



Indigenous peoples make up one-third of the world's poorest and suffer alarming conditions in all countries

First UN publication on the state of the world's indigenous peoples reveals alarming statistics on poverty, health, education, employment, human rights, the environment and more.

Indigenous peoples all over the world continue to suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty, health problems, crime and human rights abuses.

- ◆ In the United States, a Native American is 600 times more likely to contract tuberculosis and 62 per cent more likely to commit suicide than the general population.
- ◆ In Australia, an indigenous child can expect to die 20 years earlier than his non-native compatriot. The life expectancy gap is also 20 years in Nepal, while in Guatemala it is 13 years and in New Zealand it is 11.
- ◆ In parts of Ecuador, indigenous people have 30 times greater risk of throat cancer than the national average.
- ◆ And worldwide, more than 50 per cent of indigenous adults suffer from Type 2 diabetes – a number predicted to rise.

These are just a few of the startling statistics in the United Nations' first publication on the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a thorough assessment of how indigenous peoples are faring in areas such as health, poverty, education and human rights.

While indigenous peoples make up around 370 million of the world's population – some 5 per cent – they constitute around one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people. Every day, indigenous communities all over the world face issues of violence and brutality, continuing assimilation policies, dispossession of land, marginalization, forced removal or relocation, denial of land rights, impacts of large-scale development, abuses by military forces and a host of other abuses.

Alarming state of indigenous health

The publication's statistics illustrate the gravity of the situation in both developed and developing countries. Poor nutrition, limited access to care, lack of resources crucial to maintaining health and well-being and contamination of natural resources are all contributing factors to the terrible state of indigenous health worldwide.

According to the report:

- ◆ Indigenous peoples' life expectancy is up to 20 years lower than their non-indigenous counterparts.
- ◆ Indigenous peoples experience disproportionately high levels of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, cardiovascular illnesses, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis.

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- ◆ Suicide rates of indigenous peoples, particularly among youth, are considerably higher in many countries, for example, up to 11 times the national average for the Inuit in Canada.

Displacement and dispossession destroying indigenous communities

One of the most significant threats facing indigenous peoples identified in the publication is the displacement of indigenous peoples from their lands, territories and resources. The publication details several examples of displacement, separation and eviction, including in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Hawaii, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia.

“When indigenous peoples have reacted and tried to assert their rights, they have suffered physical abuse, imprisonment, torture and even death,” states the publication.

The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples was authored by seven independent experts and produced by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Note to Editors:

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Myrna Cunningham, one of the authors of the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, will hold a press conference at UN Headquarters in New York, to launch the report:

When: 14 January, 2010, 1:15 p.m.

Where: Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium, UN Headquarters, First Avenue and 46th Street

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CHAPTER I

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

Highlights

A continuing injustice. Indigenous peoples suffer from the consequences of historic injustice, including colonization, dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, oppression and discrimination, as well as lack of control over their own ways of life. Their right to development has been largely denied by colonial and modern states in the pursuit of economic growth. As a consequence, indigenous peoples often lose out to more powerful actors, becoming among the most impoverished groups in their countries.

One-third of the world's poor. Indigenous peoples continue to be over-represented among the poor, the illiterate, and the unemployed. Indigenous peoples number about 370 million. While they constitute approximately 5 per cent of the world's population, indigenous peoples make up 15 per cent of the world's poor. They also make up about one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people.

Suicide, violence and incarceration. Smoking and substance abuse are more common amongst indigenous peoples; suicide rates and incarceration rates are also higher. These problems are more pronounced in urban areas, where indigenous peoples are detached from their communities and cultures, yet seldom fully embraced as equal members of the dominant society. Indigenous peoples are also more likely to suffer from violent crime.

A problem in developed countries too. The well-being of indigenous peoples is an issue not only in developing countries. Even in developed countries, indigenous peoples consistently lag behind the non-indigenous population in terms of most indicators of well-being. They live shorter lives, have poorer health care and education and endure higher unemployment rates. A native Aboriginal child born in Australia today can expect to die almost 20 years earlier than his non-native compatriot. Obesity, type 2 diabetes and tuberculosis are now major health concerns amongst indigenous peoples in developed countries.

