

**MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS**

**Gateway to Diplomacy**

# **BACKGROUND MATERIALS**

**63rd CONFERENCE,  
FEBRUARY 2023**

**General Assembly  
Third Committee**

**Prepared by:**

*Elena Bonitz and Jarett Lopez*

**With Contributions from:**

*Anthony Bassey, Stephanie Liechty, Andria Marsh, and Heather Polarine*

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For any inquiries regarding committee preparation, contact Under-Secretary-General of Operations Zachary Vetter at [usgo@mmun.org](mailto:usgo@mmun.org).



## **General Assembly Third Committee**

### **Committee Mandate**

#### **Introduction**

With the creation of the United Nations and the Charter in 1945 also came the creation of the General Assembly (GA), the main deliberative body and one of the principal organs of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> The GA consists of all 193 Member States of the United Nations, along with two States with observer status. As one of the main international platforms for high-level diplomacy, the GA creates non-binding resolutions that address international norms on a wide range of pressing topics. The GA has 6 subsidiary committees.

The GA Third Committee is known as the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee, and is currently chaired by H. E. Mohamed Siad Doualeh of Djibouti. In keeping with its official name, the Committee focuses mainly on social, humanitarian affairs, and human rights issues. Topics include social development and human rights, often touching on gender equality, crime prevention and criminal justice, and the protection of vulnerable populations such as children, indigenous groups, refugees, and persons with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Membership**

The GA Third Committee is a plenary committee made up of all 193 Member States. The GA operates on the idea of Sovereign Equality: each Member State, regardless of size, GNI, or any other factor, gets a single, equal vote.<sup>3</sup> Usually, delegates are present during the review and votes for draft resolutions during the GA Plenary sessions than during a meeting of a subsidiary GA committee.<sup>4</sup> Debate in the GA Third Committee can be more intense than elsewhere due to the sensitive nature of cultural topics.

#### **Reporting**

The GA has no direct subsidiary bodies, but is often advised by other UN entities, such as UN-Women, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While in session, delegates of this committee discuss and debate a topic to develop a working paper, which can then be adopted as a draft resolution by a simple majority vote of the committee. Draft resolutions from Third Committee, and all other subsidiary committees, are passed on to the GA Plenary for a second vote and typically passed via majority

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945

<sup>2</sup> United Nations General Assembly. "Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)."

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations General Assembly. "Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)."

vote. Any resolution that is adopted by the GA is a statement of the will of the international community.

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## **General Assembly Third Committee**

### **Topic I: Safe and Sustainable Transportation Infrastructure for the Achievement of SDG 3**

#### **Introduction**

Since the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit, efforts to define the role that transportation plays in sustainable development have been made. Transportation and mobility go hand-in-hand. With increased transit comes increased mobility of people and goods. This allows for greater access to necessary services that can help to improve livelihoods and grow community connectivity.<sup>1</sup> However, increased transportation through unsustainable means, can end up having the opposite effect. Unsafe and unsustainable transportation infrastructure can have a negative impact on the health of those it aims to help<sup>2</sup>. Be it through dangerous traffic conditions or by an increased pollution output, there are many recognized side effects. Implementing sustainable transportation practices help to eliminate these unfortunate side effects without sacrificing the good increased mobility brings.<sup>3</sup>

Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3) aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Though access to safe and sustainable public transportation is not an immediate solution to this goal, it is a vital-stepping stone in achieving it. Currently, many transportation systems are not living up to the standards set by the Sustainable Mobility for All initiative. Within both rural and urban communities, those who do not have access to public transportation are at a disadvantage. In particular, those within the most vulnerable groups face additional barriers to access of necessary goods and services. There is also a great disparity between infrastructure innovation within developed and developing Member States. The United Nations recognizes this disparity and aims to create policies that work to reduce these gaps.

