

Leaflet No. 7: The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

Key Words and Ideas

**The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People
OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme
The United Nations Trust Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

In late 1993, following a recommendation by the World Conference on Human Rights, the General Assembly proclaimed the **International Decade of the World's Indigenous People** (1995-2004). Later, the General Assembly decided that the theme of the Decade would be "Indigenous People: Partnership in Action".

The goal of the Decade is to foster international cooperation to help solve problems faced by indigenous peoples in such areas as human rights, culture, the environment, development, education and health.

In 1995, the General Assembly adopted the programme of activities for the Decade and identified a number of specific objectives:

- the development of activities, by the specialized agencies of the UN system and other inter-governmental and national agencies, that benefit indigenous peoples
- the education of indigenous and non-indigenous societies concerning the cultures, languages, rights and aspirations of indigenous peoples
- the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples
- the implementation of recommendations concerning indigenous peoples adopted by all high-level international conferences, including the proposal to establish a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues in the UN system
- the adoption of the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the development of international standards and national legislation to protect and promote indigenous peoples' human rights

The General Assembly recommended that the realization of the Decade's objectives should be assessed according to whether or not the lives of indigenous peoples had improved. It suggested evaluating progress halfway through the Decade (1999) and at its conclusion (2004).

The General Assembly appointed the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as coordinator for the Decade. The High Commissioner is requested to submit to the General Assembly, through the Secretary-General, reports on the implementation of the Decade's programme of activities. (They can be found on the OHCHR web site, www.unhchr.ch, under "Indigenous Peoples/documents".)

Technical cooperation and mainstreaming of indigenous issues

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has intensified efforts to mainstream indigenous issues into human rights projects and programmes developed within the framework of its

technical cooperation programme. Two projects in Guatemala and Mexico already incorporate a focus on indigenous issues.

OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme

In 1995, the General Assembly recommended that an Indigenous Fellowship Programme be created within the United Nations to assist indigenous individuals who want to gain experience working in the UN system.

The Indigenous Fellowship Programme is a six-month training course held from June to December each year. Fellows are based at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The aim of the Programme is to give indigenous individuals the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in the field of international human rights, in general, and in indigenous peoples' rights, in particular, so they can assist their organizations and communities in protecting and promoting their people's human rights. The Programme is designed for indigenous individuals, supported by their organizations and communities, who are committed to understanding and promoting international human rights and the process of developing and implementing international human rights standards.

The Programme consists of an intensive course on human rights, briefings, seminars, monitoring of relevant UN meetings, and practical work within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As part of the practical work experience, Fellows help the Secretariat organize and service the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Working Group on the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Training sessions with the different UN agencies, such as the International Labour Organization, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, also form an important part of the Programme. Fellows also have the opportunity to establish contacts with NGOs during the Programme.

From 1997 to 2000, four indigenous individuals were awarded a fellowship each year. The Fellowship covered a return air ticket from their countries of residence to Geneva, health insurance, and accommodation and living expenses in Geneva. During this period, participants in the Indigenous Fellowship Programme came from Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mali, Nepal, New Zealand, Panama, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sweden and the United States of America. Since 1998, the programme has also been opened to externally financed candidates.

In 2000, in collaboration with the Institute of Human Rights of the University of Deusto, in Bilbao, Spain, the Indigenous Fellowship Programme was expanded to provide training for indigenous Fellows from Latin America. Four Fellows from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru spent three months at the University of Deusto, where they received human rights training, and two months in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Geneva, to gain practical experience.

Information and application forms for the Indigenous Fellowship Programme are available on the OHCHR web site (www.unhchr.ch) or can be obtained from :

<p style="text-align: center;">Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Indigenous Project Team 1211 Geneva 10 Switzerland Fax: 41-22-917-9010</p>

The United Nations Trust Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

The United Nations Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was established in 1995 by the UN Secretary-General to accept and administer voluntary contributions from governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and other private institutions and individuals to fund projects and programmes during the Decade.

One of the tasks of the Coordinator of the Decade, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is to encourage the development of projects and programmes that will be supported by the Voluntary Fund for the Decade. These projects/programmes must be designed in collaboration with governments and must take into account the views of indigenous peoples and the appropriate UN agencies. In 1996, the High Commissioner set up an advisory group, which includes indigenous persons, to recommend potential projects for the Fund.

Activities supported by the Fund

Project grants to indigenous communities and NGOs

Beneficiaries

The Fund supports indigenous peoples, communities and organizations, NGOs and academic and other similar institutions that seek small grants for projects and activities related to the Decade, especially those intended to strengthen indigenous organizations through education, human rights training, and capacity-building. Organizations should be non-profit-making and should have the capacity to raise needed additional money from other sources.

Main focuses of activities

- The programme of activities and objectives of the Decade as well as the recommendations of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action as they relate to indigenous peoples.
- Strengthening indigenous organizational structures and procedures through education, training, and capacity building, while respecting their traditions.
- Education and training in human and indigenous rights.
- Information about indigenous peoples and the International Decade.
- Communication between the UN system and indigenous peoples and among indigenous peoples.
- Fund-raising initiatives to promote the objectives of the Decade.

Criteria

- Projects should relate to the promotion, protection and implementation of human and indigenous rights.
- Projects should be of direct benefit to indigenous peoples in all parts of the world.
- Projects should be prepared by or with the full support from and in consultation with indigenous peoples.
- Projects will be considered taking gender balance into account
- Particular consideration will be given to projects from underdeveloped areas in different regions.

In order to apply for project grants, please contact:

The Trust Funds Unit
UNVF for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Fax: 41-22-917-9017
Web site: www.unhchr.ch

Workshops and seminars

The Voluntary Fund has financed several workshops and seminars organized within the framework of the International Decade. These include a Workshop for Indigenous Journalists that was held in January 1998 in Madrid, a Workshop on Higher Education and Indigenous Peoples, held in Costa Rica in June/July 1999, a Workshop on Indigenous Children and Youth, held in Geneva in July 2000, a Workshop on Indigenous Media, held in December 2000 at the UN in New York, and a workshop on "peaceful and constructive group accommodation in situations involving minorities and indigenous peoples", held in Kidal, Mali, in January 2001.

The following description of the two workshops on indigenous media explains the usefulness of these kinds of activities:

Workshops on Indigenous Media

Indigenous journalists and representatives of UN agencies and other relevant institutions participated in the workshop for indigenous media in Madrid in 1998. During their final meeting, participants recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be asked to organize a second workshop for indigenous media workers, in cooperation with indigenous journalists, to further explore the issues raised in the Madrid workshop and to finalize and adopt a programme of activities to strengthen indigenous media.

The second workshop for indigenous media was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Department of Public Information. It was held in December 2000 at UN Headquarters in New York. The aim of this workshop was to explore ways of promoting the rights and cultures of indigenous peoples through the media and to design a programme of activities to strengthen indigenous media during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and beyond. The workshop brought together representatives of both indigenous and mainstream media, as well as representatives of UN agencies and other relevant institutions and organizations. Participants discussed issues such as the relationship between indigenous peoples and the mainstream media, indigenous peoples and new media, and cooperation between the United Nations and the media. Workshop participants made a number of recommendations for a programme of action to strengthen indigenous media. (These recommendations can be found in the workshop's report, which was submitted to the July 2001 session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.)