

Delegation from
The State of Uruguay

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Position Paper for the United Nations General Assembly: Special Session on Indigenous Affairs

As a member of the UNGA Special Session on Indigenous Affairs, the State of Uruguay has been greatly committed on this issue as it voted *in favour of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* on September 13, 2007. The UN defines it clearly as “an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples that will undoubtedly be a significant tool towards eliminating human rights violations against the planet’s 370 million indigenous people and assisting them in combating discrimination and marginalisation.” State of Uruguay will cooperate and contribute in the finding of solutions when will be discussed the topics before the UNGA Special Session of Indigenous Affairs: *Indigenous Peoples, Healthcare, Mental Health, and Wellness, Indigenous Land Rights, Climate Change impacts and Environmental Protection of Resources, Indigenous Peoples, Poverty, and Development.*

1. Indigenous Peoples, Healthcare, Mental Health, and Wellness

There are approximately 40,000,000 indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to World Bank figures, 12.76% of the entire American population and around 40% of the rural population is indigenous. Several aspects, such as the access to very few health services, which leads to premature deaths, long-term health problems and more, expose indigenous peoples to experience poorer quality of life.

The State of Uruguay is not directly affected by this significant issue because of its very small indigenous population. Nonetheless, it has contributed as it voted *in favour of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, in which the article 24 mentions that “indigenous people have the right to traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices...” Access to proper healthcare including mental healthcare and other wellness services are basic human rights that the UNGA Special Session should promote with the collaboration of relevant NGOs and the World Health Organization.

2. Indigenous Land Rights, Climate Change impacts and Environmental Protection of Resources

In the last few years, the severity of the climate change issue has increased drastically. Nowadays, indigenous populations rely on subsistence economy. Consequently, they depend on wildlife and nature in order to survive and prosper. With the acceleration of climate change, ecosystems are vastly modified, so indigenous people's way of life is grandly affected. Therefore, land right is of a fundamental importance for indigenous peoples for many reasons as identity or economic factors, so the demand of ownership is to ensure their access to these resources.

The State of Uruguay has adopted the *Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development*, which affirms the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it guarantees the territorial rights of indigenous peoples.

3. Indigenous Peoples, Poverty, and Development

In Latin America, African descendants and indigenous peoples are more likely to face poverty and remain underrepresented amongst the poor. Afro-Uruguayans are a minority group living in Montevideo, which represents around 10% of the Uruguayan population. Economically, they are the poorest sector of Uruguayan society; unemployment is common amongst Afro-Uruguayans. Most are non-qualified workers employed in the construction industry, domestic service, or cleaning and porter services. Indeed, they have lower education levels, lower earnings and access to services.

Uruguay strongly commits itself to policies aimed to fight against racial discrimination and inequality with conferences against racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia. In 2003, an advisory Unit for Afro-Descendant Rights was created by the municipal government of Montevideo. Also, at the national level, President Tabaré Vazquez designated a presidential advisor for Afro-Uruguayan affairs and created programs for Afro-Uruguayan women and Afro-Uruguayan youth in the Ministry of Social Development. Therefore, Uruguay's policies on this issue are significantly progressive.