The Sustainable Mobility for All initiative<sup>4</sup> identifies four main aspects of sustainable transport: universal access, efficiency, safety, and green mobility. This initiative, hosted by the World Bank, is a multistakeholder partnership focused on international cooperation on transportation and mobility issues<sup>5</sup>. Though everyone can potentially benefit from sustainable transport, it is often vulnerable populations such as women,

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development: Interagency Report for second Global Sustainable Transport Conference"

<sup>2</sup> Bao, Sungtao, et al. "Sustainable Transportation and Health." Int J Environ Res Public Health, March 2018

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Report of the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference", October 2021

<sup>4</sup> Sum4all (2021) "Sustainable Mobility for All."

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank (2019) "Sustainable Mobility for All (Sum4All)," December 2019

children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, who stand to gain the most<sup>6</sup>. Universal access implies that transportation systems consider the needs of every user, regardless of gender, age, economic situation, or health. Making sure that no one is left behind<sup>7</sup>. Sustainable transportation allows for broader access to employment opportunities, healthcare and medical facilities, and education, helping to bridge the gap of inequality<sup>8</sup>. With sustainable transportation infrastructure comes connectivity. Connectivity between global, regional, and interregional economies is crucial for increasing the efficiency of the global supply chain<sup>9</sup>. Increased transportation, especially vehicular transportation, can bring increased risk<sup>10</sup>. The issue of increased safety within transportation infrastructure has been recognized as an important indicator towards the fulfillment of SDG3. The creation of safer transportation is crucial as millions of lives are lost to road traffic accidents each year.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, Local Governments for Sustainability's (ICLEI) Ecomobility Initiative defines green mobility as mobility focused on moving people more than vehicles. It "encourages modes not dependent on fossil fuels<sup>12</sup>." Ensuring green mobility within sustainable transportation infrastructure will help cut back on the negative side effects mentioned before.

## **Background**

Road, rail, aviation, marine, ferry, and urban public transport all fall within the umbrella term of sustainable transportation. The topic was first recognized at the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. From there on out, its presence within the UN agenda would be cemented. By the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, it was 'unanimously' considered to be a crucial aspect of sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> The first major action made by the United Nations in regard to sustainable transportation was the creation of the Secretary General's High-level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport in August of 2014. Two years later, the Group released a comprehensive guide on the role sustainable transport played in sustainable development, as well as various plans for implementation. Notably, it provided 10 recommendations on how decision-makers at all levels could best direct resources towards sustainable transportation.<sup>14</sup> This guide, entitled *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*, states that this more energy efficient infrastructure could

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development: Interagency Report for second Global Sustainable Transport Conference"

<sup>7</sup> Sum4all "Universal Access" 2021

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Report of the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference", October 2021

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development: Interagency Report for second Global Sustainable Transport Conference"

<sup>11</sup> Lennon, Conor. "Can We Make Transport Safe and Sustainable? an Interview with Motorsport Chief, Jean Todt" 2021

<sup>12</sup> Kumar, Emani. "Green Mobility" Local Governments for Sustainability Asia

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022) "Sustainable Transport"

<sup>14</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development "Experts Urge Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Sdgs." SDG Knowledge Hub, 2016

potentially save the world around 70 trillion dollars in urban transportation, and is still being referenced in documentation six years later.

While there is no single SDG dedicated to sustainable transportation, the United Nations has acknowledged the important role it plays in achieving sustainable development and has worked to increase its implementation through various means.<sup>15</sup> Three SDG targets reference sustainable transport (3.6, 9.1, and 11.2). Target 9.1 aims to “develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure,” and is most loosely connected of the three targets. Target 11.2 aims to provide safe and accessible public transportation to all, particularly to vulnerable groups, as well as increase road safety through these tactics. Lastly, target 3.6 falls focuses mainly on cutting down road traffic accidents globally<sup>16</sup>.

In November 2016, the First Global Sustainable Transport Conference was held, during which *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development* was released. During the opening session, then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, stressed the importance that safe and sustainable public transit plays in improving livelihoods around the world. Even in areas that have access to public transit systems, safety and health protection are not guaranteed. Improving the current systems worldwide would bring with it the answers to these current problems.

