



**ODUMUNC 2015**  
**Issue Brief for World Conference**



***Self-determination and Autonomy of Indigenous People and Minorities***

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**Introduction:**

The issue of self-determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples and minority groups have been a pressing issue in the post-colonial era. The vast practice of drawing borders by imperial powers have come to undermine the historical territorial claims of indigenous populations across the globe. The World Conference has become the global forum for these indigenous groups to seek better representation in their current governmental institutions. As well as gaining increased representation within their states, many groups have sought a more autonomous form of representation which would be separate from the current state they inhabit in hopes of becoming a fully-autonomous nation state in the global community. As it stands, there are over 370 million indigenous peoples in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific with varying levels of representation and a diverse set of urgency to each indigenous population.

The basic human rights and fundamental freedoms which these indigenous populations are entitled to are enshrined within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Those basic human rights, as stated in the UNDRIP, are as followed:

- *The right to unrestricted self-determination*
- *The unalienable right to the ownership, use and control of lands, territories, and other natural resources*
- *The rights to maintain and develop political, cultural, religious and educational institutions*
- *The requirement for prior & informed consultation, participation and consent in activities that impact indigenous peoples*
- *The requirement for fair and adequate compensation for violations of the rights in the Declaration*

The Declaration has been a symbol of triumph and hope for indigenous populations across the world and carries a considerable moral force. Regardless of the moral force the declaration carries, the United Nations is not a global police force and each nation who recognizes the UNDRIP must push for policies to better protect the rights of indigenous populations or reform areas of their policies towards their respective indigenous groups.

The World Conference has also been provided with the debate of increasing the representation of minorities in countries and monitoring for abuses and inadequate protections of minorities groups across the globe. In regards to the rights of minority groups across the global stage, the hierarchy of representation in a given polity can vary from the idea of equal rights, special rights, and full autonomy of a minority group.

**Figure 1. Pyramid of Minority Autonomy & Representation**



Source: “Roma Rights 2012: Challenges of Representation: Voice on Roma Politics, Power and Participation.” August 22, 2013. *European Roma Rights Center*. 2014.

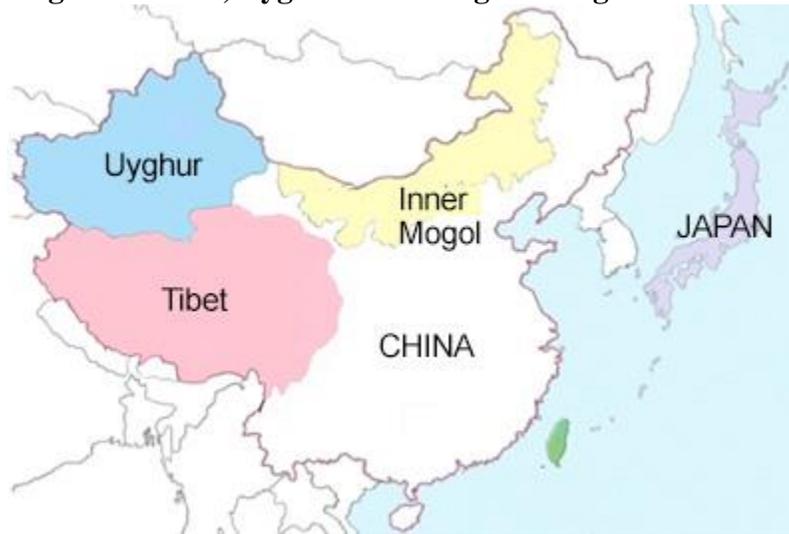
The figure above is a glimpse of the process for progress in minority groups gaining improved representation and equality in their standards of living with the top of the pyramid highlighting the ultimate goal of achieving personal or territorial autonomy for an ethnic minority. The Roma minorities through Eastern Europe have made some gains in improved representation in their governments’ decision-making bodies, but even now in 2014, the Roma are quite severely under represented by numerous Eastern European nations and on a transnational level with 1 out of 736 members of the European Parliament being of Romani origin. The discourse expressed by numerous Roma and pro-Roma organizations has shifted from a message of self-determination that was prevalent through the 1970s and 80s, to raising awareness of human rights violations against Roma from the 1990s to the early 2000s. From the late 2000s to now, the focus of these organizations has been aimed at social and economic integration of Roma under the current EU Framework Strategy.

Issues with regards to the proper representation of minority groups in a given polity and additional concerns over human rights violations are prevalent all across the globe. The Tibetan Autonomous Region and progress under the Dalai Lama’s “Middle Way” policy with Beijing has allowed the Tibetans within the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) a level of autonomy to continue traditional localized governance of the territory while still under Chinese sovereign authority.

Beijing’s policies for economic development in Tibet have been seen by Tibetans as a legal attempt at resource extraction while opening migration into the region by various migrants and business interests. The policy has given rise to numerous protests and riots while increasing Tibetan extremism and national calls for full autonomy from Beijing, citing inadequate representation in decision-making under the Peoples Republic of China’s top down authoritarian rule.

The debate around economic development and integration in various nations across Southeast Asia has put into question the rights of indigenous nations all across the region. Accusations of land grabbing measures by state governments in indigenous lands for resources within the given countries will be a serious matter in need of resolution within the World Conferences.

