

# United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Organization: United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Author: Ravi de Costa , McMaster University

Date Entered: 2005-05-05

Description The Working Group on Indigenous Populations is a subordinate body of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It was established in 1982 (resolution 1982/34) in response to a decade-long study of the discrimination facing Indigenous populations and now meets annually in Geneva, usually during the last week of July.

Formally, the Working Group consists of five members of the Sub-Commission who are experts on Indigenous peoples rights and human rights. They hear submissions primarily from Indigenous representatives but also from governments and United Nations (UN) bodies. The Working Group's mandate is two-fold: to "review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations" and to "give special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of such populations."

Since its inception, the Working Group has been the origin of all the major developments in Indigenous policy within the United Nations system. Initially, participants set about identifying and reforming existing human rights mechanisms, including work that led to the revised International Labour Organization Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. However, there was soon a realization that reform of existing arrangements was not sufficient.

A Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was called for, as was a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in which governments and UN agencies would have to justify their actions. The latter body came into existence in 2002 and since then there has been concern about the role of the Working Group within the UN system.

Suggested Reading: **Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) website.**  
[www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org) (accessed 24 July 2006)

**Working Group on Indigenous Populations Website.**  
[www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/groups-01.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/groups-01.htm) (accessed 23 March 2005).