaysia, the world's largest exporter of tropical timber and a country widely criticized for its forestry practices, 2.7 million hectares were logged during the 1990s. A recently established certification process was supposed to improve forestry practices, but the basic rights of indigenous peoples are still often ignored.

### Petroleum

Oil is the world's largest source of energy, supplying nearly half of the total energy demand. In 1995, the world used more than three billion tonnes of oil in a single year — about the weight of three billion small cars. Every day, Canada alone consumes nearly two million barrels of oil. One barrel is enough to fill the gas tanks of four cars; two million barrels could fill a football stadium. The petroleum industry includes some of the world's most profitable corporations, a few of which have larger economies than three-quarters of the world's countries.

Though this industry includes some of the worst offenders against indigenous peoples and the

environment, public pressure has led to more progressive policies. For example, Syncrude Canada, our country's largest single oil producer, has established an environmental policy that respects the needs of surrounding communities.

As part of this policy, the company is committed to improving environmental performance. In partnership with the Fort McKay First Nation, Syncrude developed land reclaimed from mining operations into habitats for more than 300 wood bison. Syncrude is also Canada's largest industrial employer of Aboriginal people — more than 700 work for the company, many at highly skilled, high-paying jobs.

## TRADITIONAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Indigenous peoples have traditional ways of life that are inherently sustainable. These practices enabled them to live efficiently in even the world's most extreme environments, such as deserts and the Arctic.

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations officially recognized the position of indigenous peoples in conflicts surrounding resource development. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states "Indigenous people and their communities ... have a vital role in environment management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture, and interests, and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development. This development should improve the quality of life for all the world's people."

### REFLECTION

As you learned in Chapter Two, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have traditional political, economic, social, and spiritual ways of life that ensured people lived harmoniously with the environment. Find and learn a story from a local Aboriginal group's oral tradition that communicates a sustainable practice.

## RESOLVING RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CONFLICTS

How have conflicts over natural resources emerged and been resolved?

### WHAT TO DO

1. Working in groups of three, select a case study about conflict between indigenous peoples and natural resource development. Suggestions include the
  - Boruca Hydroelectric Project (Costa Rica)
  - El Desquite Mine Project (Argentina)
  - Upper Baram Timber Project (Malaysia)
  - Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Botswana)
  - Texaco/Petroecuador (Ecuador)
2. Using the Internet and the library, read about the nature of the conflict, its cause, how it was resolved (or not resolved), and strategies, if any, that have been developed to avoid future problems.
3. What does the conflict reveal about attitudes towards natural resources and indigenous peoples?
4. Write a final report that includes
  - a cover page and title
  - a table of contents
  - a map
  - the cause of the conflict and different perspectives on it
  - a timeline of major events
  - how the conflict was resolved or why the conflict was not resolved
  - the impact of the conflict or resolution
  - an analysis of the outcome, and your group's recommendation, if possible, for an improved process for resolution
  - at least one connection to a Canadian example of natural resource management conflicts
5. Use a computer to prepare your final report.



*This bulldozer is in the Wichi community of Hoktek T'oi, Salta Province, Argentina. It has invaded the village cemetery, just one incident of damage in the region caused by careless clear-cutting in the rainforest. How is a bulldozer symbolic of the approach often taken by governments and companies towards indigenous peoples' rights? What symbol would you suggest to demonstrate a better approach? Use this symbol on the cover page of your report.*

### LOOKING BACK

How does sustainable development fit within traditional indigenous peoples' worldviews? How is it a significant goal for natural resource development? Name and describe at least three examples of natural resource development and how it affects indigenous peoples.

## The United Nations

### AS YOU READ

The United Nations is an independent international body. It sets standards for relationships among nations and between governments and their people. As you read, consider how the United Nations has supported indigenous peoples' struggles for human rights, economic development, cultural preservation, and self-determination. Why would indigenous groups, such as the Quebec Cree, turn to the United Nations for help? What values does the United Nations try to balance? How successful do you think the United Nations has been at ending injustices?

