



United Nations Permanent Forum
on Indigenous Issues

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TOPIC B:

The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities

Undersecretary:

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INTRODUCTION

A long history of devastation from epidemics is something that many indigenous communities have in common: from the first Europeans in the Americas who brought smallpox and influenza, to a measles outbreak in Brazil and Southern Venezuela that nearly decimated the entire Yanomami tribe (Pringle, 2015). COVID-19 has become a whole new threat to Indigenous Peoples. Most of these communities fall into the most “vulnerable” in the health category; they have higher mortality rates and lower life expectancies. “I can’t be any blunter... if COVID-19 gets into our communities, we are gone” said Pat Turner, Chief Executive of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organization in Australia. It’s important to attend to this problem to save lives and preserve the generations of knowledge native people carry.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Indigenous Peoples live in both urban and rural areas and account today for over 476 million individuals, spread across 90 countries in the world, and accounting for 6.2% of the global population (Nuorgam, 2020). There is emerging evidence that many native communities in The United States, Canada, and Brazil are being disproportionately affected by this virus. “Native American populations are facing a disproportionate brunt of the COVID-19 epidemic with higher infection and mortality rates than the overall U.S. population” (Akee, R., 2020). Indigenous Peoples are largely being excluded from the global conversation on the pandemic.

“We urge Member States and the international community to include the specific needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples in addressing the global outbreak of COVID-19” said Anne Nuorgam, chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Indigenous communities already experience poor health care, have higher rates of diseases, lack of services like sanitation, and may lack access to other preventive measures like clean water, disinfectants, and soap (UNDESA, n.d). Another key factor when it comes to medical attention is that these services and information about the prevention methods need to be available in indigenous languages.

Rural Indigenous communities are often not recognized by their governments, therefore they don’t respond to their needs and overlook their health, safety, and the information coverage on the everchanging COVID-19 virus (Cultural Survival, n.d). High rates of inequalities and systemic discrimination all add up to the lack of food, housing, and in the end, they become more likely to suffer negative outcomes from infectious diseases. This was an already existing problem that only became worse with this pandemic. Often living off land-based occupations, many Indigenous Peoples who work in these traditional occupations are severely affected by the pandemic. “Staggering rates of poverty are one of the primary root causes of Indigenous Peoples’ premature death rates by upwards of 15 years earlier than non-Indigenous...” said Dr. Pamela D. Palmater, Mi’kmaw citizen and member of the Eel River Bar First Nation in northern New Brunswick.

Most indigenous communities regularly organize gatherings to celebrate special events. Multi-generational housing is also common, which generates risk even inside the same household, especially the elders. Yet, Indigenous Peoples are seeking their basic solutions, practices like

voluntary isolation and sealing off their territories. COVID-19 pandemic triggers much more than healthcare. Socio-economic conflicts, racial discrimination, and overall inequalities need also to be addressed in order to have a successful health campaign.

UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION

- UNDESA organized the International Expert Group Meeting on “Indigenous Peoples and Pandemics” from 7 to 11 December 2020.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Information on access to health care and prevention might not be available in indigenous languages.
- The lack of data prevents an accurate diagnosis on the impact of the pandemic on indigenous peoples.
- Indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to the direct (health) and indirect (economic, food security) effects of COVID-19.
- Measures such as washing one's hands with soap is a difficult preventative step for indigenous communities to take due to the lack of clean water and other sanitation services.

QUESTIONNAIRE

- A. What is my country's position?
- B. What are my country's policies?
- C. What can my country do to solve this issue?
- D. Which countries can my delegation work with?
- E. What are three possible solutions?
- F. What has been done to solve the problem?

USEFUL LINKS

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

[The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities:](#)

[The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

[Indigenous Peoples and COVID-19 A Guidance Note for the UN System prepared by the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues](#)

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