

## REPORT

### **Briefing of UN Member States Attending 79<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly Briefing Report held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

Indigenous Peacebuilding as Pathway to Mitigating Violent Conflicts and  
Securing a more Peaceful World.

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Around the world, Indigenous communities are disproportionately subjected to violent armed conflicts, organized crime, and insurgency, which not only degrade their sacred natural resources but also limit economic opportunities. Indigenous Peoples are historically excluded and underrepresented as agents of peacebuilding, despite being impacted the most by violent conflict that occurs in biodiversity hotspots which they inhabit. This is largely due to a lack of awareness and respect for Indigenous methodologies of peace, which addressing these gaps has been a major commitment at the United States Institute of Peace and our partner organisations and committed individuals in our efforts to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict. The first-ever historic First Global Summit on Indigenous Peacebuilding hosted earlier in the year was the first step towards addressing the disparities and problems facing 476 million Indigenous Peoples living in over 90 countries and territories. In April 2024, over 120 Indigenous peacebuilders, elders, women, and youth from over 30 countries and 7 global socio-cultural regions convened at USIP HQ in

Washington DC. The meeting successfully highlighted the missing elements of Indigenous Peacebuilding and provided space to discuss the problems Indigenous people are facing and how we as a global network can elevate this to the attention of the global community.

Following the success of the Summit, briefing the international community on these issues and detailing the historic Summit was a priority as we continue to advance our efforts of advancing conflict mediation strategies and building sustainable peace. Along with Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations team as a co-sponsor, USIP organized a briefing of United Nations Member States in accordance with the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and the Summit of the Future held from 10 to 24 September 2024 at the UN Headquarters in New York City. This briefing was coordinated alongside our partner Indigenous communities and organizations along with the Global Network of Indigenous Peacebuilders, Mediators, and Negotiators. We are extremely grateful to all of our partners who made this briefing possible and especially thankful to everyone who joined us. Special thanks to the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations who were highly supportive of the briefing and were present with us.



The briefing included a total of 60 participants from over 20 countries, most notably 7 Ambassadors to Permanent UN Missions, 30 diplomats, and various Indigenous elders, women, and youth. The briefing commenced with a special opening prayer by Chief Wilton Littlechild and Sasha Leung which set the stage for all to share messages of peace and light in light of the world's current climate along with Sasha Leung. We welcomed opening remarks by Binalakshmi Nepam, Senior Advisor on Indigenous Issues at USIP, and Rosemary Lane, the Acting Chief for the

Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Their remarks introduced the important work that Indigenous communities have been engaging in for years and highlighted the need for societies moving forward to be open to acknowledging Indigenous practices and their truth. Rosemary and this UN branch act as Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, which serves as a vital platform for Indigenous peoples to voice their concerns on conflict related issues. The forum recognizes that Indigenous peoples are not just merely victims of conflict but are active participants of building and sustaining peace which is a critical component of the work they engage in.

This first session of the briefing was facilitated by Elsa Stamatopoulou, the current Director of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Program at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia. As the first Chief of the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and an active participant of the first Global Summit, Elsa spoke to the specialness of the period we are in. Noting that since the Summit there has been a real commitment by Indigenous people to follow up on peacebuilding work.

The United States Government's engagement was demonstrated through two insightful contributions. These remarks acknowledged the importance of Indigenous issues and highlighted current initiatives. Michael Orona who is the Senior Advisor for Global Strategy and International Indigenous Issues at the U.S. Department of State from Apache and Yaqui ancestry himself, spoke to the wealth of wisdom Indigenous peoples hold. They have been keepers of traditional knowledge, sustainable practices and communal harmony for centuries which is indispensable for the promotion of world peace. In a general statement from the U.S. government, they acknowledge the long history of conflict with Indigenous Peoples, including horrific policies of assimilation, displacement, and eradication. The efforts by Michael Orona and the U.S. Department of State as well as many other U.S. governmental agencies have committed to working towards respecting the expertise and agency of Indigenous Peoples. While also recognizing that there is still much work to be done to improve their engagement with Indigenous communities.