The UN General Assembly has also passed several resolutions on sustainable transport throughout the years. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted “Towards comprehensive cooperation among all modes of transport for promoting sustainable multimodal transit corridors” (A/RES/70/197). This resolution touches on the need for cooperation, particularly through multi-stakeholder partnership and public-private partnership, on all fronts when implementing sustainable transportation policies and the positive effect cooperation can have on enhancing regional and interregional connectivity. Two years later, in 2017, “Strengthening the links between all modes of transport to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” (A/RES/72/212), was adopted, which acts as a call-to-action for Member States to invest in their own sustainable transportation policies, as well as consider joining in on already existing conferences. Member States may be deterred or hindered from adoption due to funding, rapid urbanization or demographic changes, or maybe under special situations. Least developed, developing landlocked states, and small island developing states fall within these special situations and unique care is needed. All challenges and deterrents have been acknowledged since A/RES/70/197.

More recently, an updated version (A/RES/75/313 from 2021) has been passed with the focus on continuing to implement sustainable transport amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, in 2022 “Integration of mainstream bicycling into public transportation systems for sustainable development” (A/RES/76/255) was adopted. It focuses on encouraging member states to consider the positive effects integrating bicycles into

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) “Report of the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference”, October 2021

<sup>16</sup> High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport “Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development” 2016

public transit systems can have on sustainable development. Those positive effects being a “simple, affordable, reliable, clean and environmentally fit sustainable means of transportation, fostering environmental stewardship and health<sup>17</sup>” Further proving that sustainable transportation can come in all forms.

### **Current Situation**

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has diverted resources from all areas of sustainable development, including efforts to implement sustainable transportation. On one hand, the demand for public transportation has dropped drastically, as less people are traveling. However, the demand for the transport of goods, such as vaccines, has risen. Due to this continued dependency on the transportation of goods Member States have been forced to rethink their approaches to sustainable transportation. Contactless transport and delivery, the inclusion of bicycles within urban transport, and the further digitization of public transit systems are all being considered. The United Nations acknowledges the important role that public transit can play in restoring normal living conditions and unhindered mobility within and after the pandemic and continues to integrate the topic into its current agenda.<sup>18</sup>

At the Second Global Sustainable Transport Conference, held in October 2021, participants gathered to address the current state of sustainable transportation and what policies could be implemented to combat any current issues. One of the key takeaways was an increased emphasis on scientific innovation. As the world continues to digitize, some of those innovations may be used to better sustainable transportation infrastructure. Artificial intelligence for road safety management,<sup>19</sup> electric vehicles that cut down on carbon emissions<sup>20</sup>, and self-driving cars to cut down on road accidents, are all but a few examples of scientific innovation at work. Even the reduced demand for public transit due to telecommuting can be helpful towards sustainable transportation. As it cuts down on the immediate demand it offers opportunities to allow sustainable innovation without excess strain. That being said, the United Nations has also recognized that not all Member States will have equal access to these necessary intelligent transit systems. Therefore, the need to mobilize the adequate resources for those vulnerable/special situations is emphasized. The conference’s answer to this was through improving financing, as it is one of the major challenges to implementation of sustainable transport policies. Financing is to come from multilateral groups, public, and private sources, with private dominant in developed states and public in developing ones. For multilateral groups, the Interagency Report highlighted the Green Climate Fund, a global fund created to combat climate change, for support. For domestic public financing, fiscal policies like subsidies, taxation, market-based charges were recommended.

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<sup>17</sup> A/RES/76/255

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022) “UN DESA Policy Brief No. 126: Partnering with the Private Sector towards a Future of Sustainable ”

<sup>19</sup> AI for Good “The Drive to Use AI for Safer Roads.” 2022

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Environment Programme “Global Electric Mobility Programme” 2022



## *Safety in Sustainable Transportation*

Public transportation systems are a crucial aspect of social development. They allow access to jobs, education, and essential goods and services. However, unregulated or informal infrastructure can increase safety concerns<sup>21</sup>. SDG Target 3.6 aims to halve the number of deaths and injuries from road related accidents by the year 2030<sup>22</sup>.

Currently, millions of people still die every year because of these events<sup>23</sup>.

