



**SPEC POL T2 Promoting Shared Governance and Political Representation of Indigenous Peoples in National Decision-Making Structures with Special Regard to the Cases of the Amazon Region and New Zealand**

Table of Contents:

1. Information on the topic
2. Which regions are affected?
3. What, particularly, is the issue and why is it problematic?
4. What has been done so far to make a difference?
5. What did these attempts to a solution look like and who was involved?
6. What were the consequences of the efforts and why is there still an issue?
7. Who needs to handle this situation/take action?
8. Useful links

## 1. Information on the topic

When discussing the representation of Indigenous peoples in national decision-making structures, it is first necessary to clarify who is being referred to. According to Amnesty International Indigenous peoples can be identified by certain characteristics: Most importantly, they identify themselves as Indigenous peoples.

- They share an ancestral link with the original inhabitants of a country or region, predating colonization or the arrival of other dominant populations.
- They have a strong link to particular territories and the surrounding natural resources.
- They have distinct social, economic or political systems, which they are resolved to maintain and reproduce.
- They have a distinct language, culture and beliefs.
- They are politically and socially marginalized.

Indigenous peoples around the world face severe challenges rooted in exclusion, retribution, contempt, and systemic oppression. This manifests in many forms, including land dispossession and lack of political representation to cultural erasure, limited access to education and healthcare as well as and targeted violence. Often, their voices are silenced in national decision-making processes, and their traditional knowledge and rights are overlooked in favor of economic or political interests. It is important for a peaceful, respectful coexistence on an equal footing to treat every citizen equally, to hear their voice and to act accordingly. However, these values are often disregarded by the state and society in regions where Indigenous peoples live.

## 2. Which regions are affected?

In our committee we will focus, as already highlighted in the topic, on the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples in the regions of the Amazon and New Zealand.

However, the problem of ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples, doesn't only appear isn't limited to these regions. It's a much broader issue that directly or indirectly affects people worldwide. While it is difficult to determine the exact number, the United Nations estimates that around 476 million Indigenous people, representing over 5,000 distinct cultures, live across approximately 90 countries worldwide.

- Countries where Indigenous peoples' political representation remains a significant issue (examples only):
- Aborigines in Australia
- Inuit in Alaska
- Native Americans in the United States of America
- Ainu in Japan
- Tuareq in the Saharan states
- Adivasi in India
- Maori in New Zealand
- Nuhua, Maya, Zapoteco, Mixteco, Otamí and other Indigenous groups in southern Mexico
- Yanomami, Cayapo, and Asháninca in the Amazon region
- Lahu, Hmong, Akha in China
- Karo Batak and Bajau in Indonesia

### 3. What particularly is the issue and why is it problematic?

Since the beginning of colonial times, Indigenous peoples have been given little say in decision-making processes that directly affect their land and livelihoods, including decisions about natural resource extraction or industrial development on their traditional territory. Historically, this silencing of Indigenous voices and viewpoints has taken the form of exclusion. Indigenous communities were never given a seat at the table and never asked to contribute to the relevant discussions. They were given no opportunity to participate as their input was neither sought nor permitted. As though being silenced and structurally marginalized were not already enough, climate change continues to devastate their lands and erode their traditional ways of life daily. Indigenous peoples have limited access to education, employment and culturally appropriate healthcare, causing disproportionate rates of diseases.

