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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues



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About Us

Permanent Forum: Origin and Development

The Permanent Forum was established by the UN in response to demands from indigenous peoples for a high level permanent body at the United Nations



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The Permanent Forum is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

According to its mandate, the Permanent Forum will:

- provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the Council, as well as to programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, through the Council
- raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system
- prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues

The Permanent Forum holds annual two-week sessions. The first meeting of the Permanent Forum was held in May 2002, and yearly sessions take place in New York. Sessions may also take place in Geneva or another place decided by the Forum.

The Permanent Forum is one of three UN bodies that is mandated to deal specifically with indigenous peoples' issues. The others are the [Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and the [Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Background:

Discussions to establish the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues began in the late 1980s

Indigenous peoples and others in the Working Group on Indigenous Populations felt that the structures of the United Nations were not well-suited to consider issues of concern to indigenous peoples comprehensively. In addition, they felt that the participation of indigenous representatives in the United Nations was limited. In light of these concerns, indigenous peoples and others proposed establishing a new body that would focus on global issues related to indigenous peoples and that would offer the opportunity for indigenous peoples to participate effectively.

Participants at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna discussed the creation of the Permanent Forum. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action recommended that such a forum should be established within the framework of the first United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004).

In June 1995, a workshop was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, to discuss establishing a permanent forum for indigenous peoples. Participants included representatives of governments, indigenous peoples and independent experts. They discussed the potential scope of a permanent forum, which UN body the proposed forum would report to, the forum's mandate and terms of reference, including what activities it might undertake, membership, indigenous participation, its relationship with the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and financial and secretariat implications. The report of this workshop was transmitted to governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, and inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. Recipients of the report were invited to express their views.

When the General Assembly adopted the Programme of Activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, it recognized that the establishment of the Forum was one of the primary objectives of the Decade.

A second UN workshop on the Permanent Forum was held in Santiago, Chile in 1997, during which representatives of governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs, UN organizations and bodies and specialized agencies considered the findings of the Secretary-General's review and further developed proposals for establishing a permanent forum.

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