THE FIRST TIME THE JAMES BAY CREE ASKED THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) FOR ASSISTANCE WAS IN 1981. NINE CHILDREN HAD DIED THE PREVIOUS YEAR FROM DISEASES RELATED TO A CONTAMINATED WATER SUPPLY, PRIMARILY

- because Canada and Quebec had failed to provide medical and sanitation services as required by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.
- Canada began to uphold its treaty responsibilities soon afterwards, but Quebec did not.

Every paragraph of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is based on an abuse of human rights that the indigenous peoples have experienced. The Declaration proposes remedies in the form of human-rights standards. These are not theoretical. We knew from bitter experience what needed to be in the draft.

— Chief Ted Moses, ambassador to the United Nations for the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec)



Ted Moses

In 1985, the year Phase I of the James Bay Project was completed, the Cree presented a submission to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The submission described their experiences — how the altered environment had damaged their traditional lifestyle — as a caution to others.

Cree people from Quebec returned to the UN again in 1991, when Quebec's separation from Canada appeared likely. In their brief to the UN, the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec) argued forcefully that they had a right to self-determination under international law. If Quebec has a right to separate from Canada, they argued, then the Cree have the same right to keep their territory in Canada. The Cree asserted that they are citizens of Canada and are bound to the country by terms of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

In 1998, after assessing Canada's record, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights found Canada to be in violation of its international obligations regarding the rights of First Nations. In 1999, the UN Human Rights Committee separately made a similar finding. Canada responded with a commitment to end its "practice of extinguishment," meaning policies that freeze Aboriginal rights, deny future recognition of those rights, and deny Aboriginal access to courts to assert those rights.

## THE ORIGINS AND POWERS OF THE UN

The United Nations (UN) was established in 1945 to solve international disputes that threaten world peace and security. Today, it often plays a global peacekeeping role. In 2003, UN peacekeepers, with their distinctive blue headgear, had a presence in ninety-four countries.

As well helping to maintain peace and security, the United Nations works to protect human rights, to protect the environment, to help the advancement of women and the rights of children, and to fight epidemics, famine, and poverty. It assists refugees, delivers food aid, combats disease, helps expand food production, makes loans to developing countries, and helps stabilize financial markets.

Almost all of the countries in the world today — 191 out of 193 or 194, depending on the criteria used to count — belong to the United Nations. When a country becomes a member, it agrees to accept the obligations of the UN Charter, an international treaty that sets out basic principles of international relations. The charter lists the four main purposes of the United Nations:

- to maintain international peace and security
- to develop friendly relations among nations
- to co-operate in solving international problems and promote human rights
- to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of all nations

The United Nations is not a world government and it does not make laws. It does provide a forum

Education is an essential human right, a force for social change — and the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Education is a path towards international peace and security.

— United Nations, *The State of the World's Children* (1999)

and process to resolve conflicts and make policies on matters that affect the world's people. While UN committees cannot force a member country to change its laws, they can exert considerable pressure on governments.

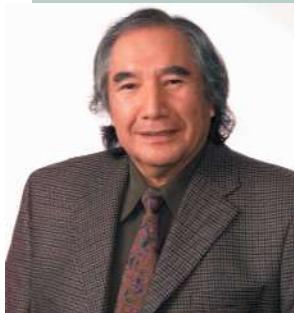
Public condemnation voiced in UN decisions is an embarrassment to a country such as Canada, which has long prided itself on being a champion of international human rights. In addition to the cases involving the Cree in Quebec, Canada has been found in violation of Aboriginal peoples' rights several other times. For example, in 1990, the UN Human Rights Committee concluded that Alberta's expropriation of Lubicon Lake Cree lands for private oil and gas company leases violated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a UN agreement regarding human rights.



The year 1977 was pivotal for Aboriginal rights in Canada. Sandra Lovelace's appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Committee helped prompt an amendment to the Indian Act in 1985 (Bill C-31). Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was pivotal to her case. What does this article state? Research and evaluate the United Nations's role in this case.



