

# Portugal's Position on Indigenous Affairs

## *United Nations General Assembly: Special Session on Indigenous Affairs*

With indigenous rights, Portugal is a highly progressive country. The indigenous (or more accurately, minority) populations of Portugal are nigh-completely integrated into portuguese society, while still maintaining their own individual cultures. While Portugal's "indigenous people" make up the majority of the population, there are several minorities which exist within Portugal. It is my personal assumption that the laws created in Portugal to ensure the rights of minority groups would also be viewed by the Portuguese to apply to indigenous peoples in general. Therefore, this paper is based off of estimations made by myself using current laws in Portugal.

The two most prominent minority Portuguese people are the Azoreans and Madeirans. There is a small number of other minorities, most notably Roma (or Gypsies) and Ukrainians. Portugal has effectively no major health problems within their minority populations, with these groups' suicide rates being equivalent to Portugal's national suicide rate. The same is true with general health-care, as well as mental health-care. It is considered important by the government of Portugal to ensure the wellbeing of minority groups in their country, and in 1996, the office of High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME) was created to monitor and research the issues of minority groups in Portugal. Among other things (which will be looked at later), ACIME is responsible for making sure that minority groups have reliable health-care and welfare systems. Largely due to this, all minorities in Portugal are very well "taken care of," to the same extent as the rest of Portugal's citizens. It would be a reasonable assumption that Portugal would desire for other countries to establish similar bodies to ensure the rights of indigenous people.

In regards to indigenous lands rights, Portugal has a good track record when it comes to minority groups maintaining their own lands. In fact, the two groups mentioned above, the Azoreans and Madeirans, each control an autonomous region of Portugal (islands not part of mainland Portugal, but considered part of the nation) where they work and live. These two regions have a noticeably positive influence on the Portuguese economy. Therefore, Portugal would suggest that other nations take similar actions, not only due to civil rights, but also due to the likely economic boost it would provide. In addition, Portugal finds that indigenous groups' lands are legally protected from seizure, and would condemn actions that contradict this issue. Portugal does not seemingly have a strong position when it comes to climate change and enviromental protection. Research in both of these areas is currently being undertaken, the results of which will likely determine Portugal's stance. As of now, Portugal is effectively neutral on the matter.

As mentioned earlier, Portugal is rather progressive in regards to minority rights, and has been for quite a while. The 1976 constitution of Portugal bans discrimination based on any of the following: ancestry, sex, race, age, disability, language, territory of origin, religion, political or ideological convictions, education, economic situation, social condition or sexual orientation, and any other reason. This is incredibly thorough. Due to these anti-discriminatory policies, Portugal has put into place many groups and officials to ensure the development of minority communities. Most townships within Portugal have set up counsels with local minority groups to ensure that their voice is being heard. In addition, the Ministry of Education has put a strong emphasis on ensuring reliable education within minority communities. ACIME, mentioned earlier, is likely the most important, and most influential, body within Portugal that monitors indigenous rights. ACIME works with minority groups to make sure their social infrastructure is sound, working alongside labor unions, social welfare groups, immigrant and minority associations, and government ministries to do so. Once again, Portugal would strongly recommend that countries create a similar body to ensure that minority groups and indigenous people are well represented.