With many important actors in attendance, it is important to highlight the participation of Keynote Address by H.E. Mrs. Leanor Zalabata Torres, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations. As an Indigenous leader and the first Indigenous Woman appointed as Colombia's Ambassador to the UN, the keynote remarks by Mrs. Zalabata emphasized that marginalizing Indigenous voices undermines the sustainability of reconciliation efforts and that their full participation is crucial for genuine peace. She highlighted Colombia's approach, which addresses historical injustices by involving indigenous communities in decision-making and embracing capital diversity as essential for stable and lasting peace. Global efforts must actively work towards enhancing our understanding of strategies that ensure the full integration of Indigenous voices in peace and reconciliation efforts.

Furthering on the themes Mrs. Zalabata discussed, Ambassador to the Permanent Mission of Guatemala, H.E. Carla María Rodríguez Mancia, and Ambassador to the Permanent Mission of Guyana, H.E. Mrs. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett also spoke from an Indigenous perspective of their representative countries. As Indigenous leaders themselves, they spoke on the scarcity of peace and stressed solutions of Justice and Reparations as important to consider for local and global efforts of structural change. The remarkable efforts by these women underscore the significant contributions Indigenous Women have in the peacebuilding field, and their perspectives were critical additions to the discourse around Indigenous Peacebuilding as conflict mitigation and sustainable peacebuilding.

In addition to UN officials, the U.S. Government, academics, and Diplomats, Indigenous Peoples held the spotlight as they briefed member states on their participation in the Summit, issues facing their communities, and the necessary pathways to move towards collaborative peace and conflict mitigation efforts. This briefing and the global efforts that will follow would not be possible without the knowledge and involvement of Indigenous peoples, elders, leaders, women, and youth. Their contribution and active participation in this briefing were fundamental to its success. With many unique cultural and regional perspectives discussed, their contributions highlighted several key takeaways which all are interconnected:

- Uplifting Indigenous Voices/Leadership
- Restorative Justice/Reparations
- Truth telling and Reconciliation
- Indigenous People and Connection to Climate and Land

Briefings from our Indigenous partners began with remarks by Chief Wilton Little Child, a Canadian lawyer and Cree chief who served as Grand Chief of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations. He reflected on models of peace that have been used throughout his extensive work that he believes are valuable to follow such as the Treaty Number Six (Peace and Friendship Treaty) with Great Britain and Ireland. With emphasis on respect, honor, and especially enforcement as outlined in Article 37 of the UN Declaration. Other important models mentioned were the Commonwealth Sport Declaration which utilizes sport to advance reconciliation in partnership with Indigenous peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Report in Canada which uses the UN framework for reconciliation.



Following Chief Wilton, Kenneth Deer presented on the “Ways of Peace” of the Mohawk Nation. The Peacemaker's principles for peace include disarmament, forgiveness, positive communication, reason and morality, and consensus. By following these guidelines, they believe that individuals and communities can work together to create a more peaceful and harmonious society. Moving to another part of the world where Indigenous are experiencing severe conflict, Eskender Barriev who is the Head of the Board of the Crimean Tatar Resource Center traveled specifically from Kyiv, Ukraine to attend this briefing. He emphasized a critical need for the global community to respect the UN Charter and International law. Eskender urged support for the 10-point peace formula that can be universal to stop wars created by the President of Ukraine in light of the war that is happening in Ukraine and Russia. The 10 points included nuclear safety, food security, energy security, the release of prisoners of war/deportees, restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, withdrawal of Russian troops, restoration of justice, environmental security and reconstruction, preventing escalation of war and repeated aggression and lastly end of war guarantees.

Participation from Indigenous Youth has been an active element of our initiatives at USIP and grateful to have remarks by Temulun Togochoong as well as by her father Enghebatu Togochoog who is the Director of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Centre. As a young person living in the U.S. with family in Mongolia experiencing cultural genocide, she underscored the importance of youth involvement. It is the future generations that will be affected by these issues, so youth need to fight for their identity and those in the world experiencing human rights violations. Her father, Enghebatu spoke on the ongoing human rights violations such as the systematic destruction of Mongolian political, culture, tradition, language, and identity with



particular mention of the continuing cultural genocide occurring in the Indigenous Mongolian communities that China does not recognize.