High levels of poverty. Studies of socio-economic conditions of indigenous peoples in Latin America show that being indigenous is associated with being poor and that over time, that condition has stayed constant. Even when they are able to accumulate human capital [i.e. education or training opportunities], they are unable to convert that to significantly greater earnings or to reduce the poverty gap with the non-indigenous population. This finding holds for countries where indigenous peoples are a small fraction of the overall population, such as Mexico and Chile, as well as in countries where a large portion of the population is indigenous, such as in Bolivia.

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CHAPTER II

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CULTURE

Highlights

Indigenous cultures threatened with extinction. The importance of land and territories to indigenous cultural identity cannot be stressed enough. However, indigenous peoples have continued to experience loss of access to lands, territories and natural resources. The result has been that indigenous cultures today are threatened with extinction in many parts of the world. Due to the fact that they have been excluded from the decision-making and policy frameworks of the nation-states in which they live and have been subjected to processes of domination and discrimination, their cultures have been viewed as being inferior, primitive, irrelevant, something to be eradicated or transformed.

90 per cent of all languages will disappear within 100 years. It is usually estimated that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 oral languages in the world today. Most of these languages are spoken by very few people, while a handful of them are spoken by an overwhelming majority of the world. About 97 per cent of the world's population speaks 4 per cent of its languages, while only 3 per cent speaks 96 per cent of them. A great majority of these languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, and many (if not most) of them are in danger of becoming extinct. Roughly 90 per cent of all existing languages may become extinct within the next 100 years.

Dying languages, damaging communities. While some indigenous peoples are successfully revitalising languages, many others are fighting a losing battle, where languages are simply no longer passed from one generation to the next. Most governments are aware of this language crisis but funding is often provided only for the recording of languages, while limited funds are diverted to language revitalization programmes. Language, furthermore, is not only a communication tool, it is often linked to the land or region traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples; it is an essential component of one's collective and individual identity and therefore provides a sense of belonging and community. When the language dies, that sense of community is damaged.

Traditional food lengthens life. It is now emerging that indigenous peoples' overall health, well-being and cultural continuity are directly related to their ability to consume their traditional foods and continue their traditional food practices. This realization has led to calls to governments to incorporate culture into the development of sustainable agriculture, food systems and related practices, policies and programmes that respect and support the well-being of indigenous peoples.

Value of traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge and traditional resources have been managed by indigenous and local communities since time immemorial, using customary law embedded in spiritual cosmology. A great deal of traditional knowledge, including customary laws and folklore, has been undermined and destroyed by colonizers and post-colonial states who imposed their own systems of law, knowledge and worldviews on indigenous people. Today, however, there is an increasing appreciation of the value and potential of traditional knowledge.

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CHAPTER III

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Highlights

Indigenous peoples account for most of the world's cultural diversity. Throughout the world, there are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples occupying 20 per cent of the earth's territory. It is also estimated that they represent as many as 5,000 different indigenous cultures. The indigenous peoples of the world therefore account for most of the world's cultural diversity, even though they constitute a numerical minority.

Land rights in law, but not in reality. Only a few countries recognize indigenous peoples' land rights, but even in those countries, land titling and demarcation procedures have often not been completed, suffer delays or are shelved because of changes in political leadership and policies. Even where indigenous peoples have legal title deeds to their lands, these lands are often leased out by the state as mining or logging concessions without consultation of indigenous peoples, let alone their free and prior informed consent. The lack of legal security of tenure remains a crucial issue for indigenous peoples almost everywhere.

New technologies force resettlement. The promotion of new technologies such as improved seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the introduction of cash-crop cultivation and large plantation schemes have caused environmental degradation and destroyed self-sustaining eco-systems, affecting many indigenous communities to the point of forcing them to resettle elsewhere.

The cost of unsustainable development. Large dams and mining activities have caused forced displacement of thousands of indigenous persons and families without adequate compensations in many countries. Several communities have been moved out of national parks against their will, while tourist development in some countries has resulted in the displacement of indigenous people and their increasing poverty. When indigenous peoples have reacted and tried to assert their rights, in most instances they have suffered physical abuse, imprisonment, torture and even death.

The Implementation Gap: Much talk, little action. While indigenous peoples have, since 2002, experienced increased recognition of their environmental rights at the international level, translating this political recognition into concrete advances at the national and local levels remains a major challenge. Many decisions made at the international level are not always respected or implemented at the national level, and indigenous peoples' voices are all too often marginalized, if heard at all.

