

Dear Delegates,

It is with utmost pleasure to welcome you to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII). My name is Albert Chen, and I am so excited to serve as your chair for UGA's 27th Model United Nations Conference. I am a current second-year from Marietta, Georgia majoring in International Affairs, Finance, and International Business with minors in Music and Chinese. In addition to Model UN, I am a violist in UGA's Symphony Orchestra and a member of Apollo Business Society. I am a huge Taylor Swift fan (stream any of her albums, I'm not elitist), but I also appreciate the masterpiece that is Carly Rae Jepsen's second studio album, *Emotion*. In my free time, I really enjoy playing tennis, rock climbing, or hanging out with my friends. I am also an avid watcher of the Bachelor *and* the Bachelorette. Model UN has played a huge part in shaping who I am today, and the UGA Model UN team has given me a better community than I could ever ask for. I have grown to love and value what Model UN can teach delegates: leadership, teamwork, and public speaking.

I hope that you, the delegate, will compete to the best of your ability and prepare adequately. Please note that this background guide is meant to give you a foundation for further research, rather than an all-encompassing reference for your preparation. That being said, I would like to also note that this committee will at times discuss politically sensitive topics. Thus, I hope that you will carry yourself with the highest level of professionalism and debate respectfully and responsibly. Additionally, as delegates of your country, I expect that the scope of your position papers and your proposed strategies in debate are in line with the views of your country. Delegates should consider the history, politics, culture, and the demographics of the country which they represent, even if you do not personally agree with these views. The PFII seeks to put forth resolutions that address the three important problems relating to the international community.

I would like to remind the delegates that each nation is equally important in drafting resolutions, so please remember that when preparing for the conference. I am specifically looking for cooperation and efforts to give each nation a voice rather than one or two nations leading a block. At the beginning of the conference, I will review parliamentary procedure, but I urge you to review UGAMUNC rules and procedures on our website: ugamunc.com. If you have any questions or concerns prior to the committee, my email is azc81952@uga.edu. I am happy to answer any and all questions you may have. I am looking forward to a great committee and weekend! Please submit your completed position papers (1 page per topic) to me by **11:59PM, January 29th**, and cite your sources using footnotes. I am hoping to find specific, well thought out solutions to the topics listed and any past action your country may have done. Thank you so much, and I am looking forward to meeting you all!

Albert

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1 What is the PFII?

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) is an advisory body within the UN that reports to the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). PFII was founded in 2000 and deals with matters concerning the rights of the world's indigenous peoples. "Indigenous" in this context means native, original, first people, and aboriginal people. It is this committee's responsibility to provide expert advice to ECOSOC about various topics under its purview; raise awareness of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; and disseminate information on indigenous issues.¹

The PFII is composed of sixteen independent experts. Eight of these members are nominated by Indigenous Peoples Organizations and the other eight are nominated by governments. While PFII is a smaller committee size, it still seeks to cover issues in all regions as the government nominated experts are based on the five regional groupings normally used in the UN²

It is vital to be aware that the PFII reports directly to ECOSOC and not the UN General Assembly or UN Security Council. Also, please keep in mind the central missions of providing expert advice and disseminating information.

The PFII fills an important niche in the international community, giving a voice to indigenous peoples who are largely ignored when selecting government offices or representatives to the UN. Its focus on topics that are largely ignored by other UN bodies makes it one of the few lines of defense that indigenous groups have from losing their identity to globalization and other countries' expansions. Because it is one of the only bodies that adequately reports indigenous issues, it covers multiple aspects of indigenous peoples, ranging from human rights violations to economic issues. However, because no member of this committee is a member of an indigenous group, be aware of what actions your resolution may include. I look forward to seeing you debate these multifaceted topics.

¹ "Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues For Indigenous Peoples," accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us/permanent-forum-on-indigenous-issues.html>.

² Ibid.

2 Topic A: The Xinjiang Conflict

2.1 Introduction:

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) region (Figure 1) is in the northwest corner of China with a majority Uyghur population. It is China's largest province and provides several strategic advantages being rich in natural resources and sharing borders with eight other countries.⁴ The Uyghur population established a kingdom in present-day north-central Mongolia and are mentioned in Chinese records as early as the 3rd century CE. In the 1950s, large populations of Han Chinese began moving into the Xinjiang territory. Tensions rose between the Uyghur and Han Chinese populations and escalated into protests and disturbances. Violent incidents increased, and Chinese authorities began responding with shootings, arrests, and jail sentences until 2017, when the Chinese government set up cameras, checkpoints, and police patrols in Uyghur-populated areas. The Chinese government has also reportedly placed one million Uyghurs into indefinite detention into re-education centers.⁵



Figure 1: Xinjiang Map³

This committee is concerned with the potential human rights violations against the Uyghurs that may be occurring within the Xinjiang Conflict. The committee will need to balance national sovereignty rights alongside the responsibility to protect indigenous populations.