Technological innovation plays a major role in increased safety. The United Nations Special Envoy for Road Safety, in collaboration with the International Telecommunications Union and the Office of the UN Envoy on Technology, has brought a new initiative to the table. Introduced in late 2021, the AI for Road Safety initiative aims to use artificial intelligence to help prevent casualties through six separate 'pillars:' road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users, post-crash response, and speed control. The initiative specifically focuses on providing assistance to developing regions that have high rates of road-related fatalities.<sup>24</sup>

Focusing on supporting initiatives like AI for Road Safety in developing regions is crucial because access to life-saving technology is often out of reach of these areas<sup>25</sup>. Allotting necessary support to these regions is one of the many ways to help regulate and ensure the safety of official transit systems. Support that can come in the form of NGOs such as the Towards Zero Foundation, which aims to end road fatalities.

## *Sustainable Transportation for Better Livelihoods in Rural and Urban Areas*

Sustainable Transportation Infrastructure is not unilateral and different regions will have different needs and outcomes. That being said, all regions can benefit from sustainable transport. From a rural perspective, reliable transportation infrastructure can be a "gamechanger."<sup>26</sup> It allows for better rural-urban connectivity, helping to reduce poverty and boost rural economies. In fact, improved road access in Ethiopia was said to have reduced poverty by 6.9%. Increased mobility might not be a cure-all but it is a crucial stepping stone for change.<sup>27</sup> From an urban perspective, sustainable transportation can also mean healthier transportation. Transportation systems in urban spaces, particularly those focused on vehicular transport can help contribute to the overall air and noise pollution within already polluted spaces. SDG Target 3.9 aims to reduce deaths and illness from pollution, although it does not specifically mention transit. However, with transportation already accounting for a large sum of energy cost and CO2 emissions, implementing more sustainable transportation policies could contribute greatly to this

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<sup>21</sup> Mead, Leila "The Road to Sustainable Transport" International Institute for Sustainable Development 2021

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development: Interagency Report for second Global Sustainable Transport Conference"

<sup>23</sup> Lennon, Conor. "Can We Make Transport Safe and Sustainable? an Interview with Motorsport Chief, Jean Todt" 2021

<sup>24</sup> AI for Good "The Drive to Use AI for Safer Roads." 2022

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Report of the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference", October 2021

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

target.<sup>28</sup> Having sustainable transit in urban cities would not only offer increased mobility to health-related services but its existence itself would be improving residents' livelihoods.

## **Future Outlook**

Rural areas still remain isolated with over a billion people still lacking access to adequate public transit systems. Even in areas where transportation systems exist, they are often unavailable to those within vulnerable groups. 49% of urban residents lack access to transportation, particularly those in poorer communities. If a city mainly relies on cars for transport, not being able to afford a car limits one's options greatly. On the other hand, living in a city with a transit system only accessible to those with higher incomes is just as isolating.<sup>29</sup> Sustainable Transportation Infrastructure has the potential to increase the health, education, and economic status of the people it services, making sure that no one is left behind. When those systems are safe, there is the potential to save millions of lives every year. By increasing the sustainability of current transit services, Member States have the ability to cut back on up to trillions of dollars in energy cost globally, as well as reduce the amount of greenhouse gasses they emit. With all this in mind, there is still a long road to travel. There are large disparities between the access that developed and developing regions have to crucial innovations, gaps that have been acknowledged since this topic was introduced.

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<sup>28</sup> Vandycke, Nancy. "Envisioning the Transport We Need." World Bank, 2015

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) "Report of the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference", October 2021

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## ***General Assembly Third Committee***

### **Topic II: Securing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Context of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

#### **Introduction**

Worldwide, there are an estimated 476 million indigenous peoples. Among them, there are nearly 7,000 languages and 5,000 distinct cultures.<sup>1</sup> This vast population is one that often faces marginalization and discrimination. The 2001 *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* (DDPA) is a non-binding political framework for addressing racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and other types of intolerance faced by marginalized communities. The Declaration recommends certain concrete actions States can take to improve equity gaps among indigenous and non-indigenous populations and secure protection of indigenous rights. These include investing in health systems, education, as well as infrastructure such as housing, electricity, and potable water<sup>2</sup>. It additionally recommends that States ensure that everyone, especially women and girls, have access to education and new technologies.