Climate change threatens very existence of indigenous peoples. For many indigenous peoples, climate change is already a reality, and they are increasingly realising that climate change is clearly not just an environmental issue, but one with severe socioeconomic implications. The World Bank also sees climate change as having the potential to hamper achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including those on poverty eradication, child mortality, combating malaria and other diseases, as well as environmental sustainability. For many indigenous peoples, climate change is a potential threat to their very existence and a major issue of human rights and equity.

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Severe impact on women. Forced evictions and the dispossession of lands have particularly severe impacts on indigenous women, who, as a result, often have an increased workload as they must walk long distances to find alternative sources of water or fuel wood, or are driven out of income-earning productive activities and into a situation of economic dependence on men.

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STATE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Highlights

Lack of respect and resources cause critical education gap. Too often, education systems do not respect indigenous peoples' diverse cultures. There are too few teachers who speak their languages and their schools often lack basic materials. Educational materials that provide accurate and fair information on indigenous peoples and their ways of life are particularly rare. Despite the numerous international instruments that proclaim universal rights to education, indigenous peoples do not fully enjoy these rights, and an education gap between indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical, worldwide.

Numerous obstacles to education. Indigenous children are more likely to arrive at school hungry, ill and tired; they are often bullied, and the use of corporal punishment is still widespread. Ethnic and cultural discrimination at schools are major obstacles to equal access to education, causing poor performance and higher dropout rates. Indigenous girls, in particular, experience difficult problems related to unfriendly school environments, gender discrimination, school-based violence and sometimes sexual abuse, all of which contribute to high dropout rates.

Loss of identity, caught in no man's land. When indigenous school children are introduced only to the national discourse at the expense of their native discourse, they are in danger of losing part of their identity, their connection with their parents and predecessors and, ultimately, of being caught in a no man's land whereby they lose an important aspect of their identity while not fully becoming a part of the dominant national society.

Invisible and at risk. When a child's birth goes unregistered, that child is less likely to enjoy his or her rights and to benefit from the protection accorded by the state in which he or she was born. Furthermore, the unregistered child may go unnoticed when his or her rights are violated. Later in life, he or she will be unable to vote or stand for election. These children are also at risk of falling victim to child trafficking and are often easy prey for those who exploit their vulnerability, recruiting them as street beggars, domestic servants in slave-like arrangements, or as child soldiers.

Education often irrelevant. Indigenous students frequently find that the education they are offered by the state promotes individualism and a competitive atmosphere, rather than communal ways of life and cooperation. They are not taught relevant survival and work skills suitable for indigenous economies, and they often return to their communities with a formal education that is irrelevant or unsuitable for their needs. They are forced to seek employment in the national economy, leading to a vicious cycle of social fragmentation, brain drain and a lack of development, especially because the jobs and salaries available to them often will not match their educational achievements.

Despite efforts, no solution in foreseeable future. Even in countries where the general level of schooling among indigenous peoples has increased, for instance in several Latin American countries and Canada, the quality gap in schooling persists, resulting in poor education outcomes for indigenous peoples. The conditions of extreme poverty, exclusion and isolation do not bode well for sustainable and multicultural indigenous education programmes.

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CHAPTER V HEALTH

Highlights

Alarming levels of diabetes. Worldwide, over 50 per cent of indigenous adults over age 35 have type 2 diabetes and these numbers are predicted to rise. In some indigenous communities, diabetes has reached epidemic proportions and places the very existence of indigenous communities at risk.

Life expectancy up to 20 years lower. Indigenous peoples suffer from poorer health, are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life and ultimately die younger than their non-indigenous counterparts. The gap in life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous people in years is: Guatemala 13; Panama 10; Mexico 6; Nepal 20; Australia 20; Canada 17; New Zealand 11.

Poverty, tuberculosis and lack of treatment. Tuberculosis, a disease that primarily affects people living in poverty, affects at least 2 billion people in the world. As a result of poverty, tuberculosis continues to disproportionately affect indigenous peoples around the globe. While programmes have been designed to combat tuberculosis, they often do not reach indigenous peoples because of issues related to poverty, poor housing, a lack of access to medical care and drugs, cultural barriers, language differences and geographic remoteness.

Poor levels of health, acutely felt by indigenous women. Indigenous peoples experience disproportionately high levels of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, cardiovascular illnesses, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Indigenous women experience these health problems with particular severity, as they are disproportionately affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts, and are often denied access to education, land, property and other economic resources. And yet they play a primary role in overseeing the health and well-being of their families and communities. In addition, as the incidence of other public health issues such as drug abuse, alcoholism, depression and suicide increases, urgent and concerted efforts are needed to improve the health situation of indigenous peoples.

