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I. Introduction

Since the beginning of recorded history, humans have been sailing and voyaging to new lands in search of religious freedom, resources, and to satiate curiosity. In these new lands, the more often than not Western explorers discovered an already thriving population of humans. Today, these people are known as the indigeneous people. Before Western colonizers took over these territories, the natives had preserved the environment and conserved nonrenewable resources for centuries upon centuries. Now, Western civilization and colonization threatens the delicate ecosystem of the Earth through climate change. It is imperative we acknowledge the role indigeneous people have played in protecting the environment and ensure these efforts are not in vain as we strive to strengthen these communities through protecting their rights.

II. Key Terms

1. Indigenous people

Indigenous Peoples are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced¹.

2. (Human) Rights

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples>

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status²

3. Environment

(specifically referring to the natural) the air, water, and land in or on which people, animals, and plants live³

4. Preservation

The act of maintaining something in its original state, or to keep something as it is, esp. in order to prevent it from decaying or to protect it from being damaged or destroyed

5. Conservation

The act of using something sparingly with the knowledge that it could run out, as opposed to preservation⁴.

6. Colonization

The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area, or the action of appropriating a place or domain for one's own use⁵

7. Modern Civilization

In this context, it is used as a term for industrialized communities who have technology and practices contributing to climate change

III. General Overview

² <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights>

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/environment>

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[https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/91554/what-is-the-difference-between-conserve-and-serve](https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/91554/what-is-the-difference-between-conserve-and-preserve)

⁵ <https://www.oed.com/>

1. The role of indigenous people in conserving and preserving the environment

Living in harmony with nature, indigenous peoples help safeguard 80% of the world's biodiversity and hold many of the solutions to the climate crisis, despite constituting less than 5% of the global population. "Indigenous peoples must be part of the solution to climate change. This is because they have the traditional knowledge of their ancestors. The important value of that knowledge simply cannot — and must not — be understated,"⁶ said UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa. Respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and enhancing their participation in climate policy is critical to achieving the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and fostering climate resilience⁷. This was recognized with the establishment of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) in 2015 at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, thereby giving indigenous peoples a voice alongside governments and enabling them to participate more effectively in the United Nations climate process. "Meaningful engagement of indigenous peoples to meet the Paris Agreement goals means making decisions together – we must be equal partners in the development of national and international climate policy,"⁸ said Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Co-Chair of the LCIPP Facilitative Working Group.

2. The rights of indigenous people⁹

⁶ <https://unfccc.int/news/indigenous-peoples-increasingly-engaging-in-climate-action>

⁷ <https://unfccc.int/news/indigenous-peoples-increasingly-engaging-in-climate-action>

⁸ <https://unfccc.int/news/indigenous-peoples-increasingly-engaging-in-climate-action>

⁹ <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/un-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples/>

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from September 2007 affirms that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples. The resolution also affirms that indigenous peoples contribute to the diversity of cultures and that they must not to be discriminated against due to their traditions and the exercise thereof. The declaration furthermore notes that indigenous peoples were subjected to historic injustices for example as a result of colonialization. The declaration acknowledges indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, the right to the resources in their territories and the right to restitution or compensation for stolen lands, territories and resources. Today, key sections of the declaration have the status of customary international law and are therefore binding. This includes for example indigenous peoples' right to consultation and cooperation. This means that the free and informed consent of indigenous peoples must be sought in advance of any administrative and legislative measures that might directly affect them.

3. Modern impact on the indigenous¹⁰

a. Colonization and government assimilation

Colonization and government assimilation (i.e., into mainstream Western society) impacted all aspects of indigenous life, including: health, traditional roles, culture, socio-economic conditions, access to services, and equity among others. Consequently, many indigenous people today experience health inequities, loss of tradition and traditional practices, and breakdown of the family unit. To gain an understanding of how to promote equity for indigenous people, a

¹⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/2051453015Z.00000000023?journalCode=yjrl20>

critical examination of the root causes of living, territorial, and health inequities between colonizers and indigenous people must be considered within historical, economic, and socio-political contexts.