Indigenous peoples in the Amazon Region and New Zealand, and all over the world, continue to face oppression and exclusion, underrepresentation in national decision-making structures, health disparities and many more social and economic inequalities. These issues must be confronted and action must be taken. Even though international organizations such as UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) call for meaningful and inclusive participation, countries like New Zealand or Amazon-region states like Brazil, are facing systemic obstacles that reduce Indigenous representation to symbolic acts, rather than allowing these communities to have real influence. In the Amazon, Indigenous communities are essential to the survival of the rainforest, one of the most important ecosystems on Earth. Their skills, cultural connection to the environment and vast knowledge, like their land stewardship practices, have protected large swaths of forest from deforestation. Despite that, these people are frequently left out of many political processes on how the forest is governed. This is mainly happening because countries often prioritize economic exploitation, such as agriculture, mining, and infrastructure development, over Indigenous land rights and autonomy, by allowing illegal land grabs or environmental destruction on Indigenous land. Therefore, this exclusion seems not to be only political but deeply systemic. Back in 2022, during the Brazilian elections, only one Indigenous candidate won a federal seat, and even then, representation was not assigned to the broader Indigenous movement. The result is that national policy affecting Indigenous people's land and rights is made largely without having Indigenous input, undermining both democratic legitimacy and environmental sustainability. These people in the Amazon face threats to their autonomy, cultural survival and safety, as land defenders are often targeted with violence. Moreover, deforestation is accelerating and global climate efforts are being destabilized, causing further environmental degradation. By excluding those who truly understand and protect the ecosystems, rights are not only violated, but ecological futures are being jeopardized. Furthermore, New Zealand has a more advanced framework for Indigenous representation, but it is far from solving the structural problems. Māori, the Indigenous Polynesian people of Aotearoa, New Zealand, have had parliamentary representation since 1867, and they are still holding a significant proportion of seats in Parliament. However, this does not always mean having a lasting influence. Core institutions made to uphold Māori self-determination, such as the Māori Health Authority (Te Aka Whai Ora), have recently been dismantled through government decisions, underlining the fragility of the power of an Indigenous group within a political system where the majority can easily override their interests through ordinary legislation. Real co-governance is rare and it is often limited to advisory roles and to short-term agreements. The persistent disparities are also seen when talking about health, education and justice, keeping in

mind that Māori life expectancy remains significantly lower than that of non-Māori. In addition, Māori children are also overrepresented in state care and the adults make up over half of the prison population. This is not just an isolated example, it reflects a broader failure to redistribute power and resources equally. The common thread between the Amazon and New Zealand is that Indigenous representation, when it exists, is often limited by dominant political structures that can exclude or override Indigenous perspectives. It undermines Indigenous rights, weakens environmental protection and reinforces inequality. The problem is not just the absence of Indigenous representation, but the absence of mechanisms that guarantee lasting, equal and legally protected power. Shared governance requires more than seats at the table. It needs real authority over economic exploitation. Without it, Indigenous peoples will remain politically vulnerable. In conclusion, the exclusion of Indigenous people from national decision-making structures is problematic because it enables systemic inequality, it weakens democracy, and it threatens cultural survival and environmental sustainability. The cases of the Amazon and New Zealand show that while ways of inclusion vary, the root causes are still not fully addressed. Solving this complex issue requires not only inclusion but transformation, moving from symbolic participation to shared power.

#### 4. What has been done so far to make a difference?

In recent decades, the need to address the marginalization of Indigenous peoples has gained growing recognition at international and national levels. Governments, international organizations and civil society have started to take steps toward inclusion, protection, and justice. Non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Cultural Survival and Survival International have played key roles in advocating for Indigenous rights, raising awareness, and pressuring governments to act. It is important to note that Indigenous communities themselves have been at the forefront of these efforts by organizing movements, defending their lands and asserting their political and cultural rights. These collective actions have paved the way for concrete initiatives and partnerships

#### 5. What did these attempts to a solution look like and who was involved?

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, establishing a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples and elaborating on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples. The declaration called on UN entities and international organizations to contribute to the realization of these human rights. In 2015, following the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the UN Inter-Agency Support Group created a system-wide action plan (SWAP-Indigenous Peoples) to promote the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to track progress in supporting their rights and well-being. In November 2015, the SWAP-Indigenous Peoples was brought to the attention of the CEB (United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) as an important tool at the disposal of the UN system and members were encouraged to support its implementation in their respective organizations. At High-level Committee on Programmes' 38th session in October 2019, IASG's work on Indigenous peoples' issues was showcased as an opportunity to improve coordination, fill in information gaps and leverage existing coordination frameworks. Yet the implementation of the SWAP-Indigenous Peoples has been uneven. In November 2020, the fifth anniversary of the SWAP-Indigenous Peoples, CEB took the opportunity to revitalize the action plan and strengthen collective and coherent UN system efforts by endorsing a call to action on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with Indigenous peoples. The call to action affirms the Executive Heads' commitment to supporting Member States in the promotion, protection and realization of the rights of Indigenous peoples. It aims to:

- ensure more systematic participation of Indigenous peoples in United Nations processes and initiatives that affect them
- strengthen targeted actions at the country level to support the rights of Indigenous peoples and learning from good practices
- ensure greater accountability and visibility for the action plan
- strengthen the categorization of data on indigenous peoples to ensure greater visibility of indigenous peoples and their situation.

The call to action was developed through the IASG, discussed and approved by the HLCP at its 40th session in October 2020. It was subsequently endorsed by CEB at its second regular session of 2020. To ensure follow-up to the CEB Call to Action and to deepen its implementation, the Committee reviewed a progress report prepared by ISAG at its 43rd session in April 2022 and:

- requested the IASG to develop an accountability measure for the United Nations system to strengthen the implementation of the UN-SWAP Indigenous Peoples
- emphasized the need to promote categorization of data related to Indigenous peoples as agreed in the CEB Call to Action and requested the IASG to engage with the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System on a human rights-based approach to data
- encouraged UNSDG to place Indigenous issues on its agenda to explore additional action that could be taken at country level to further the implementation of the UN-SWAP Indigenous Peoples
- encouraged the continuing close collaboration between the inter-agency support group and UNSDG through the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) to support United Nations resident coordinators.

Amnesty International's and other NGOs play a role in fighting for Indigenous rights by amplifying the voices of Indigenous advocates, providing high-quality research and applying pressure on governments to respect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. Amnesty's reports have, for example, highlighted the violence Indigenous activists face in the Amazon when defending their land from illegal logging and mining.

6. What were the consequences of the efforts and why is there still an issue?

In order to improve Indigenous representation and shared governance there have been efforts over the decades in both the Amazon region and New Zealand. In both cases, these efforts brought some policy wins, visibility and little institutional change. Yet, the deeper the structures of power, regarding legislation, politics and economy, have not shifted in a way that ensures lasting significant participation. As a result,

while progress has occurred, inequality still remains. In the Amazon, particularly in Brazil, efforts such as marking the borders of Indigenous lands, support for Indigenous-run associations and the recognition of Indigenous rights were major steps forward. The right to their traditional lands and cultural autonomy was remarked in the Brazilian Constitution in 1988. This was then followed by the recognition of over 400 territories and legal backing for Indigenous-run organizations like COIAB (Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon) and APIB (The Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil). Worldwide the voices of Indigenous Amazonian people have become more and more influential, especially in global climate and human rights debates. These efforts had real consequences. Where Indigenous peoples were able to maintain control over their land, deforestation dropped significantly. According to the World Resources Institute and IPAM Amazônia (2020), deforestation rates inside clearly marked Indigenous lands were up to 66% lower compared to the surrounding areas. Besides helping to preserve biodiversity, this also helped reduce carbon emissions and offered various benefits to the planet. Culturally, Indigenous languages, practices, traditions and identities gained more visibility and protection, especially in legal terms. Still, despite these successes, the problem persists, and, in some cases, the situation has worsened as Indigenous lands face economic and political pressure due to administrations prioritizing agriculture, mining, and infrastructure. Illegal logging, for example, is widespread, and very rarely prosecuted. Even though laws exist to protect Indigenous rights, local governments frequently fail to take action. The inclusion of some Indigenous leaders in federal politics, like Joenia Wapichana, the first-ever Indigenous woman elected to Brazil's National Congress, is symbolically powerful but structurally limited. Why is it still an issue? Because the efforts made were often defensive and partial, not systemic and fully recognizing all the aspects of the issue. The core governance model, which is based on extractive economic development and centralized state authority, remains hostile to the sovereignty of Indigenous communities. Land rights remain treated as negotiable and participation is often limited to consultation, not consent. As a consequence, the recognition of the Indigenous people's voice coexists with policies that continue to harm their territories. There continues to be a mismatch between the ambition of the Indigenous political recognition and the narrow space granted to it in national political life. In terms of formal political inclusion, New Zealand presents a more advanced