A key group the DDPA focuses on are the populations that are indigenous to areas impacted by colonization.<sup>3</sup> There is not an agreed upon definition of indigenous populations, however the UN has a working definition which includes various factors such as occupation of ancestral land and a shared language.<sup>4</sup> The working definition originates from a 1981 study produced by Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, José Martínez Cobo. Central to the working definition is that an indigenous person is “one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group)”.<sup>5</sup> By adopting a definition that centered indigenous populations in defining indigenous, Cobo emphasized the sovereignty of indigenous to define their membership without external influence or subjugation.<sup>6</sup>

United Nations (UN) reports, like the *State of the World's Indigenous People*, detail inequities faced by indigenous populations. In many regions, indigenous populations face high levels of impoverishment, suppression of their historic languages and cultures, and experience a gap in education and health outcomes<sup>7</sup>. This combination of issues presents

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Indigenous Healthcare and Revitalization,” 2020

<sup>2</sup> OHCHR, *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action*, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> UNDESA, “State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Vol 1,” 2009

<sup>5</sup> UNDESA “Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations,” 2022

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

numerous challenges for indigenous populations that require cooperation among States to eliminate outcome gaps and alleviate these problems.

## **Background**

The work to address the rights of indigenous populations began in 1982 with the formation of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations by the UN Economic and Social Council.<sup>8</sup> Three years later, the Working Group began drafting what would become the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) which was finalized in 1993 and referred for further review by the UN Commission on Human Rights<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held in Durban, South Africa wherein the assembled States adopted the DDPA. The document addressed the rights of indigenous people in a broader context of addressing marginalized populations worldwide<sup>10</sup>.

The same year the DDPA was adopted, a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was appointed by the Commission on Human Rights.<sup>11</sup> The Special Rapporteur promotes best practices in legislation and government programs to States while also generating reports on human rights situations in select States and instances of human rights violations.<sup>12</sup>

In 2007, after 25 years of deliberation, the General Assembly adopted UNDRIP. The extensive document focuses on protecting and promoting indigenous culture, emphasizing the indigenous populations' right to self-determination, and asserts that they are entitled to just and fair redress for deprivations suffered through discrimination.<sup>13</sup> The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, established by *ECOSOC/RES/2000/22* in 2000, meets periodically to provide expert recommendations, raise awareness, and disseminate information on indigenous populations to States. It is also tasked with monitoring the implementation of the DDPA. Since then, the UN has held a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, declared an International Year of Indigenous Languages, and reaffirmed commitment to the DDPA and UNDRIP through A Call to Action on Building an Inclusive, Sustainable, and Resilient Future with Indigenous Peoples.

The Call to Action presents six action steps: raising awareness of the UNDRIP, supporting State implementation of the UNDRIP, aligning realization of indigenous rights with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, conducting a mapping exercise of current policies, procedures, and standards for gaps and opportunities; developing capacities of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> OHCHR, *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action*, 2001

<sup>11</sup> UNDESA "Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations," 2022

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> UNDESA, "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 2007

States, indigenous peoples, civil society, and UN personnel; and supporting the involvement of indigenous peoples in processes that affect them.<sup>14</sup>

## **Current Situation**

In recent years, the international community has made progress in including indigenous populations in international decision-making and to establish procedures for subsidiary and affiliate bodies of the UN to interact with these populations.<sup>15</sup> A key tenet of both the DDPA and UNDRIP is that indigenous communities can exercise their right to self-determination. The right to self-determination includes the ability for a population to exercise control over their own affairs. A population denied self-determination experiences subjugation. Several States have adopted legislation or released judicial rulings that have extended rights to indigenous populations, ordered reparations, and recognized the importance of their culture and language.<sup>16</sup> Despite these efforts, key issues of concern remain.