2.2 Topic Background

The Uyghur population in the Xinjiang province is a remainder of the Uyghur Empire from the eighth century. The Uyghur majority is largely Sunni Muslim, a far cry from the non-religious Han Chinese. For a brief period after 1864, Xinjiang was to break away from China while it was weakened by other conflicts. However, Chinese control was reasserted in 1877. The Chinese Government put heavy taxes on the Uyghur populations to finance Han Chinese migration and settlement into the best land in the province.⁶

In 1949, Uyghur leaders were invited to speak with Mao Zedong about Uyghur independence which was promised in exchange for them supporting the Communists in the civil war, but the plane crashed on its way to Beijing. The region later took shape on October 1, 1955 as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. However, tensions continued to rise as Chinese Communist officials began to favor the Han Chinese.⁷ The Han Chinese are said to be given the best jobs the majority do well economically.⁸

⁴“Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues For Indigenous Peoples,” accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us/permanent-forum-on-indigenous-issues.html>.

⁵“Uighur,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Uighur>.

⁶United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - China : Uyghurs,” Refworld, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49749d3c4b.html>.

⁷United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - China : Uyghurs,” Refworld, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49749d3c4b.html>.

⁸“Why Is There Tension between China and the Uighurs?,” BBC News (BBC, September 26, 2014), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-26414014>.

In 1962, 60,000 to 100,000 Uyghurs fled the country to avoid repression and famine from the Great Leap Forward. The Chinese Government also began imposing restrictions on Uyghur religious and cultural practices as well as began seizing land. Student demonstrations and riots arose in the 1980s to oppose the Han migration. In 1990, the Baren Township riot resulted in at least 50 people being killed. These protests further escalated into bombing incidents as well as attacks against Chinese soldiers and officials.⁹

After the Chinese execution of 30 suspected separatists, large demonstrations occurred in February 1997. Chinese media called these demonstrations “violent riots”¹⁰ whereas western news outlets characterized them as peaceful.¹¹ This culminated in the Ghulja Incident, where the Chinese army crackdown led to at least nine deaths.¹² Conflicts have continued to escalate, and Uyghur separatists claimed responsibilities for bus bombings in Beijing.¹³

Following China’s secondary crackdown before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the number of violent incidents and attacks have only increased, including a plane hijacking in 2012, a knife attack in 2013, and a bombing in 2014. China has blamed the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for multiple violent incidents, a group which the United States classifies as “the most militant of the ethnic Uyghur separatist groups.”¹⁴

In 2017, President Xi Jinping set up Xinjiang Re-education camps to indoctrinate Uyghurs and other Muslims as part of a “people’s war on terror” The Chinese Government has also began to “treat expressions of Uyghur identity... as one of the three evil forces”. There is very little information about these facilities, and the number of people held in them varies between 2000 to 5000.¹⁵ Detainees are not released until total ideological transformation. This includes renouncement of their religion, forced learning of the Mandarin language, and promoting repentance.¹⁶ There is no official knowledge on other punishments being used.

2.3 UN Action

There has been little official action by the UN on this topic until recently. The establishment of the political re-education centers has made the UN more aware of the Xinjiang Conflict. Nearly two dozen countries confronted China at the United Nations in October 2019. A group of 23 countries released a statement to the UN General Assembly the Third, condemning the actions of the Chinese government, but nearly 50 countries supporting China sought to “commend China’s remarkable achievements in the field of human rights.”¹⁷ Because this issue was only brought to the General Assembly in late 2019, there has been little opportunity for further debate of this topic. It is up to this committee to debate and determine the UNPFII stance on the Xinjiang Conflict.

⁹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - China : Uyghurs,” Refworld, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49749d3c4b.html>.

¹⁰“Xinjiang to Intensify Crackdown on Separatists,” Global Edition, accessed October 20, 2020, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2001-10/25/content_90592.htm.

¹¹“CHINA: REMEMBER THE GULJA MASSACRE? CHINA’S CRACKDOWN ON PEACEFUL PROTESTERS,” Amnesty International, 2007, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/002/2007/en/>.

