



9th August 2023

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples



Artwork by Tufan Chakma[©]

This year is very significant for human rights all over the world. This year marks the 100th anniversary of Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh's journey to Geneva in 1923, to speak to the League of Nations and defend the right of his people to live under their own laws, on their own land, and under their own faith. This year also marks 75 years of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, popularly known as the UDHR, and 30 years of the Vienna Declaration of Human Rights and Plan of Action and the Bangkok NGO Declaration of Human Rights. Indigenous Peoples of the world have achieved several milestones from the time the first inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations was held on August 9th, 1982, which to this day has been observed and celebrated as The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna was convened in June 1993 for the renewal of the spirit to focus on human rights and to move from rhetoric to concrete action for a world free of human rights violations. The World Conference on Human Rights was significant in establishing mechanisms within the UN for the implementation and monitoring of human rights. For Indigenous Peoples, the recommendations from the Vienna Conference were actualized with the adoption of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000, Establishment of Special Procedure on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2001, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) in 2007 and pronouncement of decades for Indigenous Peoples, Languages, which shaped the struggle of the Indigenous Peoples.

The ILO-169 is another significant instrument for Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 1989. The adoption CEDAW General recommendation in December 2022, recognized the differential gendered experience of indigenous women and girls and calls attention to address to the states to address those. The Alta Outcome Document of the Indigenous Peoples preparatory meeting of the Indigenous Peoples for WCIP (2013) reflected the situation and challenges and visions of Indigenous Peoples across the globe and provided many recommendations, which were discussed and incorporated into World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) Outcome Document (2014). This clearly defines States' commitments to respect, promote and advance the rights of indigenous Peoples and the realization of the UNDRIP.

Further, the establishment of The Human Rights Council as an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe has significantly improved the monitoring of human rights violations in general. As we celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples and reflect on our achievements, we are reminded that human rights are a tangible reality.



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Progress in international negotiations on the human rights and environmental rights of Indigenous Peoples has also led to positive outcomes in the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' land rights and the contribution of indigenous knowledge to climate change and biodiversity conservation challenges. However, we are also reminded of the formidable challenges ahead of us. Human rights and democratic values have failed to take root in Asia and states have failed us. Human rights are seemingly promoted but responsibility and commitment are missing from the reckoning. It is devoid of human agency. We are also witnessing the dramatic rollbacks of human rights. There has been a lot of pushback on Indigenous Peoples rights in Asia.

The cycle of violence continues due to the lack of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and autonomy and implementation of their collective rights. This remains the key driver of attacks against Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders (IPHRD). Closing in civic and democratic spaces remains an impediment for IPHRDs to advocate for their rights. There is still a huge gap between domestic and international law, and there is still a huge challenge in the implementation of both. Psychological warfare, sexual harassment, militarization, etc are used as weapons against IP rights defenders, protesters, and journalists alike.

Meanwhile, rapid digital shifts, including Artificial Intelligence without regulations are transforming our world, with no preparation to meet these crucial developments. In this context, recognizing Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty has become an urgent issue for us.

This rapid transformation has also created a huge intergenerational gap and there is a need to address those gaps by strengthening dialogues between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples for building future generations cemented by trust, inclusion, respect, and dignity for everyone. Governments talk of living in harmony with Nature but continue to build machines that devour Nature. And continue to militarize our territories to segregate people and Nature.

We are under oppression and our oppressors are choking our voices, but we will be heard. We will redeem ourselves in the great ways of our ancestors and the Great Spirit. We will teach our children about respecting elders and the community and living in harmony with Nature. So that our youths learn their responsibility and earn their leadership position. We draw our strength from our youth, and we secure the future in them where justice will prevail. And our women will continue to make our societies vibrant and steer our struggles in the direction of our common vision.

Gam A. Shimray
Secretary-General
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact



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