

Concept Note

UNPFII 2026 Side Event

25 Years Advancing Indigenous Peoples' Rights: The Impact, Lessons Learnt and Future of the UN Special Rapporteur's Mandate

Background

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples was established by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2001 and assumed by the Human Rights Council in 2006 marking a historic advancement in the international protection system for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The mandate is one of the central mechanisms dedicated to monitoring, documenting, and advancing the rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

Over the past twenty-five years, successive mandate holders have played a transformative role in shaping global understanding and enforcement of Indigenous Peoples' rights. Through a combination of country visits, communications, thematic reporting, and close engagement with Indigenous Peoples, the mandate has shed light on urgent human rights concerns and systemic patterns of discrimination. Country visits and communications procedures have enabled mandate holders to address and publicly report on violations occurring in diverse contexts, from land dispossession and extractive industry impacts to violence against Indigenous human rights defenders, Indigenous women and girls. These interventions have not only provided visibility to the struggles of Indigenous Peoples but have also generated concrete action and follow up by States, companies, and international institutions.

A significant contribution of the mandate lies in clarifying and expanding the interpretation of Indigenous Peoples' rights under international human rights law. The work of the mandate has strengthened the understanding of key principles such as free, prior and informed consent (FPIC); self-determination and autonomy; land, territory and resource rights; and the protection of Indigenous knowledge systems. These efforts have supported the broader implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, by providing guidance on its practical application and by reinforcing its normative authority at the international level.

The mandate has also been instrumental in supporting Indigenous human rights defenders, many of whom operate in extremely challenging or dangerous environments. Through urgent appeals, communications with governments, and public advocacy, the Special Rapporteur has provided critical protection to individuals and Indigenous communities facing threats, retaliation, or violence for their work in defense of their lands and rights. At the same time, the mandate has contributed to emerging national and regional jurisprudence by influencing court decisions and legislative reforms that recognize or strengthen Indigenous Peoples' rights, demonstrating the mandate's impact beyond the UN system.

Throughout these years, the mandate has served as an important platform that elevates Indigenous Peoples' voices in international, regional, and national processes. By ensuring that Indigenous leaders, communities, and organizations participate meaningfully in UN processes, the Special Rapporteur has helped shift global dialogues on human rights, climate change, biodiversity, and development toward approaches that honour Indigenous People's perspectives, cultural integrity, and traditional knowledge systems.

Objectives

The year 2026 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate, which is an important milestone that invites reflection on achievements, challenges, and opportunities for the future. This moment provides a unique opportunity to take stock of progress made in advancing the rights of Indigenous Peoples while acknowledging the persistent and emerging threats they continue to face. It also offers a space to reaffirm the commitment of States, UN bodies, civil society, and Indigenous Peoples to the mandate and to the broader international human rights framework.

Against this backdrop, a side event at the 2026 session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) will provide a timely and strategic platform to commemorate the legacy and impact of the Special Rapporteur's mandate. The event aims to bring together current and former mandate holders, Indigenous leaders, government representatives, UN agencies, and experts to reflect on how the mandate has shaped global advocacy and protection efforts. Participants will explore the major accomplishments and contributions of the mandate, celebrate the leadership and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, and highlight the collective efforts that have advanced the recognition of their rights.

Equally important, the event will provide an opportunity to examine ongoing and emerging challenges affecting Indigenous Peoples, and continuing gaps in the implementation of UNDRIP. Understanding these challenges will be essential in shaping forward-looking strategies that strengthen the mandate's relevance and impact in an increasingly complex global landscape.

The side event will further serve as a space to discuss how cooperation among Indigenous Peoples, States, UN bodies, civil society, and the Special Rapporteur can be deepened. Strengthened collaboration is vital for ensuring that the mandate remains responsive, effective, and grounded in Indigenous Peoples' lived realities. Participants will be invited to share experiences, identify good practices, and propose new avenues for collective action.

Outcome

Ultimately, the discussion will contribute to the development of recommendations for the next decade of the mandate. These recommendations will aim to reinforce the mandate's ability to address evolving threats, support the full realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights, and influence global policy debates on issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and human rights protection frameworks, among others.

This commemorative event will stand not only as a celebration of progress but also as a reaffirmation of shared commitments. It will underscore the importance of continued vigilance, solidarity, and innovation in promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

Practical Information

Venue: UN Headquarters, New York (UNPFII 2026 session), room CR2

Date: Friday, 24 April

Time: 13:15-14:30

Date: 24th April 2026

Duration: 75 minutes

Languages: English, Spanish, French

Format: In-person and through webtv.un.org