Poverty and malnutrition. Poor nutrition is one of the health issues that most affects indigenous peoples around the world. In addition to circumstances of extreme poverty, indigenous peoples suffer from malnutrition because of environmental degradation and contamination of the ecosystems in which indigenous communities have traditionally lived, loss of land and territory and a decline in abundance or accessibility of traditional food sources.

Self-determination, collective rights, crucial to indigenous health. To address the root causes of indigenous peoples' health problems, there must be full recognition and exercise of indigenous peoples' collective rights to communal assets and self-determination. Many mental health issues such as depression, substance abuse and suicide have been identified as connected to the historical colonization and dispossession of indigenous peoples, which has resulted in the fragmentation of indigenous social, cultural, economic and political institutions.

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Health systems appropriate for the indigenous context. Models of health care must take into account the indigenous concept of health and preserve and strengthen indigenous health systems as a strategy to increase access and coverage of health care. This will demand the establishment of clear mechanisms of cooperation among relevant health care personnel, communities, traditional healers, policy makers and government officials in order to ensure that the human resources respond to the epidemiological profile and socio-cultural context of indigenous communities.

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CHAPTER VI HUMAN RIGHTS

Highlights

Violence, forced assimilation, abuse. Despite all the positive developments in international human rights standard-setting, indigenous peoples continue to face serious human rights abuses on a day-to-day basis. Issues of violence and brutality, continuing assimilation policies, marginalization, dispossession of land, forced removal or relocation, denial of land rights, impacts of large-scale development, abuses by military forces and armed conflict, and a host of other abuses, are a reality for indigenous communities around the world. Examples of violence and brutality have been heard from every corner of the world, most often perpetrated against indigenous persons who are defending their rights and their lands, territories and communities.

Violence against women. An indigenous woman is more likely to be raped, with some estimates showing that more than one in three indigenous women are raped during their lifetime

Systemic racism. Indigenous peoples frequently raise concerns about systemic discrimination and outright racism from the State and its authorities. This discrimination manifests itself in a number of ways such as frequent and unnecessary questioning by the police, condescending attitudes of teachers to students or rudeness from a receptionist in a government office. At their most extreme, these forms of discrimination lead to gross violations of human rights, such as murder, rape and other forms of violence or intimidation. These forms of discrimination are often either difficult to quantify and verify or are simply not documented by the authorities, or not disaggregated based on ethnicity.

Criminalization of protest. Indigenous peoples have frequently faced detention due to the criminalization of social protest activities. One of the most serious shortcomings in human rights protection in recent years is the trend towards the use of legislation and the justice system to penalize and criminalize social protest activities and legitimate demands made by indigenous organizations and movements in defence of their rights.

Despite some progress, little change. Despite efforts over the last 40 years to improve conditions and to increase recognition of indigenous rights through law and policy, litigation, national dialogue and enhanced leadership opportunities, full accommodation of indigenous rights remains elusive.

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STATE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

REGIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES

AFRICA

Indigenous peoples in many African countries have been displaced from national parks and protected areas, had their lands expropriated and have been denied access to the natural resources critical for their livelihoods and survival.

Examples referenced in the report include:

- ◆ There are around 300,000 Forest Peoples – also referred to as “Pygmies” or “Batwa” - in the **Central African rainforest**. These peoples are now facing unprecedented pressures on their lands, forest resources and societies, as forests are logged, cleared for agriculture or turned into exclusive wildlife conservation areas. They are becoming outcasts on the edge of dominant society as they settle in villages and are increasingly dependent on the cash economy, but are unable to enjoy the rights accorded to other citizens and are marginalized from decision-making. As these pressures intensify, Pygmy peoples are suffering increasing poverty, racial discrimination, violence and cultural collapse. Throughout Central Africa, their traditional way of life is disappearing, and their incomparable knowledge of the forest is being lost.
- ◆ Of the estimated 70-87,000 Batwa peoples living in the **Great Lakes** region, probably less than 7,000 have direct and regular access to forest today due to clearance of forests for development projects and the establishment of conservation areas. A smaller group of Batwa in the region -- numbering no more than 3,000 -- lives mostly on the shores of Lake Kivu. Traditionally fisher folk, they are today prevented from openly fishing because they do not have fishing licences.
- ◆ The tradition livelihood of Batwa, based on pottery, is now increasingly threatened by the modern, more mechanized pottery industry. Between 1978 and 1991, there was a 40 per cent fall in the pottery dependent Batwa population. Although research is very limited, it is likely that this population decline is due to extreme poverty, poor access to health care and the loss of land and traditional livelihoods. Furthermore, authorities refuse to recognize the Batwa as indigenous or even as a separate ethnic group, claiming that to do so would undermine the reconciliation process among the ethnic groups.
- ◆ A majority of the Batwa are not documented as citizens, preventing them from legally owning land, as land entitlements are tied to nationality.
- ◆ Pastoralists – such as cattle and camel breeders in the Sahara, in East Africa and in the West African savannah – account for a significant economic contribution in many African countries and pastoralism is the source of identity, culture, heritage and traditions for some 200 million people. However several factors, such as pastoral lands extending across national borders, militarization, economic modernization and State appropriation of lands have had devastating effects on pastoralists, as well as on the lands themselves.