## PROFILE



Leroy Little Bear

### LEROY LITTLE BEAR

#### Kainai First Nation

"If you think provincial government moves slowly, you should try working at the international level," says Leroy Little Bear of his involvement with indigenous groups working for human rights through the United Nations.

But the wait is worth it, according to the Native American Studies professor. He is gratified to see years of meetings, conventions, and resolution-making paying off.

"Twenty years ago, there would have been no talk of protecting indigenous peoples' rights and knowledge at the global level, but there is now," Little Bear explains. "Within the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, for example, there is a section that specifically speaks to protection of indigenous knowledge related to the environment."

A graduate of the University of Lethbridge, Little Bear has held Professor Emeritus status there since his official retirement in 1997. This status means he keeps his title of professor in honour of his contributions to the institution. He continues to teach and mentor university students and to act as an advisor to government. The accomplished academic has co-authored three books and taught at Harvard University.

Little Bear is now interested in connections between North American Aboriginal peoples' science and Western physics. He became fascinated with the subject after working with a group of Aboriginal traditionalists and senior scientists, who compared similarities and differences between Western science and indigenous cultures and worldviews.

"At face value, Western concepts of physics, for example, differ greatly from those of our culture. But enter into the subject at the level of quantum mechanics, and you notice more and more similarities," Little Bear explains. He explores Blackfoot knowledge through its oral tradition. Blackfoot stories and songs referring to the "magical" manipulation of time, space, and matter become more practical and less mystical the deeper you go, he says.

"As we connect with these ways of knowing, which our ancestors used for centuries, we move towards sustainable existence and away from the illusion that so much of modern society is based on," Little Bear concludes.

#### REFLECTION

1. Aboriginal people's traditional knowledge is considered a collective right. The knowledge is owned by no individual, but is property of an entire nation, including past, present, and future members of that nation. The right to manage the uses to which this knowledge is put is an intellectual property right. Many world indigenous peoples are working together to ensure that the intellectual property of their people is protected as carefully as their traditional lands. Visit the United Nations Web site at [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) and visit the Cyberschoolbus site to learn more about this topic.
2. What is quantum mechanics? Research how this field of physics is related to traditional First Nations worldviews and oral traditions.

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE UN

Only countries have voting rights at the United Nations (UN), but the UN recognizes that other groups have interests in the issues it deals with. The UN therefore recognizes many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs can attend meetings and present their views. Among many other Aboriginal organizations, the Métis National Council has NGO status, which can help the organization influence UN decisions.

Indigenous peoples have often turned to the United Nations for legal recognition and political support. After initially focusing on human rights, indigenous people now participate in international conferences concerning the environment, development, and population.

Since the 1970s, indigenous issues have formed a larger part of the UN agenda. In the 1980s, a working group suggested that the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples be dealt with on a continuing basis under a separate, high-level, permanent UN body. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established in 1982, leading to some of the largest human rights meetings ever held by the United Nations.

In 1985, the Working Group began drafting a declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples. In 1993, it completed a draft document, the most comprehensive statement of such collective rights ever developed. More than 100 indigenous peoples' organizations participated in the Working Group.

In an attempt to increase global awareness about indigenous peoples'



*United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (centre left) stands with participants at the third session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Annan's opening speech said that indigenous peoples had made much progress over the last decade, but continued to suffer discrimination and other human rights violations.*

rights, both among indigenous peoples and the rest of the world's citizens, the United Nations declared 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. Continuing this effort, the United Nations then announced the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, beginning December 10, 1994.

In 2000, the UN established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which acts as an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council regarding indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights.

### LOOKING BACK

Write down the four main purposes of the United Nations. With a partner, review this section to find examples of activities that fulfill these purposes. List United Nations endeavours that work specifically on behalf of indigenous peoples. Write a review of the United Nations Web site as a source of information for indigenous students around the world.

## Aboriginal Youth and Education

### AS YOU READ

The United Nations pursues many health and education programs to ensure the well being of young people around the world. In most cultures, young people are valued for the future they represent. Societies try to secure that future by investing in young people's knowledge and skills. Education provides access to economic, political, and social power.

