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Rights of indigenous peoples: rights of indigenous peoples

Status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution [40/131](#). It provides updated information on the activities and status of the Fund since the submission of the previous biennial report ([A/73/137](#)), including on the thirty-second and thirty-third annual sessions of the Board of Trustees, held in December 2018 and 2019, respectively. It also provides information on the activities related to the expansion of the mandate of the Fund enabling the participation of indigenous peoples in the Forum on Business and Human Rights and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in addition to other United Nations meetings under its mandate.

* [A/75/150](#).



I. Mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

1. The initial mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, established in 1985 pursuant to General Assembly resolution [40/131](#), was to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations by providing them with financial assistance, funded by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities.
2. Over the past 35 years, the mandate of the Fund has been expanded eight times, giving the opportunity to indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations and decision-making of other relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and to contribute to important developments on indigenous issues that take place at the international level.
3. The Fund, within the framework of its current mandate, supports the participation of representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (General Assembly resolution [56/140](#)), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Assembly resolution [63/161](#)), the Human Rights Council, including its universal periodic review mechanism, and the human rights treaty bodies (Assembly resolution [65/198](#)), and the consultation process on the procedural and institutional steps to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant United Nations bodies on issues affecting them (Assembly resolution [70/232](#)).
4. The General Assembly, in its resolution [74/135](#), further expanded the mandate of the Fund, enabling the participation of indigenous peoples in the Forum on Business and Human Rights and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

II. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

5. Pursuant to resolution [40/131](#), the Fund is administered by the Secretary-General, in accordance with the relevant financial rules and regulations of the United Nations on general trust funds for humanitarian assistance, and with the advice of a Board of Trustees. The recommendations of the Board are approved by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) acts as the secretariat of the Fund and the Board.
6. The Board is composed of five persons with relevant experience on issues affecting indigenous peoples, who serve in their personal capacities as United Nations experts. The members of the Board are appointed by the Secretary-General for a three-year renewable term.
7. Four of the current Board members appointed by the Secretary-General for a second term, Claire Charters (New Zealand), Myrna Cunningham (Nicaragua), Binota Dhamai (Bangladesh) and Anne Nuorgam (Finland), will conclude their service at the end of 2020. The fifth member, Diel Mochire Ngawe (Democratic Republic of the Congo), was appointed on 1 January 2018 for a three-year term.

III. Grant cycle

A. Meetings of the Board of Trustees

8. The Board has adapted its working methods in order to respond to the new challenges arising from the expansion of the mandate of the Fund to the sessions of the human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council, the Forum on Business and Human Rights and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To this end, in addition to its annual sessions, the Board has established a system of intersessional meetings, organized by email or teleconference, to decide on the allocation of grants to indigenous peoples' organizations and communities that wish to participate in sessions of the Council, including its universal periodic review mechanism, and the human rights treaty bodies. Intersessional meetings are usually held in May, August and November of each calendar year.

9. During its thirty-first annual session, held in January 2017, the Board members decided to shift the usual date of the annual session from January to December, in order to facilitate the process of organizing the Fund's support for the travel of the selected indigenous grantees. This enables OHCHR to have sufficient time to properly deal with the time-consuming travel arrangements of the grantees.

B. Admissibility and selection of beneficiaries

10. The criteria for the selection of beneficiaries have been established by the General Assembly (in resolution [40/131](#)), as well as by the Secretary-General upon the recommendation of the Board. These include additional criteria for the selection of beneficiaries attending the sessions of the Human Rights Council, including its universal periodic review mechanism, the human rights treaty bodies, the Forum on Business and Human Rights and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking into account the specific accreditation and attendance rules that apply to the work of these United Nations bodies and mechanisms.

11. During the selection process, the members of the Board seek to ensure geographical, gender and age balance and pay special attention to indigenous persons with disabilities. Where possible, the Board recommends at least one indigenous representative with a disability. In selecting the beneficiaries for attendance at the sessions of the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism, priority is also given to underrepresented regions. Decisions of the Board are taken on the basis of the level of available contributions.

12. The secretariat reviews the recommendations of the Board for consistency with relevant United Nations administrative and financial rules and regulations. The High Commissioner approves, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the recommendations made at the annual session of the Board.

13. Approved participation grants include a round-trip air ticket in economy class from the beneficiary's home town to Geneva or New York and a daily subsistence allowance for the days of the session, which is paid upon arrival in Geneva or New York.

14. As at 1 January 2018, indigenous persons who are interested in receiving assistance from the Fund also have the possibility to apply online. The online application system has been developed on the basis of a system that is already being used by the two humanitarian funds managed by OHCHR.