¹²“China: Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang,” China: Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang (Human Rights Watch Backgrounder, October 17, 2001), 2001, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck1017.htm>.

¹³Rémi Castets, “The Uyghurs in Xinjiang – The Malaise Grows,” China Perspectives (French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, July 31, 2006), <https://journals.openedition.org/chin perspectives/648>.

¹⁴“Why Is There Tension between China and the Uighurs?,” BBC News (BBC, September 26, 2014), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-26414014>.

¹⁵“China: Free Xinjiang ‘Political Education’ Detainees,” Human Rights Watch, October 20, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/10/china-free-xinjiang-political-education-detainees>.

¹⁶“Data Leak Reveals How China ‘Brainwashes’ Uighurs in Prison Camps,” BBC News (BBC, November 24, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063>.

¹⁷“Countries Blast China at UN Over Xinjiang Abuses,” Human Rights Watch, October 20, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/30/countries-blast-china-un-over-xinjiang-abuses>.

2.4 Current Situation

China has continually justified its stance and its actions through its euphemistic naming of its re-education centers and saying the violent actions of the ETIM warrant an equally violent response. Testimonies from survivors paint these camps as internment camps or prisons. This is especially of concern as the COVID-19 pandemic still rages on.

Without any proper protective gear, hygienic facilities, or social distancing, COVID-19 could easily tear through the Uyghur communities. There has been virtually no information on the real figure of COVID-19 in Uyghur communities.¹⁸

The harsh treatment of the Uyghurs has not stopped, but only escalated in recent years. However, the number of violent attacks from Uyghur separatist groups has dropped to almost zero. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues must carefully discuss and debate the issues at hand. Violence should be reduced as much as possible through a resolution that is passed in committee.

2.5 Relevant Vocabulary/Notes

- **Uyghur/Uighur:** Both spellings are accepted, but for this committee and conference, please use “Uyghur”.¹⁹ There is contention on whether or not the Uyghurs are truly indigenous. The final decision will be up to the committee, but for the sake of opening debate, we will assume that this topic falls under the purview of the PFII.
- **Responsibility to Protect:** An international norm that affirms the responsibility of states to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.²⁰
- **Uyghur-Chinese Conflict and Xinjiang Conflict are synonymous.**

2.6 Questions to Consider:

- Do the violent attacks from Uyghur separatist groups count as domestic terrorism/ terrorist attacks?
- Has China violated human rights by establishing their re-education centers?
- Is the violent response by Chinese Authorities to the violent protests reasonable? Reflect upon your own country’s history in dealing with violent protests.
- Should some groups of the Uyghur separatist movement be punished for their violent actions?
- What is the best way to de-escalate the conflict and negotiate peace between the two parties? Consider the 1949 plane crash.

2.7 Suggested Readings:

- A timeline and good overview of the Uyghur Crisis.
- A summary of a Stanford Panel on the Xinjiang Crisis
- More info on the Political Re-education Centers
- Article on forced Uyghur Labor
- Article on some extreme punishments being issued

¹⁸Vaishnavi C Chaudhry, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Uighur Muslims: An Ignored Crisis,” LSE Human Rights, July 13, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2020/04/23/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-uighur-muslims-an-ignored-crisis/>.

¹⁹“Uighur,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Uighur>.

²⁰“The Responsibility to Protect,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect>.

3 Topic B: The Kurdish Stateless Nation

3.1 Introduction

The Kurdish people are a stateless ethnic group of approximately 30 million located in parts of northern Syria, north-western Iran, eastern Turkey and northern Iraq (Figure 2). On a global scale, the group is known for its cultural diversity that spreads across the four states it inhabits. However, the Kurds have been persecuted as they are an ethnic minority in the states of which they reside. Over the years, tens of thousands of Kurds have been killed in genocides in Syria, faced political oppression in Iraq, and currently are at odds with the Turkish government. Since before World War I, the Kurds have been pushing for the declaration of autonomy and statehood, with little to no conclusion in sight. In addition to numerous refugees and destruction of civilian lives, these conflicts are putting Kurdish culture at risk. The issues of preserving the history of this ethnic group and addressing their countless calls for independence, while also keeping the lives of the displaced people safe must be addressed by this committee.