To be effective, education must be relevant to the needs and situation of students. It must also be a life-long process. As you read this section, think about the importance of education as a means to achieving self-determination.

CHARLES NELSON PERKINS WAS BORN AT THE ALICE SPRINGS TELEGRAPH STATION ABORIGINAL RESERVE, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA, ON JUNE 16, 1936. OF ARRERNT AND KALKADOON DESCENT, HE WAS A NON-PERSON

according to the Australian government. Section 127 of the Australian Constitution (repealed in 1967) stated "In reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted."

When he was ten, he was taken from his home — as were almost all Aboriginal children over a period of almost 100 years. He was sent to a mission school for Aboriginal boys in Adelaide. He remembers his grandmother as a face behind a wire



*Charles Perkins, pictured here in the 1960s, became a leading Aboriginal rights leader in Australia. What qualities and experiences do you think drive a person like Perkins to become a leader? What would drive you to stand up for what you believe in?*

fence. She made trips to the school to try to speak to him in his own language, only to be shooed away by a mission manager.

Technical school training prepared Perkins to become a machinist, but fate intervened. When he was sixteen, he was spotted playing soccer by the English first-division club Everton, which offered him a place on the team. In England, he discovered how much better life could be outside Australia's systematic racism. Though he was later invited to try out for Manchester United, he chose to return to Australia in 1959.

At the age of twenty-three, he became an Aboriginal rights activist. The Freedom Rides through rural New South Wales in 1966 were among his most famous efforts. Modelled after African American Freedom Rides, this bus tour of student protestors sparked international awareness of the problems of Aboriginal people in Australia. Like African Americans, Aboriginal Australians were banned by law from public places such as washrooms, swimming pools, cinemas, and shops. The Freedom Rides are often cited as the most significant act in Australia's race relations during the twentieth century.

Named Aborigine of the Year in 1993 and awarded the Order of Australia for his work on behalf of indigenous people, Perkins's legacy includes the Aboriginal embassy, a tent he helped build in 1972 on the lawns of Australia's former parliament house. The tent remains there today, protected under heritage laws.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Perkins was the first Australian Aboriginal person to graduate from university. In 2000, thirty-five years after he completed his arts degree, the University of Sydney awarded him an honorary doctor of laws.

In contrast, many of the world's children leave school before grade five. One hundred and thirty million children worldwide — two-thirds of them girls — have no access to education. A disproportionate number of them are indigenous people.

In 2001, only 17 per cent of indigenous Australians had a high school education. They were more

than twice as likely as non-indigenous students to leave high school before graduating. Fewer than half of indigenous teenagers were attending educational institutions, compared to 75 per cent of non-indigenous teenagers. Canada's picture in this regard is improving. Of working-age Aboriginal people, 61 per cent had high school diplomas or better in 2001, up from 55 per cent in 1996.

Education has a direct impact on employment. In 1991, 84 per cent of Aboriginal Canadians with university degrees were working, compared to 52 per cent of Aboriginal people overall. But education is more than a path to a good job. The

## ABORIGINAL YOUTH WORKING ABROAD

The Native Law Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, in co-operation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, offers international internships for Aboriginal young people from Canada to work in other countries with institutions that serve the needs of indigenous peoples. The focus of this program, called Young Professionals International, is giving indigenous peoples the chance to learn from each other.

Jonathan Breaker was one of these interns. He went from the Siksika First Nation in Alberta to Paris, France, to work for UNESCO. His project involved work with sustainable development issues among indigenous peoples — preserving indigenous culture and language, conserving the environment, and reducing poverty. All these goals were pursued through programs integrating the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Adrienne Edmunds, an Inuk from Labrador, worked for the New South Wales government in Australia to research Canadian and Australian indigenous social justice issues, and to compare contemporary and historical policies of the governments of both countries. Her experiences abroad increased her empathy, sensitivity, and appreciation for cultural differences.