15. There is a plan to build an e-learning capacity-building tool on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations human rights mechanisms specific and relevant to indigenous peoples, to be developed by OHCHR with the support of the Fund and the Expert Mechanism, which would serve as a prerequisite online course for grant applicants.

C. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

16. The attendance and contributions of the beneficiaries of the Fund are closely monitored. The secretariat provides guidance and support to beneficiaries and maintains a daily attendance sheet of the grantees. As part of their reporting obligations, beneficiaries are requested to provide a copy of their statement and to complete questionnaires on their participation in key United Nations human rights mechanisms that are specific and relevant to indigenous peoples and on follow-up activities upon return to their respective home countries.

17. During its annual session, the Board reviews the status of all participation grants allocated during the reporting period. It also examines the reports containing the secretariat's analysis of the questionnaires submitted by the beneficiaries. In accordance with its admissibility criteria, the Board does not consider applications from indigenous peoples' representatives and their nominating organizations that have been beneficiaries of the Fund but failed to submit their evaluation questionnaires within three years following their participation in a United Nations meeting.

18. The Board and the secretariat each send a representative to the annual sessions of the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism to meet with and provide support to all beneficiaries present. Through this engagement, they also contribute to the beneficiaries' training and are able to assess the impact of the beneficiaries' participation on the deliberations at the respective sessions.

IV. Thirty-second and thirty-third annual sessions of the Board of Trustees

19. The Board held its thirty-second and thirty-third annual sessions from 3 to 7 December 2018 and from 9 to 13 December 2019, respectively.

20. At those sessions, the Board reviewed the implementation of the recommendations adopted during its previous sessions and examined information prepared by the secretariat, in particular relating to previous allocations of grants, policy issues, capacity-building of indigenous peoples, fundraising efforts and the financial situation of the Fund, including contributions received or pledges made. It decided to allocate grants to indigenous representatives wishing to participate in sessions of the Permanent Forum, as well as the interactive hearings on indigenous peoples' participation at the United Nations held on the margins of those sessions; the Expert Mechanism; the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review mechanism; and the country reviews and relevant thematic general discussions of the human rights treaty bodies.

21. In addition, the Board met with representatives of Member States within the framework of two donor meetings organized during the thirty-second and thirty-third annual sessions. Board members expressed their gratitude to the donor States for their generous contributions to the Fund, highlighting the impact of the Fund on beneficiaries and their communities, and appealed for an increased support from States and other donors.

22. The recommendations made by the Board during the two annual sessions, as well as during the intersessional virtual meetings, were approved on 19 December 2019 and 21 February 2020 by the High Commissioner on behalf of the Secretary-General.

A. Recommendations for grants at the thirty-second session of the Board of Trustees

23. During its thirty-second annual session, the Board considered more than 680 admissible applications. Having examined the applications in the light of the established selection criteria, the Board recommended a total of 144 grants, which were subsequently approved by the High Commissioner, comprising: 45 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum; 14 grants to attend the interactive hearings on the margins of the eighteenth session of the Forum; 45 grants to attend the twelfth session of the Expert Mechanism; and 40 grants to attend various sessions of the Human Rights Council, the human rights treaty bodies and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review.

B. Recommendations for grants at the thirty-third session of the Board of Trustees

24. During its thirty-third annual session, the Board considered more than 712 admissible applications and recommended a total of 165 grants, which were subsequently approved by the High Commissioner, including: 46 grants for representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations and communities to attend the nineteenth session of the Permanent Forum; 7 grants to attend the interactive hearings on the margins of the nineteenth session of the Forum; 40 grants to attend the thirteenth session of the Expert Mechanism; and 30 grants to attend the sessions of the Human Rights Council, including its Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, and the human rights treaty bodies.

25. Pursuant to resolution [74/135](#), in which the General Assembly further expanded the mandate of the Fund, enabling representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to partake in other relevant United Nations meetings and sessions, 21 grants were allocated for attendance at the Forum on Business and Human Rights; 7 grants were allocated for attendance at the meetings of the indigenous peoples platform and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; 7 grants were allocated for attendance at the pre-sessional meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention; and 7 grants were allocated for participation in the Conference of the Parties itself. The key United Nations meetings relevant to indigenous peoples that were to be held between March and July 2020 have been affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as a result of which the Fund's grants have had to be suspended.

V. Recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees during its thirty-third annual session

A. Reprisals against indigenous peoples

26. In 2019, OHCHR recorded 15 cases of harassment and reprisals against indigenous representatives participating in sessions of the United Nations

mechanisms during the reporting period, all of whom had received a participation grant from the Fund. A total of 5 cases were recorded in relation to the eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum, held in New York in April 2019, and 10 were recorded during or after the twelfth session of the Expert Mechanism, held in Geneva in July 2019. In 2018, OHCHR recorded two such cases, one of which was included in the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights ([A/HRC/39/41](#)).

27. The Board expressed concerns about the reported cases of reprisals and/or threats of reprisals against the grantees of the Fund. As a result, the Board decided that a strategy to prevent and react to such threats and reprisals would be developed as a high priority, as well as a funding proposal to support the strategy. The strategy is to be developed with utmost consideration for indigenous peoples' proposed actions to prevent and react to such reprisals and/or threats, as well as for their unique cultures and value systems.

28. The Fund requested the Expert Mechanism, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Permanent Forum to partner with the Fund and OHCHR in developing the strategy.

B. Outreach and dissemination strategy

29. The Board agreed to develop and launch a dissemination strategy to reach out to potential beneficiaries from among indigenous peoples. The strategy will be aimed at increasing the pool of applicants, in particular for the universal periodic review and sessions of the human rights treaty bodies. Moreover, it will target Member States, donors and other related stakeholders through a more comprehensive visibility campaign on the Fund's work and activities. In this regard, the Fund's effective engagement on social media has increased during the reporting period.

30. In order to develop the required content for dissemination and awareness-raising tools, the Board is considering the production of short and easy-to-disseminate videos of the grantees. This would allow for the Fund's related general information to be available in at least four official languages of the United Nations, including English, French, Spanish and Russian. To this end, the Fund's booklet entitled "UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples: 30 years of empowering indigenous peoples to claim their rights" was translated from English into French, Spanish and Russian. It was printed and widely distributed during key meetings and events organized by the United Nations and other organizations.

31. The Board continuously collaborates with United Nations entities and civil society organizations based in Geneva and New York, which effectively raise awareness about the mandate and activities of the Fund. Throughout the reporting period, the Fund has been actively engaged with, among others, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Tribal Link Foundation, the International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, Franciscans International, the International Service for Human Rights, Child Rights Connect, UPR Info and the Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation, Research and Information.

32. Relevant information about the Fund is also distributed through a mailing list recently established by the secretariat, which contains email accounts of civil society organizations, relevant United Nations mandate holders and key regional, national and local indigenous and non-indigenous organizations.

C. Fundraising activities

33. During the reporting period, the Board decided to develop a strategy targeting private donors in order to build potentially beneficial relationships with the private sector, in particular with airlines and travel agencies. In addition, the Board organized information-sharing meetings with representatives of Member States and arranged bilateral targeted consultations, both in New York and Geneva, with specific donor countries.

34. The Fund organized two side events on the margins of the eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum and the twelfth session of the Expert Mechanism, in collaboration with major donors of the Fund. Both events provided a platform to inform Member States, indigenous peoples' communities and organizations, as well as other interested stakeholders, about the status of the Fund, the implementation of its mandate and core activities, the progress achieved, success stories and lessons learned.

35. The secretariat, in cooperation with the Forest Peoples Programme, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba Foundation) and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, organized a panel discussion on the theme "Ensuring access to remedy for indigenous peoples – trends, challenges, ways forward" at the Forum on Business and Human Rights session held from 25 to 27 November 2019.

36. The Board members and the secretariat regularly meet with the Donor and External Relations Section at OHCHR to receive guidance and to coordinate efforts towards mobilizing additional resources for the Fund's activities.

D. Capacity-building and training

37. The Board has repeatedly stressed the role of the Fund not only as a source of participation grants but also as a mechanism to build the expertise of indigenous beneficiaries, thus making them truly effective participants in key United Nations human rights mechanisms and other United Nations processes relevant to indigenous peoples. In this regard, the Board members continued to emphasize the need to increase efforts to build the capacity of indigenous representatives by offering orientation programmes, guidance and training for the beneficiaries of the Fund.

38. The Board also continued to organize preparatory training sessions for indigenous grantees and other representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in four official languages of the United Nations, namely, English, French, Spanish and Russian. The preparatory course included a general overview of the history and formation of the United Nations and its human rights mechanisms, in particular those pertinent to indigenous peoples, and an introduction to the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary bodies, the United Nations special procedures mechanisms and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Expert Mechanism, the Fund, the universal periodic review mechanism and the human rights treaty bodies.

39. In addition to regular preparatory training sessions, from 17 to 19 April 2019, the secretariat, together with the Tribal Link Foundation, organized a training programme entitled "Project access" in New York. As part of the programme, which was held the week before the Permanent Forum, the secretariat conducted a training session on the Fund for 21 participants (10 women and 11 men) from 13 countries.