Figure 2: The Kurdish Project Map²¹

3.2 Topic Background

The Kurds originated between the contending empires of the Ottomans and the Persians for centuries.²² Though the two empires were divided by the natural barrier of the Zagros Mountains, the Kurds had access to both and thus formed their own distinct language, history and culture. After assisting the Ottomans in defeating the Persians, the Kurds were offered self-governance in the region for approximately 300 years until the Kurds asked for full independence and were rejected.²³ Following World War 1, the Treaty of Sevres both ended the Ottoman Empire and proposed an independent Kurdish State. This proposition was also rejected, and the Kurdish people were given some limited autonomy in the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.²⁴

About half of the Kurdish population lives in Turkey, where Kurdish culture and political actions are silenced by the Turkish government and with violent attempts to claim Kurdish equality in the nation.²⁵ This has led to the development of a separatist movement in the state that, while not fully supported by all Turkish Kurds, has gained some popularity in the region. Violence from this group's conflict with the Turkish government has subsequently created nearly 2 million refugees in the area.²⁶ Kurds living in the Persian Empire now live in modern day Iran where the Iranian government has been less aggressive to the Kurds, however they are still pushing for inclusion in the political system. Numerous opposition groups have formed in Iran, such as the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), who are using force against the Islamic Republic of Iran.²⁷ The state of Iraq initially showed more willingness to provide autonomy for the Kurds, yet this was reversed as a consequence of the US-Iraqi conflict. In 1988 the Iraqi Kurds faced a mass genocide led by Saddam Hussein that killed tens of

²² "THE ANCIENT ROOTS OF THE KURDS." *TIME SIFTERS ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY*, 31 Mar. 2016, www.timesifters.org/the-ancient-roots-of-the-kurds/.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Timeline: The Kurds' Quest for Independence." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/timeline/kurds-quest-independence.

²⁵ *The Kurds in Turkey*, fas.org/asmp/profiles/turkey_background_kurds.htm.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Crahan, Garrett Nada and Caitlin. "Iran's Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan." *The Iran Primer*, iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/sep/08/iran%E2%80%99s-troubled-provinces-kurdistan.

thousands and increased tensions in the region.²⁸ Later in 2003, the Kurds supported the United States in overthrowing Hussein, and in 2005, were recognized as an autonomous region within Iraq.²⁹ This changed however when President Trump pulled U.S. forces out of the area as tensions redeveloped between the Iraqi government and the Kurds.³⁰ The instability that faces the Kurds in each region they inhabit leaves the group calling for independence; a call which has been overlooked for centuries.

3.3 UN Action:

In 2004, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called attention to the Iranian Kurds fleeing their homeland due to the upset brought on by the Iraqi War.³¹ This committee proposed resettlement of the Kurdish refugees to nations including Australia, the United States, and some Scandinavian countries, however these requests remained pending, and the situation has only escalated from there.³² Later in 2017, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq spoke in opposition of the violence occurring to the political offices in the portion of Kurdistan in Iraq. The mission addressed the Kurds' call for peace and paired it with the Iraqi government's requests for de-escalation and legal order.³³ The situation was left with the region being monitored as the Iraqi government suspended military operations for the time being. Most recently, the UNHCR has reported tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the violence of the Syrian conflict in 2019. When addressing the UN Security Council, US Ambassador Kelly Craft declared that Turkey bears responsibility for protecting the Kurdish people and other minorities.³⁴ Turkey deems the Kurdish fighters that have been supporting the United States as terrorists, thus this poses many issues regarding their willingness to protect the ethnic group's interest. The heavily debated issue of Kurdish independence and at what levels that can be granted, allows opportunity for meaningful resolutions to be developed in this committee.

3.4 Current Situation

The relationship between the Turkish government and the Kurds has been tumultuous for years, but in 2019 it escalated. On October 6, 2019, President Trump pulled U.S. troops out of Northern Syria which created a domino effect of power struggles that ultimately allowed for Turkey to gain control of the border area. The state established a 5000 sq. km buffer zone that prohibits the presence of Kurdish people.³⁵ Turkey has shown little willingness to give the Kurds autonomy in the past and the Kurds face even more destruction of their culture and identity in this state of violence.

Even with the onset of Covid-19 in the past six months, Turkey has maintained its position against the Kurds. Because of the pandemic, the United Nations called for a ceasefire with Turkish forces, yet they continued their attacks on Northern Syria and have begun restricting crucial resources from refugee camps that house many Kurdish people.³⁶ Remaining Kurds in the area are also suffering greatly at the hands of the Turkish government, with targeted violence to their businesses and homes and even the people themselves.

Historically, Kurdish requests for independence have resulted in further conflicts and violence. On the other hand, remaining internally displaced threatens the preservation of the Kurdish culture, language, and his-

²⁸ "Timeline: The Kurds' Quest for Independence." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/timeline/kurds-quest-independence.