Bev Lafond is from the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in the Treaty Six territory in Saskatchewan. Her placement allowed her to work with the Human Rights Commission of New Zealand. She knew about issues affecting First Nations people in Canada, and wanted to see if new initiatives or developments in other countries could be adapted for her own community. Part of her job was to share information on First Nations initiatives and development in Canada.

### REFLECTION

Write a paragraph describing an international internship for yourself. Explain which country you would like to visit and what kind of work you would like to pursue.



The Bigstone Cree Nation is just one of many Alberta communities that makes sure its school programs are relevant and meaningful for Aboriginal students. Here Elder Bill Sewepagaham teaches students about drumming and singing.



Young girls in Kabul, Afghanistan, are shown here in 2003 attending school for the first time in five years. Why do girls in some countries have problems accessing education?



Canada's first accredited Aboriginal-run university, First Nations University of Canada, was launched in 2003. Formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, which opened in 1976, First Nations University has campuses in Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Regina. It is "dedicated to promoting and expanding Aboriginal knowledge in teaching, research, and service."

- ➊ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) declares that education "is the foundation of a free and fulfilled life" — a statement based on decades of research and experience.
- ➋ Knowledge is power. In an increasingly global community, the world's indigenous peoples are learning from each other and gaining from one another's triumphs. Indigenous Australians, for example, hold up Nunavut as a shining model

of Aboriginal self-government. First Nations in Canada cite an Australian case, *Mabo v. Queensland*, during court arguments for Aboriginal title.

Education helps people to see opportunities, to understand how to turn ideas into reality, and to play a part in making the world a better place, both locally and globally. It enables the world's indigenous peoples to bring their stories onto the world stage, where others will listen, care, and assist.

Many factors contribute to lower education rates for the world's indigenous peoples, including poverty, war, physical distance from facilities, and disease. What is taught in the classroom — and how — also plays a considerable role. Lessons that are relevant to students' lives and cultures, and taught in students' first languages, help make education more effective. Recognizing this, education systems around the world are slowly evolving to meet the needs of indigenous peoples.

## ENSURING CULTURAL FUTURES THROUGH EDUCATION

Around the world, a revolution in education is beginning, as governments and educators realize the importance of a new approach to teaching and learning — one designed to make classroom experiences more fulfilling and relevant, while equipping students with skills they will use throughout their lives. Approaches to learning systems vary around the world, reflecting local conditions and needs. The intent is to make education more effective for both children and society as a whole.

For example, the Yurrekaityarindi partnership in Australia involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their communities' education systems. Yurrekaityarindi are committees of indigenous people who work with local schools and educators to ensure that indigenous students are encouraged to excel in their studies. They also help students overcome challenges to learning.

Another Australian initiative is the Intelyape project, which developed Arrernte literacy materials with indigenous Australians in Alice Springs. The project has become a model for other countries creating bilingual programs based on local indigenous languages.

### How can education best serve the needs of Aboriginal youth?

#### WHAT TO DO

1. Research initiatives in education for indigenous youth in Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and Russia.
2. Compare these initiatives to the educational opportunities provided for Aboriginal youth in your community or province.
3. What is your ideal vision of education for Aboriginal youth in your community? What educational goals do you think are most important for Aboriginal youth today? Is cultural education an important part of the system you envision? Design a weekly school timetable that includes a description of each course and any special features of how it is taught. How will this education system help prepare Aboriginal youth for the future?

#### Thinking About Your Project

Besides formal education at school, how else can people learn about culture? In your opinion, how is culture best taught?



*These students at New Aiyansh, British Columbia, are part of a bilingual/bicultural education system developed by the Nisga'a Tribal Council (since the Nisga'a Treaty called the Nisga'a Lisims Government.) Its goal is to have students fully fluent in Nisga'a language and culture.*

#### LOOKING BACK

Why is education important to Aboriginal youth? How is it important to Aboriginal cultures? If you could do something to help your community, what would you most like to do? What kind of preparation, education, or experience would you need to achieve this goal?