40. In addition, from 17 to 19 April 2019, the secretariat provided an introductory training session on the Fund for 21 indigenous women leaders participating in the sixth global leadership school for indigenous women of the International Indigenous Women's Forum. The session was carried out in cooperation with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University.

41. During the final week of the Permanent Forum in 2019, the secretariat organized a one-day briefing with the 45 indigenous grantees (19 women and 26 men) to assess the effectiveness of their participation and discuss further improvements to the Fund. The participants of the briefing were given an opportunity to assess their own progress and provide feedback on the work of the Fund by completing evaluation questionnaires.

42. In collaboration with the OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme, the secretariat organized a one-day preparatory training session in four languages, namely, English, French, Spanish and Russian, for the 45 indigenous grantees and other indigenous representatives (27 women and 18 men) attending the twelfth session of the Expert Mechanism. The former grantees of the Fund and current beneficiaries of the OHCHR fellowship programme were actively engaged in the training session, contributing to the process by sharing their experiences and expertise. The secretariat regularly met with the grantees during the Expert Mechanism sessions to provide them with updated information on the agenda items and advice on their oral statements and other related issues.

43. In close collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the secretariat organized a training programme to enhance the conflict prevention and peacemaking capacities of indigenous peoples' representatives, in Geneva.

VI. Financial status of the Fund and contributions received

44. The Fund is funded through the voluntary contributions of Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities. The Board can allocate participation grants on the basis of the contributions paid and duly registered by the United Nations Treasury, as well as any remaining balance from the previous years, as established by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

45. The table below indicates the contributions received from and pledges by Member States for the period from January 2018 to June 2020. The total amount is \$1,564,322, which reflects an increase of 39.55 per cent compared with the previous reporting period (from January 2016 to June 2018), for which the total amount of contributions received was \$1,120,933.72.

Contributions received from States, January 2018 to June 2020

(United States dollars)

<i>Contributor</i>	<i>Amount</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	
Argentina	5 000	–	–	5 000
Australia	109 890	33 898	–	143 788
Canada	192 456	–	–	192 456
Chile ^a	–	5 000	–	5 000
Denmark	155 376	–	–	155 376
Estonia	22 727	22 222	–	44 949
Finland	58 072	55 741	65 502	179 315
Germany	68 259	–	–	68 259
Mexico	17 327	–	15 797	33 124
Norway	357 270	324 957	–	682 227
Peru	–	2 943	2 935	5 878
Spain	22 727	22 222	–	44 949
Holy See	2 000	2 000	–	4 000
Total	1 011 105	468 983	84 234	1 564 322

^a Pledge announced to OHCHR (commitment letter outstanding).**VII. Conclusions and recommendations**

46. The year 2019 was marked by another expansion of the Fund's mandate by the General Assembly, in the fields of climate change and business and human rights, thereby making the Fund more comprehensive and responsive to the needs of its target beneficiaries. In its present format, the Fund enables indigenous peoples to partake in a wider scope of decision-making processes within the United Nations and articulate the problems and issues their communities presently face. Importantly, representatives of indigenous communities and organizations can apply for support and participate in events related to the Forum on Business and Human Rights and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

47. Over 2,400 representatives of indigenous peoples from 90 countries around the globe have benefited from the Fund since its establishment in 1985. This active participation in key United Nations decision-making processes by indigenous peoples has had a positive impact for the recognition of their human rights. The Fund is considered a global enabler for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights worldwide.

48. During the reporting period, the Board expressed concerns about a number of reports of reprisals and/or threats of reprisals against the grantees of the Fund and decided to develop a strategy to prevent and counter such unacceptable acts.

49. The number of requests received from indigenous peoples to participate in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review mechanism, as well as the human rights treaty bodies, has increased significantly over the past decade. However, the financial

contributions to the Fund, despite a slight increase during the reporting period, do not yet correspond to the increasing number of requests for support and the most recent expansion of the Fund's mandate.

50. Without robust, predictable and sustainable contributions, the Fund will face difficulties carrying out its mandate and responding to the increasing demand for support. After assessing the current financial needs of the Fund, the Board has concluded that, for the Fund to operate satisfactorily, it needs a minimum of \$1.2 million in contributions per year. Even that amount would only partially cover the requests for funding that it currently receives.

51. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing inequalities, discrimination and violence faced by indigenous peoples, who are among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. Member States and other potential donors are therefore strongly encouraged to contribute to the work of the Fund to ensure the continuation of its support to the participation of indigenous peoples in international processes and decisions that have a direct impact on their lives.