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REGIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES ASIA – PACIFIC

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in the criminal justice system:

- ◆ The Maori comprise less than 15 per cent of the **New Zealand** population, yet account for 40 per cent of all court convictions and half the prison population.
- ◆ In **Australia**, the indigenous population in 2001 made up only 2.4 per cent of the total population, yet 19.9 per cent of all adult prisoners were indigenous.

Allegations of abuse at the hands of military forces have been received:

- ◆ In **Myanmar**, members of the village of Tagu Seik, near Einme, were tortured and their community ransacked on the basis of purported communications with another armed opposition group, according to information received by the UN's Special Rapporteur.
- ◆ In the **Philippines**, a similar military attack took place based on allegations that indigenous individuals were members of a "splinter group" of communist terrorists.

Poverty and unemployment rates are very high for indigenous communities in the region:

- ◆ In **Australia**, the indigenous unemployment rate in 2006 was 15.6 per cent, just over three times higher than the non-indigenous rate, while the median indigenous income was just over half the non-indigenous income.
- ◆ In **New Zealand**, the unemployment rate amongst Maori is over twice as high as the national average (7.7 compared to 3.8 per cent) and Maori household income is 70 per cent of the national average.
- ◆ According to the UNDP's Human Poverty Index ranking of countries, indigenous communities in **India** are comparable to sub-Saharan countries, which are ranked in the bottom 25.

Health issues include diabetes, tuberculosis and suicide:

- ◆ Nearly half (44 per cent) of Torres Strait Islanders have diabetes.
- ◆ The prevalence of Type 2 diabetes among indigenous 25- to 50-year-olds in **Australia** is ten times higher than that of Australians of European descent.
- ◆ Pacific Islanders and Maoris are at least 10 times more likely to contract tuberculosis than other people living in **New Zealand**.

Development has caused massive displacements of indigenous groups:

- ◆ The Bakun Dam in **Malaysia** is reported to have caused the forced displacement of up to 8,000 indigenous persons from 15 communities by clear-cutting 80,000 hectares of rainforest.
- ◆ In **Thailand**, several highland communities, including the Karen people, have reportedly been moved out of national parks against their will.

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- ◆ In **Indonesia**, from 1967 to 1997 oil palm plantations increased 20 times and three million hectares in Borneo are planned to be converted. According to latest estimates, the net forest loss over the period 2000-2005 was 7.5 million ha of forest per year.

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REGIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES LATIN AMERICA

“Pervasive and severe” poverty:

- ◆ Indigenous poverty rates are far higher than the rest of the population in several countries in Latin America: **Paraguay**, 7.9 times higher; **Panama**, 5.9 times higher; **Mexico**, 3.3 times higher; and **Guatemala**, 2.8 times higher.
- ◆ Indigenous workers’ earnings average only half non-indigenous workers,’ in large part due to factors such as discrimination and quality of schooling. The highest gap in earnings for each additional year of schooling between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Latin America exists in **Bolivia**.

Major gaps in education:

- ◆ In **Guatemala**, more than 50 per cent of indigenous youth aged 15-19 have not completed primary education, compared to around one-third of non-indigenous youth.
- ◆ A sizeable gap persists between the number of years of schooling attended by indigenous and non-indigenous children. The gap ranges from non-indigenous children in **Peru** receiving 2.3 years more education than their indigenous classmates, to a gap of nearly four years for **Bolivia**.