b. Harming of resources

Modern civilizations have contributed a great amount to the lack of food and resources for indigenous. To focus on one example, the algae blooms in the Baltic are extremely harmful to fish and other ocean life. Algae blooms are caused by runoff from fertilizers used in overabundance for crops. The excess nitrogen and oxygen in fertilizer, which is critical for crop success, nourishes the algae to the extent that its population grows exponentially and uses all the oxygen in the water for itself, thereby depriving other ocean life. Indigenous people have relied on bodies of water to provide them with fish and other sources of meat for centuries, making it an aspect to acknowledge when considering the effects of the need for crop efficiency on the indigenous.

4. Modern contribution to climate change¹¹

Humans are increasingly influencing the climate and the earth's temperature by burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests and farming livestock. This adds enormous amounts of greenhouse gases to those naturally occurring in the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse effect and global warming.

a. Greenhouse effect

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/climate-change/causes-climate-change_en

The main driver of climate change is the greenhouse effect. Some gasses in the Earth's atmosphere act a bit like the glass in a greenhouse, trapping the sun's heat and stopping it from leaking back into space and causing global warming. Many of these greenhouse gasses occur naturally, but human activity is increasing the concentrations of some of them in the atmosphere. CO₂ produced by human activities is the largest contributor to global warming. By 2020, its concentration in the atmosphere had risen to 48% above its pre-industrial level (before 1750). In contrast, natural causes, such as changes in solar radiation or volcanic activity are estimated to have contributed less than plus or minus 0.1°C to total warming between 1890 and 2010.

b. Main causes of emissions

- I. Burning coal, oil and gas produces carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide.
- II. Cutting down forests (deforestation). Trees help to regulate the climate by absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere. When they are cut down, that beneficial effect is lost and the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere, adding to the greenhouse effect.
- III. Increasing livestock farming. Cows and sheep produce large amounts of methane when they digest their food, as well as the emissions produced when transporting livestock and food.
- IV. Fertilizers containing nitrogen produce nitrous oxide emissions.
- V. Fluorinated gasses are emitted from equipment and products that use these gasses. Such emissions have a very strong warming effect, up to 23 000 times greater than CO₂.

IV. Major Parties Involved

a. United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva.

b. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

The UNPFII is a high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its main focuses are providing expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the Council, as well as to programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, through ECOSOC; raising awareness and promotes the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; preparing and disseminates information on indigenous issues; and promoting respect for and full application of the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In addition to the six mandated areas (economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights), each session is thematically focused on a specific issue.

c. Polynesian island nations

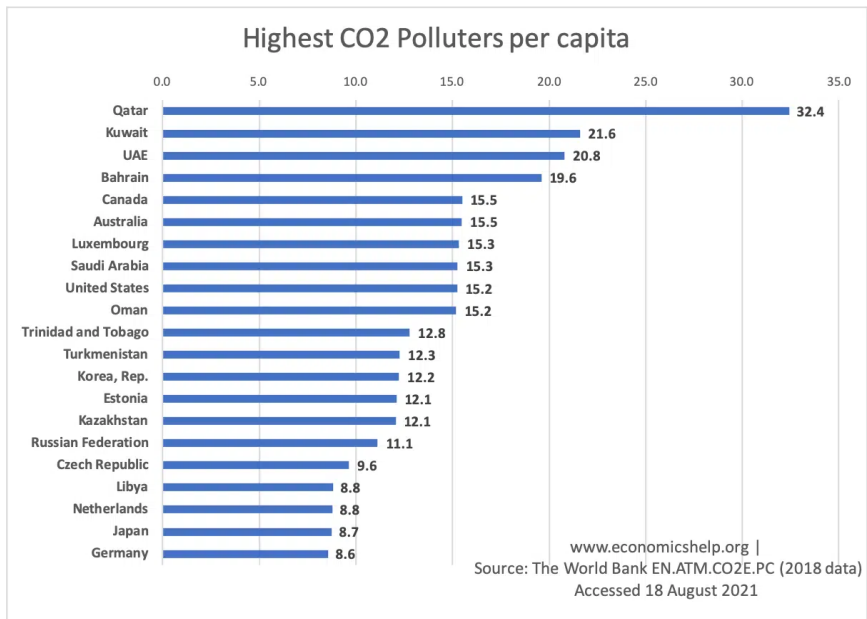
The communities of Oceania face severe, imminent consequences connected with climate change. Because of rising sea levels, low-lying atoll areas are

