History of Indigenous Affairs

The Indigenous peoples around the world have a long history of being mistreated by the government and other people within their country, and still do today. The indigenous populations throughout the world do not have access to the education, land, economic stability, and resources that one would need in order to live in a stable environment. Furthermore, Indigenous populations have almost no say in government decisions, and are therefore, in most cases, forgotten. This also means that being isolated and without proper living conditions, the mental health of a fair amount of indigenous people is poor. The suicide rates amongst indigenous people are much higher than that of non-indigenous people, and are continuing to increase. And the lack of medical resources mean that indigenous population is more susceptible to diseases such as tuberculosis. One of the reasons for the high illness rate is that the women, who are supposed to be the primary caretakers for their family, have a particularly poor education, and have little to no knowledge when it comes to common illnesses. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by a majority of 143 states in favor. Only 4 votes against were cast, and 11 abstentions. Singapore was one of the countries that backed this declaration.

Singapore’s History with Indigenous Affairs

The indigenous population in Singapore are the Malays, and they were the first inhabitants of the region. There are over 600,000 Malays in Singapore, which accounts for 13.6% of the population. Upon the arrival of the British, they deemed the Malays to be loyal and reliable, and British authorities gave them many jobs in police service, armed forces, and lower levels of the public sector. However when Singapore declared independence, most of the Malays’ jobs were taken away and given to the chinese. Today, the Malays are underrepresented in areas such as political or civil service positions, as well as in the police and armed forces. Article 152 of the Singapore constitution recognizes the Malays as the indigenous population, and states that it is the government’s responsibility to ‘protect, safeguard, support, foster, and promote the political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language. Singapore has also voted for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which helps to move forward the progress that needs to be made.

Proposed Solutions

Singapore’s Article 152 allows the indigenous people of Singapore to get supports from the government, and is trying to protect the Malay population altogether. Singapore’s hope is for a colorblind nation, in which the Malays receive no discrimination. In order to assure that there is minority representation in parliament, the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) was put into place in 1988. This requires political parties to field at least one minority candidate per GRC team. In the 1990’s, many ethnic based self-help groups were established, such as the Singapore Indian Development Association (Sinda). Singapore has many other laws that are coming into place in order to further protect and support the Malays, and would like to continue to pursue a world without discrimination against indigenous populations.