²⁹ "Iraq's Constitution of 2005." *Constitute*, www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en.

³⁰ "Timeline: The Kurds' Quest for Independence." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/timeline/kurds-quest-independence.

³¹ "UN Appeals for Resettlement of Stranded Kurd Refugees 18 Months after Iraq War UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2004/12/123252-un-appeals-resettlement-stranded-kurd-refugees-18-months-after-iraq-war.

³² Ibid.

³³ "News in Brief 30 October 2017 (PM) | | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/audio/2017/10/635242.

³⁴ "De-Escalation of Turkish Military Operation in Northern Syria 'Absolutely Essential' | | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1049021.

³⁵ Vanessa Baird Vanessa Baird lived and worked as a journalist in Peru during the tumultuous mid-1980s, et al. "Betrayed Again." *New Internationalist*, 6 July 2020, newint.org/features/2020/06/11/big-story-kurds-betrayed-again.

³⁶ Ibid.

tory. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues values both the preservation of this indigenous culture while also attempting to keep as much peace in the area as possible. Both of these values should be looked at extensively when writing a resolution.

3.5 Vocabulary

- **Treaty of Sevres:** A pact between the allied powers and Ottoman Turkey that proposed the first Kurdish state and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The treaty was not accepted by Turkish nationals and is some of the first official documentation of the first Turkish-Kurdish opposition.
- **UN Assistance Mission for Iraq:** A UN establishment formed for the purposes of forming a political dialogue between Iraq and neighboring states as well as monitoring social and humanitarian issues involving the Iraqi state.

3.6 Questions to Consider

- Consider the long history of the Kurds in Turkey. How can your country provide an approach that protects the civilians on both sides of this conflict?
- What are some solutions that can preserve Kurdish culture without immediately declaring statehood?
- Consider the official qualifications for statehood. Is it likely that the Kurds can gain independence and become a state in the near future?
- How might foreign involvement from outside of this region affect the situation (i.e. U.S troops in Syria)?
- What are the efforts your state can take to maintain peace in this region?
- Consider the conflicts the Kurds have had in states other than Turkey (Iraq, Iran, Syria). How might these relations affect your country's proposed solutions?

3.7 Suggested Readings

- Thorough explanation of the Kurdish state
- Timeline of Kurdish history
- Kurds in Turkey
- Examines the Kurds relations with each state it inhabits

4 Topic C: Achieving SDGs within Indigenous Populations

4.1 Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 goals that were outlined by the United Nations in 2015 that will lead to prosperity for the international community by 2030. These goals include targets like no poverty, gender equality, but also climate action, and life on land. Indigenous peoples are mentioned 6 times in the SDGs specifically in Goal 2: Zero Hunger, and Goal 4: Quality Education.³⁷ However, the issue of achieving SDGs within Indigenous populations applies to all goals.

Lack of infrastructure, systematic discrimination, and lack of ability to self-govern all prove to be barriers to achieving SDGs within indigenous populations. There is also the additional problem of certain cultural values conflicting against some indicators in the SDGs. Overall, the committee must balance between preserving cultural values, implementing SDGs, and behaving non-colonially when writing resolutions.

4.2 Topic Background

Indigenous peoples are a small proportion of the world's population but represent an irreplaceable population segment. However, despite living in resource rich areas, indigenous populations are consistently poor. Despite only being 5% of the world's population, indigenous populations account for 15% of the world's poor. Because indigenous communities have been forced off their land for either resource extraction or conservation efforts, their most valuable asset is unusable to them.³⁸ SDG 1 is no poverty, but the road to achieving that goal is blocked by systematic discrimination and seizing of rights.

Another significant issue that hinders the achievement of SDGs is the lack of government recognition from foreign states. Because few countries recognize indigenous peoples as legitimate groups, they are excluded from political forums to defend their rights.³⁹ Without their involvement in these forums, few bodies are even aware of what indigenous populations need to help achieve the SDGs. In relation to SDG 8 (Economic Growth and Decent Work), indigenous representatives have stressed that recognition and protection of their traditional occupations is vital⁴⁰, but there has been very little action from states to respond to their requests.