already being flooded and coastal shores eroded, along with salt water intrusion. The results are violations of the residents' fundamental human rights to water, food, housing, and health. Yet there are many more consequences impacting the cultures and livelihoods of Pacific Islanders. Beyond the sea water seeping into the soil, there is also acidification of the ocean, which is leading to coral bleaching. The death of the coral equates to the loss of an important natural barrier to king tides and rising sea levels, as well as loss of a food source. Shell fish cannot survive and fish no longer inhabit the dying reefs. The polar ice caps are melting. As the ice caps melt, and the sea temperatures increase, the oceans expand, and sea levels rise. Sea level rise will affect coastal communities, particularly in many low-lying islands found in the Pacific, as well as affecting the level of freshwater available on those islands. Climate change will intensify extreme weather events, such as storms, cyclones, floods, droughts and heat waves. In the last decade, there were three times more weather-related natural catastrophes, mostly floods and windstorms, in the world than in the 1960s.

d. People's Republic of China

In recent years, China has accelerated past the United States and is the biggest polluter in absolute terms, which is unsurprising given China's population and fast economic growth. Emissions amount to 7.38 tons per capita.

This graph measures the level of CO₂ per person. Here China, with the highest CO₂ in absolute terms, is ranked considerably lower down.



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e. Minority Rights Group International

Minority Rights Group International is an international human rights organization founded with the objective of working to secure rights for ethnic, national, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples around the world.

V. Previous and Possible Solutions

1. Previous Solutions

- a. Previous solutions to ensure the rights of indigeneous people often include organizations, both NGOs and government-led ones. These include, but are not limited to organizations like Minority Rights Group International, the UNPFII, and the UNHRC. These organizations were

¹² <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/10296/economics/top-co2-polluters-highest-per-capita/>

founded mostly on the basis of enabling communication and peaceful co-existence with the indigenous.

- b. Many treaties have also been established, some dating back to when Christopher Columbus first voyaged to North America and some as recent as a decade ago.

2. Possible Solutions

- a. Member states need to take action on indigenous peoples rights. Many treaties have been established, however there is always more to be done. Member states need to actively engage in positive, and cooperative communication with the local indigenous and establish good relations with them, optimally leading to the improved conservation and protection of the environment
- b. Multiple solutions to climate change are out there. Using renewable energies, cutting emission, transitioning from coal-based energy to renewable energy, and farming livestock sustainably will lead to a more sustainable lifestyle and protect species from suffering, to name a few.

VI. Conclusion

Indigenous people have the traditional knowledge for protecting the environment of their ancestors. Respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and enhancing their participation in climate policy is critical to achieving the Paris Agreement goals and fostering climate resilience. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from September 2007 affirms that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples. Colonization and government assimilation (i.e., into mainstream

Western society) can impact anywhere from some to all aspects of indigenous life. Modern civilizations have contributed a great amount to the lack of food and resources for indigenous. Humans are increasingly influencing the climate and the earth's temperature by burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests and farming livestock. This adds enormous amounts of greenhouse gasses to those naturally occurring in the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse effect, the main driver of climate change. Member states need to take action on indigenous peoples rights. Multiple solutions to climate change are out there. We just need to take the first step of many.

Questions to Consider

1. How can member states ensure the protection of the rights of indigenous people?
2. What rights should indigenous people be given that don't already exist?
3. How should the above mentioned rights be ensured?
4. What can be done on a global and local level to build more good relations and communication with indigenous people?
5. How can member states and indigenous work together on the environment effectively?
6. What methods could be effective in reducing modern impact on the environment in cooperation with indigenous?