### *Preventing Violence Toward Indigenous Women and Girls*

Article 22 of UNDRIP declares that States should take actions to ensure that indigenous women and children are not subject to violence or discrimination.<sup>17</sup> A 2022 report produced by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women illustrates the extent of violence against indigenous women and girls.<sup>18</sup> The violence is often intergenerational and intersectional in nature<sup>19</sup>. Indigenous women are occupying a more prominent role in political movements within States—especially to protect historically indigenous land or oppose environmentally deleterious development.<sup>20</sup> These political acts have been met with State violence; examples of State violence can be found in almost every region according to the report.<sup>21</sup>

Indigenous women are additionally subject to various forms of gender-based violence. Instances include domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation; child, early, or forced marriage, obstetric violence, violations of their sexual/reproductive health, gender related killings, forced displacement; kidnapping, and forced labor.<sup>22</sup> Women with disabilities as well as women of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are also subject to increased levels of intra- and inter-community violence<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> UNDESA, “Building an Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Future with Indigenous Peoples: A Call To Action”, 2020

<sup>15</sup> UNDESA, “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 2007

<sup>16</sup> UNDESA, “State of the World’s Indigenous Population, Vol. 4,” 2019

<sup>17</sup> UNDESA, “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 2007

<sup>18</sup> UNHRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences,” A/HRC/50/26, 2022

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 9

The Special Rapporteur report emphasizes the need for disaggregate data collection and reporting from States to fully understand the extent of issues faced by indigenous women to guide evidence-based, victim-centered domestic policy making<sup>24</sup>. It additionally recommends that States take proactive and efficacious steps to recognize, support, and protect indigenous women human rights defenders and ensure development occurs within the spirit of the UNDRIP. The steps detailed include actions such as ensuring women have access to emergency support and crisis hotlines; establishing mobile gender-based violence clinics; staffing emergency resources with indigenous people; awareness training for support service staff; and creating more accessible judicial processes that include translation and expert opinions in indigenous languages. Opportunity exists to strengthen global frameworks like the 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* to include protections against violence<sup>25</sup>. Although the Committee on the Elimination on Violence Against Women has issued the subsequent General Recommendations of 19 and 35, these do not have binding power.<sup>26</sup>

### *Reinvigorating Generation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge*

Article 42 of the DDPA and Article 31 of UNDRIP emphasize the right of indigenous people to have cultural and linguistic autonomy. However, the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world, the 43% considered endangered are indigenous.<sup>27</sup> A quarter of the world's languages have fewer than a thousand remaining speakers. With these current trends, by the end of the century, 3,000 languages—all of them indigenous—will be extinct. This poses dual problems. The first is that language is inextricably linked to culture and the knowledge contained within. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues defines traditional knowledge as the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous people developed from lived experiences and adapted to local culture and environment then transmitted orally between generations.<sup>28</sup> So, the extinction of a traditional language cuts off access to millennia of knowledge for both the indigenous and non-indigenous populations diminishing cultural diversity. The extinction estimate presents a pressing need for States to support the transmission of traditional knowledge to protect the cultural heritage of indigenous populations.

Non-governmental organizations have begun building digital capacity to aggregate traditional information and teach endangered languages.<sup>29</sup> Lower technology options, like the UNESCO partnering with curriculum experts in States such as Tonga and New Zealand to distribute CD-ROM based Teaching Resource Packs in both Māori and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid 18

<sup>25</sup> UNGA, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," A/RES/34/180, 1979

<sup>26</sup> UNOHCHR, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women," 2017

<sup>27</sup> UNDESA, "Emerging Trends in the Generation, Transmission and Protection of Traditional Knowledge," 2019

<sup>28</sup> UNFPPII, "Backgrounder - Traditional Knowledge," 2019

<sup>29</sup> UNDESA, "Emerging Trends in the Generation, Transmission and Protection of Traditional Knowledge," 2019



English.<sup>30</sup> Other organizations are using virtual and augmented reality to teach traditional Aboriginal stories.<sup>31</sup> The international community has a variety of options—both high and low technology— with which to protect the traditional knowledge that is dependent on the existence of indigenous languages<sup>32</sup>.