## Chapter Seven Review

### Check Your Understanding

1. Define geopolitical. How have geopolitical boundaries created challenges for indigenous peoples?
2. Describe at least four cultural characteristics often found in indigenous cultures from around the world.
3. List common issues faced by indigenous peoples around the world.
4. Define ethnocentrism and explain how it has affected indigenous peoples.
5. Describe at least two examples of how ethnocentrism affected Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history.
6. How does the Ainu experience in Japan mirror First Nations experiences in Canada?
7. Why did colonizers sometimes separate indigenous children from their families?
8. How did the government's failure to address the dangers involved in mining uranium near Great Bear Lake reflect its attitudes towards the land and Aboriginal peoples?
9. In what ways does hydroelectric generation often conflict with Aboriginal views about natural resource management?
10. How can a natural resource extraction company demonstrate environmental responsibility? Give a specific example.
11. What is meant by sustainable development? Why is it important for indigenous peoples?
12. What are the four main purposes of the United Nations?
13. In what disputes was Canada found in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights? What happens when a country is found in violation of a United Nations agreement?

14. How has the United Nations responded to the increasing demand by indigenous peoples to have global representation?

### Reading and Writing

15. Create a chart to organize your ideas about the issues facing indigenous peoples around the world, and how (or whether) their issues have been addressed. Your chart could look something like this:

Name of Issue	Description of Issue	How Issue Has Been OR Could Be Resolved

16. How does the position of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compare to indigenous peoples in another country? Choose a specific group of indigenous people to study. Make your comparison based on factors such as education, health, language, self-government, and cultural continuity. Write an essay giving your opinion with evidence to support your ideas.

17. Consider the statement that follows:

Indigenous youth inherit the responsibility to protect and preserve their traditional lands, resources, and sacred sites upon which their cultural heritage and identity is based.

— United Nations, 2002

Write a paragraph or two about your response to this statement. Do you think this responsibility is fair and reasonable? Is your education preparing you to take this role? Include specific examples in your response.

18. Research human rights issues in your province and prepare a case study to present to your class.
19. In a small group, create a Web site educating others about indigenous people's intellectual property and their rights regarding this property.

### Speaking and Listening

20. Working with a partner, imagine that you are employed by a television-advertising agency and you have been asked to create an environmental commercial that will target an age group of sixteen to eighteen year olds. You have been told to use one of the quotations from this textbook somewhere in your commercial. Create a 30-second commercial that will address an environmental issue and reflect Aboriginal peoples' views about conservation and management of resources. Videotape your commercial and present it to the class.
21. Find a story from the oral tradition of an indigenous culture from outside North America. Learn the story and present it to your class. Along with your story, provide a brief overview of the culture and environment of the people who tell it.

### Going Further

22. Invite an Aboriginal person who has attended international meetings of indigenous peoples to your class to discuss his or her experiences. What did he or she learn that could benefit local communities?

23. One forum through which Aboriginal people in North America meet and network with other Aboriginal people is sporting events. Research the history of the Arctic Games, North American Indigenous Games, or Northern Games. Write a three-page history of the event and learn how to do one traditional game or event to teach other students in your class. As part of your instruction, give the history of the sport and mention records or achievements held by Aboriginal athletes in this event.

For example, the one-foot high kick, a traditional Inuit sport, requires participants to jump off the ground on two feet, kick the target (usually a rolled-up seal skin), and land on the foot that kicked the seal. Traditionally, Inuit sports helped hunters build their skills and strength, while reinforcing social ideals about fair play and respect for the land. Explain the benefits to Aboriginal youth of participating in such events in the past and today.



*At the 2004 Arctic Games, held in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Nunavut athlete Chris Merkosak competed in the one-foot high kick, a traditional Inuit sport. The junior male record was set in Fort McMurray by sixteen-year-old John Miller III, from Alaska, who kicked 2 metres, 87 centimetres.*

### LOOKING BACK

In an activity on page 8, in the first chapter of this book, you read a copy of the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Look back to that declaration now and reflect upon how much you have learned in this course about the rights of indigenous peoples. For as many of the clauses as you can, give a specific example that shows problems in the world today, or changes that have improved the lives of indigenous peoples.