

Indigenous peoples to gather at UNHQ to discuss climate change

Some 3000 participants, including the President of Bolivia H.E. Evo Morales Ayma will converge on United Nations Headquarters this week to discuss the role that indigenous peoples may play in combating climate change.

The Seventh Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to be held in New York from 21 April to 2 May, will address "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges".

President Morales will address the opening ceremony, a diverse event that showcases indigenous peoples' contributions to humanity. Other participants will include Member States, civil society, particularly indigenous peoples, the United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations from around the world.

The two-week meeting is the second largest event held at UN Headquarters each year.

Indigenous peoples and climate change

Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the difficulties already faced by indigenous communities, including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment.

Although they contribute very little to the underlying causes of climate change, indigenous peoples are helping to enhance the resilience of ecosystems they inhabit and are interpreting and reacting to the impacts of climate change in creative ways, drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to find solutions which may help society to cope with impending changes. According to Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon, "They know the economic and social consequences, and they can and should play a role in the global response".

This year's session is the first since world leaders adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ([Click here for full text](#)) in September 2007. The landmark Declaration, drafted and debated for more than 20 years, emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to live in dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their self-determined development, in keeping with their needs and aspirations.

Other issues to be discussed during the two-week session include: indigenous peoples in the Pacific region, indigenous languages, indigenous children and youth, urban indigenous peoples and migration and a discussion on the Second Decade. Given the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly, the Permanent Forum is also expected to discuss its role under the Declaration.

More than 60 special side events, including exhibit openings, film screenings and panel discussions, are planned, ([Click here to see the complete list](#))

A few examples of scheduled special events linked to the themes of the session are as follows:

Tuesday, 22 April: Exhibit opening: "In Celebration of the Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", 6.15 p.m., UNHQ Visitors Lobby. Organized by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Department of Public Information and the NGO Committee on the UN International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Wednesday 23 April: Film screening: "Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations, Vol. 1"; 1:15 – 2:45p.m., Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium. Organized by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Monday 28 April: Exhibit & Sale of Indigenous Crafts, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., United Methodist Office for the UN, 777 United Nations Plaza, 2nd Floor. Organized by the United Methodist Office for the UN, Women's Division and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Tuesday 29 April:

- Panel discussion on Indigenous Languages and Media, 1:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m., Conference Room 2. Organized by UNESCO.
- Roundtable on Violence Against Indigenous Women, 3.00 – 4.25p.m., Conference Room 2. Speakers will include: Celeste McKay, NWAC; Monica Aleman, FIMI; Beverly Jacobs, NWAC. Organized by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI).

Indigenous peoples at the international level

Estimates point to more than 370 million indigenous peoples in some 90 countries worldwide. While they are from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, they share challenges such as: lack of basic healthcare; limited access to education; loss of control over land; abject poverty; displacement; human rights violations; discrimination and economic and social marginalization.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in July 2000. The Forum provides expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN system through the Council; raises awareness and promotes the integration and coordination of relevant activities within the UN system; and disseminates information on indigenous issues.

The Permanent Forum is comprised of sixteen independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity. The Economic and Social Council appoints the members, eight of whom are nominated by governments and eight nominated by indigenous organizations in their regions