We also welcomed participation from Adam Kuliet from the Masaai Indigenous community from Tanzania who is part of the FSC Indigenous Foundation. Adam urges we seek Mother Earth's forgiveness for our actions that are destroying nature, unity, life, and the future of our children and strive for a sustainable future where peace, Indigenous wisdom, and humanity prevail. From Colombia, Nidia Bustillos discussed the founding of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant Women's News Agency that amplifies Indigenous women's voices and promotes peace through unique knowledge and perspectives, challenging harmful stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media. Fred Lubang another important Summit participant who acts as the Southeast Asia Regional Representative of Nonviolence International highlighted topics of decolonization and dignity. Decolonization of global governance is essential and is the reclamation of stolen dignity to rebuild what has been lost. This process must occur not only at the international level but also locally and within communities.

One of our last speakers was Linda Burney an Australian Senator from the Wiradjuri Nation who highlighted that truth-telling is crucial for peacebuilding, but it's often neglected. Forgiveness and truth-telling require responsibility and the active participation of indigenous perspectives at all levels and are extremely important to consider.

The briefing wrapped up with a statement from Claire Charters, a Professor from Ngati Whakaue, Tuwharetoa, Nga Puhi, and Tainui ancestry in the University of Auckland Faculty of Law researching Indigenous peoples' rights in international and constitutional law. In her concluding

remarks, she focused on the recent adoption by the general assembly of a resolution to continue the process of enhancing Indigenous Peoples' participation at the UN. She highlighted Maori concepts of balance and collective responsibility as well as the legal obligation of implementation on components of the declaration, which have unfortunately been unsuccessful in Australia.

In summary, Indigenous women and youth were particularly noted for their leadership in global peace efforts, the participation of three Indigenous Ambassadors as well as examples highlighted in the history of the Mohawk Nation from Bear Clan Member Kenneth Deer reinforce this. The integration of Indigenous practices into peacebuilding and governance was examined as traditional methods of conflict resolution and environmental stewardship were deemed vital to achieving lasting peace. Another important solution touched on by many of the participants concerned restorative justice and reparation. Many called for addressing the historical injustices faced by Indigenous communities, particularly in regions like Guatemala and Guyana, where access to justice is crucial for societal restructuring. Similar ideas were presented as methods to reclaim the dignity that was stripped from Indigenous communities and rebuild what was destroyed and lost. All of this cannot happen without societal restructuring or decolonizing global government. There were also strong links made between climate change, security, and land protection as additional elements that we must consider in this work. Indigenous peoples are recognized as key guardians of natural resources and therefore require environmental security, accountability, and justice to secure the sacredness of their land, preserving unity and life as we know it. The importance of truth-telling in reconciliation processes were stressed, with the belief that without acknowledging past wrongs, genuine peace cannot be achieved, as demonstrated in Australia's truth-telling challenges.



All of the insightful remarks made at this briefing demonstrate the interconnectedness of the issues facing Indigenous communities, as well as the path forward this uniquely diverse community of peacebuilders outlines. It is evident that there is a strong commitment to Indigenous peoples'



involvement in peace processes, and we must continue to gather in the community for the collective sharing of knowledge. Our planet is actively experiencing 107 wars and conflicts around the world, that have left 117 million people displaced, many of whom disproportionately are Indigenous. As we continue to witness a period of history marked by rising war and conflict across various regions, fueled by geopolitical tensions, resource competition, and social unrest the global community is in dire need of sustainable solutions. The first Global Summit on Indigenous Peacebuilding and this briefing of UN member-states at the 79<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly are the first of many that will continue to spotlight Indigenous Peacebuilding as a pathway for mitigating violent conflict and securing a more peaceful world.

For ways forward, we will continue to engage all supportive states, institutions and Indigenous communities at the upcoming UN Third Committee as well as in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues next year to be held from 29 April 2025 to 2 May 2025 to ensure that Indigenous Peacebuilding is streamlined in all ways of working for mitigating conflicts and healing the planet.