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) explicitly referenced indigenous peoples when saying that the world is not on track for achieving the 2030 agenda. It highlighted "continued discrimination and exclusion from political and economic power" as a major reason for the lack of progress within indigenous populations.⁴²

Compounding upon bureaucratic difficulties, many SDGs such as 13 (Climate Change) and 3 (Good Health) require technological capacity that many indigenous populations are unable to afford.⁴³ COVID-19 has highlighted weaknesses in the public health systems of developed nations. Many

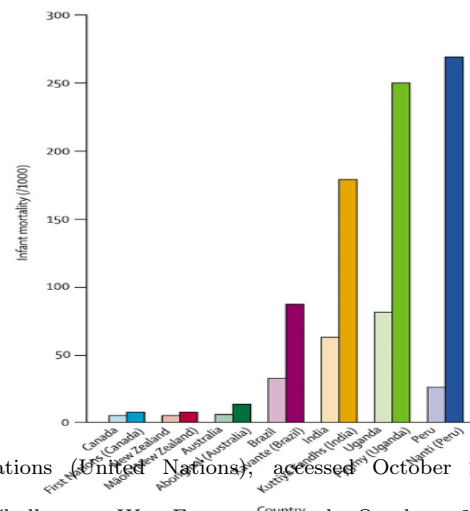


Figure 3: Indigenous community infant mortality⁴¹

³⁷ "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development," United Nations (United Nations), accessed October 20, 2020, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

³⁸ "The Challenges We Face," FirstPeoples.org - The Challenges We Face, accessed October 20, 2020, <http://www.firstpeoples.org/the-challenges-we-face.htm>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Indigenous World 2020: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Indigenous Peoples," IWGIA, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.iwgia.org/en/ip-i-iw/3658-iw-2020-sdgs.html>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

indigenous populations that inhabit remote areas do not have access to medical technologies that can save lives. As a result, infant mortality is abnormally high within indigenous populations compared to their country of residence (Figure 3).

Additionally, the culture of many indigenous populations may not be conducive to achieving an SDG. If the culture or tradition has strict gender roles, the more modern definition of gender equality may not be accepted. This becomes an issue with cultural loss and forced assimilation. If indigenous populations do not wish to achieve an SDG, or only wish to work towards part of it, should they be given the autonomy to follow their culture and tradition?

4.3 UN Action

The UN has already stated that all Sustainable Goals are relevant to indigenous peoples. However, it also admits that the SDGs lack cultural sensitivity.⁴⁴ There have been very few resolutions that address the lack of cultural sensitivity already mentioned. However, the UN has continued broadening its metrics for certain SDGs so that they are more applicable to indigenous populations. The PFII is actively engaged in the SDG agenda and ensuring that indigenous rights are being considered.⁴⁵ Because the PFII puts considerable input to ECOSOC, this committee has significant influence over the direction of the SDGs.

4.4 Current Situation

The SDGs have “acknowledged that there can be no truly sustainable development without protecting traditional knowledge and territories of indigenous peoples.” Indigenous knowledge can be combined with modern technology to protect biodiversity while harvesting valuable resources from ecosystems.⁴⁶ There has been movement in the right direction in collaboration with indigenous peoples, but interaction is limited.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has also raised additional concerns – how can we interact with populations if we don’t have a medical treatment for our disease yet? Additionally, if COVID-19 was to be transmitted into an indigenous community, it could easily eradicate the entire population because of lack of access to proper treatments.

Additionally, increasing globalization has been accused of stripping culture away from countries. The same threat would also apply to indigenous populations and their culture. The committee must weigh the costs and benefits of trying to impose modern developments into indigenous populations.

4.5 Questions to Consider

- How will new values and ideas be introduced without it mirroring historical colonization?
- Is forcing something that is seen as “beneficial” onto another group a violation of their human right?
- Are all the Sustainable Development Goals achievable within indigenous populations?

⁴⁴“Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda,” *Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda* (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.), https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2016/10/Short-flyer_UNPFII-Substantive-Inputs-2017.pdf

⁴⁵“The Permanent Forum and the 2030 Agenda For Indigenous Peoples,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/focus-areas/post-2015-agenda/the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-and-indigenous/recommendations.html>.

⁴⁶IISD’s SDG Knowledge Hub, “Guest Article: No Sustainable Development Without Indigenous Peoples: SDG Knowledge Hub: IISD,” SDG Knowledge Hub, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/no-sustainable-development-without-indigenous-peoples/>.

- Can we preserve indigenous populations' cultures while introducing them to modern technology if they conflict?

4.6 Suggested Readings

- The UN Sustainable Development Goals
- What do the Sustainable Development Goals Mean for Indigenous Peoples?
- Opinion piece on SDGs in Indigenous Populations