Beyond technology, States can take steps to embed indigenous language education into communities where the language has begun to fade. In Canada, the British Columbia Language Initiative is working to revitalize First Nations language—45% of indigenous youth on-reserve are interesting in learning their ancestral language<sup>33</sup>. Being able to speak First Nations languages is associated with self-reported high levels of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being—indicating that promoting and securing traditional knowledge aids to uplift and sustain indigenous populations.<sup>34</sup>

As the world's climate continues to change, promoting and protecting indigenous traditional knowledge may be a vital tool in disaster risk reduction. Songs and stories passed down in the Nias people and Onge tribe about the danger of tsunamis after an earthquake saved many lives in 2004 in the resulting Indonesian tsunami. Similar disaster anticipation is paralleled in the Tanzanian Maasai and the tribal people in the Indian State of Rajasthan<sup>35</sup>. The UN Office for Disaster Reduction has begun to identify disaster risk reduction contained within traditional knowledge to distribute for common benefit among States<sup>36</sup>. Indigenous-knowledge informed disaster reduction includes practices like mosaic burns to prevent wildfires; planting flood resistant crops and digging drainage to prevent seasonal flooding; resilience planning for future disasters; community-based warning systems for volcanic activity; and safe areas during seismic events.<sup>37</sup> The generation and transmission of traditional knowledge in this case informed common safety practices for the broader State offering a replicable opportunity to other States.<sup>38</sup>

### *Improving Healthcare Outcomes and Autonomy in Healthcare*

The State of indigenous health varies from region to region, though commonalities exist. According to the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous People's Issues, key areas of improvement globally are: addressing the health of indigenous women, reducing infant and child mortality, improving mental health, fighting the spread of communicable disease, improving nutrition, and reducing vulnerability to disasters<sup>39</sup>.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues identifies nine socio-cultural regions: Africa; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Arctic; Central and Eastern

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>36</sup> UNDRR "Five risk-reduction strategies updated with age-old knowledge," 2022

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> UNDESA, "Thematic Paper Towards The Preparation Of The 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples," 2014

Europe; Russian Federation; Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific. The 2019 *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous Peoples' Access to Health Services* report focuses on seven of these regions. In each region examined, the health outcomes of indigenous communities are below that of non-indigenous populations. In Africa, indigenous peoples have difficulty accessing health services. Asian indigenous people die younger and experience higher rates of malnutrition and child mortality<sup>40</sup>. In Central and South America and the Caribbean, 60% of the poor in the region are indigenous peoples. The governments in this region have begun to approach healthcare in an intercultural way emphasizing the value of indigenous knowledge and health practices.<sup>41</sup>

In the Arctic, the Sami and Inuit face limitations in the delivery of quality health care and a marginalization of their traditional healing practices.<sup>42</sup> Governments have addressed quality by incorporating indigenous language speaking healthcare providers and increasing the number of outpatient branches serving these communities. States within the Pacific region have taken substantive action in the form of health service funding and delivery that has improved indigenous people's access to healthcare.<sup>43</sup> Examples of Pacific State progress include offering universal healthcare, funding cultural competency among non-indigenous healthcare providers, ownership of healthcare provision by Indigenous populations, and inclusion of complementary indigenous healing practices.<sup>44</sup> These regional issues and how States are taking steps to address them present opportunities to synthesize regional approaches into an international effort to ensure indigenous access to healthcare.

### **Future Outlook**

The goals of the DDPA as well as UNDRIP remain broadly unrealized. While many States have taken legislative action to incorporate indigenous people more politically, socially, and educationally, significant barriers remain. Indigenous women face high levels of violence, traditional knowledge is endangered, and health outcomes among indigenous populations are worse than those for non-indigenous communities. These pressing issues require interstate cooperation and domestic action on the part of Member States.

### **Focus Questions**

As delegates engage in further research on this topic they should consider:

- Does your country have any indigenous populations? What, if any, protections do these groups have under domestic law?
- Has your country signed or ratified the DDPA?

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<sup>40</sup> UNDESA, "State of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous Peoples' Access to Health Services," 2016

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

- To what extent does your State encourage active social participation among its indigenous population?
- How does your State interact with its indigenous population?
- How has your State alleviated health outcome gaps within marginalized communities?
- How has your State cooperated with the global community to eliminate racism and discrimination?
- What steps has your State taken to eliminate violence against women—especially indigenous women and girls?
- What steps has your State taken to protect traditional knowledge?
- What gaps exist in current global frameworks on eliminating discrimination?

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