Shut out from lands and resources:

- ◆ In **Colombia** over the last three decades, thousands of indigenous peoples have been displaced due to State military activity and the presence of armed groups involved in drug cultivation and trafficking in indigenous areas. This further increases refugee populations in neighbouring countries **Brazil**, **Ecuador**, **Panama**, **Peru** and **Venezuela**.
- ◆ Ninety per cent of the timber being extracted in the **Peruvian Amazon** is illegal and originates from protected areas belonging to indigenous communities or set aside for indigenous peoples who live in voluntary isolation.

Alarming health statistics:

- ◆ Large life expectancy gaps persist between indigenous and non-indigenous people, including: **Guatemala** (13 years’ difference), **Panama** (10 years) and **Mexico** (6 years).
- ◆ Child mortality is still 70 per cent higher in indigenous communities, despite improvements across Latin America over the last 40 years.
- ◆ Malnutrition is twice as common among indigenous as in non-indigenous children. In **Honduras**, an estimated 95 per cent of indigenous children under age 14 suffer from malnutrition.
- ◆ In **Venezuela**, health indicators are significantly lower in Amazonas state, home to twenty distinct indigenous peoples, than in the rest of the country. The infant mortality rate in Amazonas state is 43.9 per 1,000 births, compared to the national average of 19 per 1,000 births. In 2004, the malaria incidence among indigenous peoples was 70 times higher than the national average.

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- ◆ In **Ecuador**, recent investigations indicate that cancer rates among indigenous communities living in oil-producing areas are significantly higher than the national average: the risk of throat cancer is thirty times greater; kidney and skin cancer fifteen times greater; and stomach cancer five times greater.

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STATE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

REGIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES NORTH AMERICA

Well under the poverty line:

- ◆ The average income of Native Americans is less than half the average for the **United States** overall.
- ◆ Almost a quarter of Native Americans and Alaska Natives live under the poverty line in the **United States**, compared to about 12.5 per cent of the total population.
- ◆ Sixty per cent of Aboriginal children in urban areas in **Canada** live below the poverty line.

Tuberculosis, suicide, malnutrition and other risks higher:

- ◆ In **Canada** in 2006, the tuberculosis rate among First Nations peoples was 35 times higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population. The Inuit rate is just over 150 times higher than the non-aboriginal population.
- ◆ Suicide rates among the Inuit are the highest in **Canada**, at 11 times the national average.
- ◆ Native Americans and Alaska Natives have higher death rates than other Americans from **tuberculosis** (600 per cent higher), **alcoholism** (510 per cent higher), **motor vehicle crashes** (229 per cent higher), **diabetes** (189 per cent higher), **unintentional injuries** (152 per cent higher), **homicide** (61 per cent higher) and **suicide** (62 per cent higher).
- ◆ Malnutrition among indigenous peoples in North America contributes to an increasing prevalence of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The Pima Indian tribe in Arizona has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the world, with around 50 per cent of adults aged 30-64 suffering from diabetes.
- ◆ Suicide rates for American Indian and Alaska Native youth are significantly higher than the national average for other population groups. For 5 to 14 year-olds, the suicide rate is 2.6 times higher than the national average; for 15 to 24 year-olds it is 3.3 times higher.

Dropout rates hinder economic prospects:

- ◆ In **Canada**, around 70 per cent of First Nations students on-reserve will never complete high school.
- ◆ The education deficit clearly has an impact on economic outcomes: While the total unemployment rate in the **United States** declined from 6.5 to 5.9 per cent between 1994 and 2003, during the same period it increased from 11.7 to 15.1 per cent among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

High incarceration rates:

- ◆ While indigenous peoples in **Canada** represent only 3 per cent of the total population, they make up around 19 per cent of federal prisoners.

Violence against women:

- ◆ Native American women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually violated than women in the **United States** in general.

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

The first UN publication on the state of the world's indigenous peoples reveals alarming statistics on poverty, health, education, employment, human rights, the environment and more.

The first chapter, written by Joji Cariño, emphasizes both **self-determination and the principle of free, prior and informed consent**, which in practice, means that indigenous peoples themselves must be free to determine their own development. Indigenous peoples' rights to their own lands and territories must be respected and indigenous peoples need to develop their own definitions and indicators of poverty and well-being. Although global statistics on the situation of indigenous peoples are not readily available, it is clear that they suffer disproportionately from poverty, marginalization, lack of adequate housing and income inequality. Traditional livelihoods are under a great amount of stress from phenomena such as privatization, deregulation, climate change, conflict and unsustainable development. The chapter concludes that... "Indigenous peoples have vital contributions to make in addressing the contemporary challenges to renew ecological and social ethics and relationships, and in the fulfilment of peace, human rights and sustainable development."

