



# *The Delegation from Slovakia*



## **SSUNS 2016 Position Paper: Special Session on Indigenous Affairs**

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### **Topic 1: Indigenous Peoples, Healthcare, Mental Health, and Wellness**

Indigenous health is a major issue that has seen very little media attention until recently. With many reports of suicides in indigenous communities and lack of healthcare for indigenous people having large impact on these communities. Slovakia has been supporter of indigenous health rights for many years and has made major strides in making sure that they are not discriminated against when getting services like healthcare. Many countries have large healthcare discrimination problems. In Canada, a report released by the Health Council of Canada showed that aboriginal people in Canada face discrimination in areas like drug prescription.<sup>1</sup> Another large factor that plays into the health of indigenous people is poverty. Indigenous people living in bad living conditions are often more susceptible to illness and injury. An example of this is Panama, which has an infant mortality rate that is over three times higher than the national average with 60-85 deaths out of 1000 live births compared to the national average that is 17.6.<sup>2</sup> One of Panama's problems is its income distribution, which is the second worst in Latin America.<sup>3</sup> This income inequality can lead to inequality in regards to healthcare access. Almost all countries with a significant indigenous population have an indigenous infant mortality rate that is above the infant mortality rate of the total population. Indigenous communities also have large mental health problems. An example of this is Canada, which has a suicide rate in young Inuit men that is 28 times higher than the national average.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mehta, Diana. "Aboriginal Canadians Face Racism, Stereotyping in Urban Health Care: Report." *CTVNews*. N.p., 11 Dec. 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Health in the Americas*, Volume 1, 2002 Edition, Pan American Health Organization, p.181.

<sup>3</sup> "The World Factbook: PANAMA." *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> "The Facts." *Mental Health Commission of Canada*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

In 1998 Slovakia created a Council for Minorities and Ethnic Groups, which is an advisory body that consists of government officials and representatives from 15 minority groups.<sup>5</sup> This allows minority communities to connect with government on issues that include fair treatment for healthcare. However, Slovakia does not have a significant indigenous population so this council does not affect them as much. A council like this could be implemented in countries that have problems with indigenous people's rights. In 2004 Slovakia put in place an anti-discrimination act that banned discrimination on the basis of sex, race, nationality or ethnicity in areas including employment, provision of government benefits, healthcare, and education. This act also authorized the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (SNSLP) to represent people claiming discrimination.<sup>6</sup> Having a system that allows indigenous people to get fair representation when they are impacted with discrimination is very important to improving equality when it comes to healthcare. UN member nations should focus on investing in hospitals and support centers to make sure that indigenous communities have access to healthcare locally, but indigenous communities should get a say in the allocation of resources in their areas. Having specific councils in governments that have indigenous and government representatives is a great way to organize this.

## **Topic 2: Indigenous Land Rights, Climate Change impacts and Environmental Protection of Resources**

Indigenous communities' ability to control land is very important for their people because it gives them some form of self-governance. Indigenous people have been oppressed before, which is why being able to self-govern and control some land is a big deal for these communities. In 2007 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the assembly by a vote of 143 in favor and 4 against. The text is not legally binding and is more of an aspirational document that member nations should strive to achieve. It involves Indigenous land rights and the need for indigenous peoples to have a say in matters that concern them. Slovakia voted in favor of this act, with our delegate (Dusan Matulay) saying that his delegation welcomed the declaration in principle, using it as a tool to protect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples at the international and national level, however Slovakia did not support the declaration's distinction between collective and individual rights.<sup>7</sup> When looking at land control we also have to think about the impact that climate change has on Indigenous people's ability

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<sup>5</sup> "Refworld | World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Slovakia." *Refworld*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> "Slovakia - Minority Rights Group." *Minority Rights Group International*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>7</sup> UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, [United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

to self-govern because of the effects on their food supply and economy. Climate change can also cause conflict over land because of Indigenous people's need for food and other necessities. Conservation is also a very important issue as the land rights of indigenous people are sometimes ignored by governments in the name of conservation. Allowing them to keep their land rights while working with them on conservation will be very important to this issue.

To help solve problems like the effects of climate change in indigenous communities, fair representation of those peoples in individual countries will be a necessity to make sure that more than one side is represented. Slovakia has already established a Council for Minorities and Ethnic Groups as a way for minorities to be represented in discussion on issues like the effects of climate change. Expanding on Slovakia's council is a great way to give indigenous communities and indigenous NGOs more of an input for deciding what happens with legislature that passes and distribution of aid resources in indigenous land. While government resources should be used to help indigenous communities economically, the delegation from Slovakia understands that some countries do not have the resources to provide this aid. That is why global investment into indigenous rights and aid programs, especially in countries that do not have the resources to provide aid to indigenous communities most effected by climate change.

### **Topic 3: Indigenous Peoples, Poverty, and Development**

Poverty in indigenous communities is rampant, with lack of funding for schools in indigenous communities, problems with food security and many indigenous people living in crowded and often dangerous housing conditions. In Latin America, the poverty rate for the indigenous population is on average twice as high. The gap between the poverty rate of indigenous people and the rest of the population is not getting smaller. In fact, in some cases it seems to be widening.<sup>8</sup> Without urgent action the indigenous population of countries in places like Latin America will be left behind without any real chance of recovering. Countries often neglect indigenous communities when going

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<sup>8</sup> González, Oscar. "Why Are Indigenous Peoples More Likely to Be Poor?" *The Data Blog*. N.p., 17 Feb. 2016. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

forward with funding cuts that are used to cut into debt. This makes indigenous communities lack the resources to solve parts of their poverty problem. With the constantly evolving problem of climate change wreaking havoc on those communities, it is imperative that we find a solution for indigenous poverty before it is too late to help. One of the main reasons that the indigenous community has such a large poverty problem is the lack of education in those communities. Even though Canada is a fairly wealthy country it still has many problems with educating members of the indigenous community with only 28.9 percent of aboriginal people between the ages 25 to 64 having no certificate, diploma or degree, while the proportion of non-aboriginals in the same age group was 12.1 percent.<sup>9</sup> This shows the inequality that aboriginals are facing with education. The schools in their areas also tend to lack school supplies and proper safety procedures. This leads to more poverty problems, as it becomes harder for members of the indigenous community to find jobs.

Giving schools in indigenous communities' general location more funding for school supplies is vital for helping these communities close the gap in education along with the creation of more schools to increase the number of children able to attend. In Slovakia, the anti-discrimination act bans discrimination in regards to education and employment, which is something that needs to be expanded on in Slovakia and in other nations with significant indigenous populations. This act requires education to be accessible by these communities, but more funding for those schools are required. To insure that indigenous communities are represented in talks about funding cuts for countries in high amounts of debt the indigenous community representatives will have to be required for talks on funding cuts whenever it directly effects their communities. Poverty reduction strategies are hard to put in practice because of countries that lack proper resources. Slovakia is an example of a country lacks the resources to help reduce poverty in indigenous communities. Slovakia was the second poorest member of the European Union in 2011 and needs to focus on the general population and not just a specialized group.<sup>10</sup> The delegation of Slovakia calls for further global investment in poverty reduction strategies and education, as many nations like Slovakia do not have the resources available to help those communities.

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<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, Mark. "Some Statistics on Indigenous Canadians." *Ottawa Citizen*. N.p., 14 Dec. 2015. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Slovakia Facts: Eurozone's Second Poorest Member." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

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