

Indigenous Peoples' Right to Education

This year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is devoted to the right to education.

The right of indigenous peoples to education is protected by the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which in Article 14 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."

The right of indigenous peoples to education is also protected by a number of other international human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Goal 4 of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* calls for ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

In spite of these instruments, the right to education has not been fully realized for most indigenous peoples, and a critical education gap exists between indigenous peoples and the general population.

A continuing struggle:

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. They make up less than 5 per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures.

As distinct peoples, indigenous peoples have developed their own knowledge systems, values, institutions, practices and economies, often based on sustainable management of natural resources. Likewise, indigenous peoples have their own cultural methods of transmitting knowledge.

When states and religious denominations developed formal education for indigenous peoples, indigenous cultures, languages and practices were often ignored or discouraged.

The education sector is a particular arena that not only mirrors and condenses the historical abuses, discrimination and marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples, but also reflects their continued struggle for equality and respect for their rights as peoples and as individuals.

Barriers to education for indigenous students include stigmatization of indigenous identity and low self-esteem of indigenous learners; discriminatory and racist attitudes in the school environment, including in textbooks and materials and among non-indigenous students and teachers; language barriers between indigenous learners and teachers; inadequate resources and low prioritization of education for indigenous peoples, reflected in poorly trained teachers as well as lack of textbooks and resources.

Many regions of the world lack the disaggregated data that could reveal the accurate situation of discrimination and marginalization of indigenous peoples. However, where data exist, they show consistent and persistent disparities between the indigenous and the non-indigenous population in terms of educational access, retention and achievement, in all regions of the world.

Some facts and figures:

In Nunavut, the northernmost territory in Canada, Inuit high-school graduation rates are well below average, and only 40 per cent of all school-age indigenous children are attending school full time. (*State of the*