care in terms of formal political inclusion. The Māori seats in Parliament, the Waitangi Tribunal and the incorporation of the Māori language and values into public life mark significant progress. Initiatives such as the Māori-led social services program (Whānau Ora) and co-governance model in environmental management (e.g., for the Whanganui River and Te Urewera area) show that Māori have the capacity to shape national policy when given the right tools. Nevertheless, the underlying issue still remains Māori authority is not always equal. Many of the reforms rely on political goodwill and are vulnerable to reversal. In 2024, despite significant disparities in health outcomes between Māori and non-Māori, the government moved to dismantle the Māori Health Authority. The Waitangi Tribunal, although influential, has no power to enforce its findings. Māori communities continue to endure rising rates of poverty, incarceration and mental health related problems. Representation in Parliament does not ensure control over education, housing or the justice system. In both contexts, the consequences of the efforts were mixed. They brought representation but not redistribution of power. While they have improved visibility and have provided various mechanisms and platforms for advisory and consultation input, these efforts have not truly altered the structures through which decisions are made. In Brazil, although Indigenous land rights are recognized in the constitution, the implementation of these rights has not been fully put into practice, and policy decisions affecting Indigenous lands are still largely made by national government bodies. In New Zealand, mechanisms like the Māori seats in Parliament and Treaty-based institutions offer limited participation, while key decisions remain subject to majority rule within the already existing political frameworks.

The persistence of issues can be linked to the limited durability of new initiatives. Because participation mechanisms frequently fail to influence national policy and they are vulnerable to changes in the political landscape, the long-term effectiveness of inclusion strategies is reduced, particularly in areas focused on health industry, land management and environmental governance. As a result, inequalities remain, and tensions often reappear when different interests between national development objectives and Indigenous communities collide.

## 7. Who needs to handle this situation/take action?

In the context of Shared Governance and Political Representation of Indigenous Peoples, responsibility lies with multiple actors across national and international levels. Responsibility for ensuring the fair political representation of Indigenous peoples lies primarily with national governments, as they hold the power to reform laws, provide resources and include Indigenous voices in decision-making structures. In the Amazon region, this means that states like Brazil, Peru and Colombia must strengthen legal protections, end political exclusion and consult Indigenous communities in all policies affecting their territories. In New Zealand, while progress has been made through Māori parliamentary representation and treaty-based frameworks, continued efforts are required to ensure full co-governance and reduce socio-political inequality. Additionally, international bodies such as the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International and Cultural Survival play a vital supporting role through monitoring, funding, and advocacy. Lastly, civil society and private actors, particularly in sectors like mining, agriculture, and development, must be held accountable and compelled to respect Indigenous rights, especially in resource-rich areas like the Amazon.

## 8. Useful links

- [About Indigenous Peoples and human rights | OHCHR](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples Must Have Full Representation, Participation in Decisions Affecting Their Territory, Governance, Speakers Stress at Permanent Forum | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)
- [untitled](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples | United Nations - CEB](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples - Amnesty International](#)
- [Brazil: "We are the land": indigenous peoples' struggle for human rights - Amnesty International](#)
- [Press Release: Wet'suwet'en Report 2023 | Amnesty International](#)

- [The Amazon can wait no longer - Amnesty International](#)
- [Indigenous Political Representation: Leaders & Progress](#)