In the second chapter, Naomi Kipuri discusses the remarkable contribution that indigenous peoples make to **cultural diversity** across the globe. Although it is estimated that indigenous peoples make up less than 6 per cent of the global population, they speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and are the stewards of some of the most biologically diverse areas, accumulating an immeasurable amount of traditional knowledge about their ecosystems. Indigenous cultures face the dual and somewhat contradictory threats of discrimination and commodification. Indigenous peoples continue to face racism and discrimination that sees them as inferior to non-indigenous communities and their culture as a hindrance to their development. Yet indigenous peoples are increasingly recognized for their unique relationship with their environment, their traditional knowledge and their spirituality, leading to external efforts to use and/or profit from their culture which are frequently out of their control, providing them no benefits, and often a great deal of harm.

The chapter on **environment**, written by Neva Collings, begins by looking at the major environmental issues that indigenous peoples are facing today. The chapter emphasizes indigenous peoples' spiritual, cultural, social and economic connection with their traditional lands and their tradition of collective rights to land in contrast with dominant models of individual land ownership, privatization and development which frequently lead to dispossession of indigenous peoples' land. In addition to these threats, indigenous peoples face the consequences of rapid climate change. The chapter then reviews some of the international legal frameworks and mechanisms for environmental protection, focusing on their implementation and how indigenous peoples have used them. Finally, it identifies the major gaps and challenges indigenous peoples confront at the local and national levels.

The **education** chapter by Duane Champagne illustrates the stark contrast in access to education between indigenous and non-indigenous students. At all levels, and in all regions of the world, indigenous peoples tend to have lower levels of literacy, enjoy fewer years at school and are more likely to drop out of school. Education is seldom provided to indigenous children in their native languages and it is frequently offered in a context that is culturally inappropriate and has few and inadequate facilities. Far too often, those who do get an education are forced to assimilate within the dominant culture, unable to find jobs in their communities. Despite discouraging

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overall trends, there are a great number of initiatives that point the way forward for indigenous education, where the community as a whole is involved, where teachers are bilingual and indigenous peoples have the freedom to choose whether they pursue their careers in their own communities or elsewhere.

The **health** chapter, written by Myrna Cunningham,¹ emphasizes the interdependence between health and other factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, marginalization, environmental degradation and (the lack of) self-determination. These forces, inherited from colonization, make indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women and children in particular, vulnerable to poor health. The result is that indigenous peoples register disproportionately high in virtually all indicators of poor health. Indigenous peoples have poor access to state health systems, while there is a palpable lack of recognition and support for indigenous peoples' own health systems. Any successful plan to provide health care for indigenous peoples must involve a multicultural health system where Western and indigenous health systems are practiced with equal human, technological and financial resources and where indigenous peoples are involved in all decision-making processes.

In the **human rights** chapter, Dalee Sambo Dorough stresses the indivisibility and interrelatedness of indigenous peoples' rights and how their human rights are intrinsically related to their right to self-determination. Despite a significant number of international instruments that protect their human rights and marked improvements in recent years, indigenous peoples continue to face grave human rights abuses on a daily basis, from dispossession of land to violence and murder. Often the most serious of these abuses are committed against indigenous persons who are defending their rights and their lands and territories. The gap between recognition and enjoyment of those rights in reality needs to be addressed through human rights education, more effective oversight and greater commitments from states.

The last chapter, written by Mililani Trask, looks at some of the **emerging issues** affecting indigenous peoples, including violence and militarism, effects of conservation, globalization, migration and urbanization, and indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation. A common theme is indigenous peoples' vulnerability in the face of outside pressures and the need to develop specific policies that address this vulnerability, while simultaneously ensuring that the principle of free, prior and informed consent is respected and that indigenous peoples participate in decision-making processes that affect their well-being. Indeed, this is the overarching theme of the whole publication.

The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples was authored by seven independent experts and produced by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

For more information, see: www.un.org/indigenous

¹Written in collaboration with the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Autonomy and Development (CADPI) in Nicaragua.