**Figure 2. Tibet, Uyghur and Mongolian regions of China**



Source: Japala Magazine

### **History and Background:**

The need for the United Nations to form a declaration that reflected and protected the rights of indigenous groups and ethnic minorities in the world began to gain momentum in 1983 by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations who began the formation of the draft that would be the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The working group consisted of experts on the subject of human rights and indigenous peoples, government delegations, and representatives of indigenous populations who had adopted the text of the declaration in 1993 where the text was then sent to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Following its adoption by the Sub-Commission in 1994, the draft was sent to the Commission on Human Rights.

With its arrival on March 3, 1995, the High Commission was able to establish an Intersessional Working Group within Resolution HR 1995/32 which authorized a decade-long mandate. A draft declaration of the text was to be drawn up and eventually adopted by the UN General Assembly. This procedure additionally made it possible for the active participation of indigenous peoples' organizations in the drafting process. When the vote on the text came in September 13th, 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the UNDRIP by an overwhelming majority of 143 votes in favor of the declaration. Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States were a few member states who cast negative votes.

A second key piece of background information in regards to indigenous peoples rights is the outcome document from the Global Indigenous Preparatory Conference in June 2013 held in Alta, Norway. The Alta Outcome Document contained a number of recommendations for the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly and World Conference on Indigenous Peoples which reviews the instrumental role of indigenous populations in advocating for human rights. It contains an emphasis on how self-determination is a prerequisite for the realization of all rights and reaffirmed the norms of international law as a basis for upholding all matters of human rights. The attending delegations consisted of 200 indigenous delegates and roughly 400

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observers who contributed to the four overarching themes in the Outcome Document; those themes being:

- *Indigenous People's land, territories, resources, oceans and waters;*
- *Implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples;*
- *The UN system for action in implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples; and*
- *Indigenous peoples' priorities for development with free, prior and informed consent.*

The Alta Gathering is important because it allowed for indigenous delegates to be actively involved in preparation for the upcoming 2014 High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly. The North American Indigenous Peoples Caucus (NAIPC), which represented the more than 566 Native American tribes across the United States of America, expressed its concern with the UNDRIP in regards to incorporating indigenous peoples into the body of politics of the state. Debra Harry of the Numu tribe explained that the NAIPC reserves all rights to decision making with regard to future work in relation to the World Conference. The NAIPC also do not empower anybody or entity to speak for, represent, or negotiate any position on our beliefs and is committed to sharing a historical context and update that includes the outcomes of the Alta Conference with their region and improve upon their communications to their indigenous peoples and nations affected.

The statements from the NAIPC came in opposition to statements made by a spokesman on behalf of the US federal government's position on the UNDRIP, in which they stated that, "the US government's view that self-determination, as expressed in the Declaration, is different from self-determination in international law." The position of the United States in this regard was rejected by delegates of the NAIPC as well as the Indigenous Law Institute and the International Indian Treaty Council.

The acceptance of the Alta Outcome Document by the NAIPC and various indigenous delegations at the conference was due in part to the reaffirming of indigenous peoples inherent and preeminent right of self-determination not only in international law, but in the inherent sovereignty and free exercise of indigenous populations as protected in the UNDRIP.

### **Current Situation:**

The progress made by indigenous populations across the globe has enshrined the legitimacy these populations and ethnic minorities carry in international affairs. One of the key issues prevalent in today's affairs in regards to indigenous and minority rights are economic development plans by central governments to integrate indigenous regions into the industrial sectors of the economy. While economic development initiatives by these countries may seek to better the standards of living of indigenous populations while meeting the growing demands for the abundant resources in these regions, many indigenous groups and human rights organizations criticize these efforts as an infringement of indigenous peoples' right to ancestral lands.

The Southeast Asian region of the world has seen a sharp rise in land grabbing by a number of states which has led to widespread displacement of indigenous populations. The displacement of these indigenous groups in nations like Bangladesh, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, India, and Laos have brought questions of land use, ownership and settlement into the international stage in need of resolution. These instances

also can raise questions in regards to proposed economic projects in North American nations like the US and Canada's transnational oil pipeline, Keystone XL Pipeline, which would cut through traditional territories held by Native American tribes and tribal resources both in Canada and the US. The need for improved access to justice and recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to land and resources are a fundamental part of the agenda here at the World Conference.

On the issue of protecting the rights of minority groups, both ethnic and indigenous minorities, has also come to center stage at the World Conference in countries where these minorities may not even have citizenship in their state of residence. This is the case for the Rohingya Muslim minority within the Rakhine area of Myanmar where most Rohingya have been stripped of their citizenship since the 1982 Citizenship Act by the Myanmar government. After many years of discrimination and segregation of the Rohingya, reform projects began to start up in 2011 and a UN Country Team tasked with improving development and humanitarian roles in the country with 75% of the efforts were focused in Rakhine and Kachin State. Many of the critics of the UN team, Human Rights Watch and other aid organizations such as Refugee International and Fortify Rights contributing to efforts in Myanmar focused on the government's failure to protect the Muslim minority in the country with reports of state-sponsored violence against Rohingya communities in October 2012.

In the face of the reports of wartime abuses in the dire humanitarian within Rakhine and Kachin, the government did allow for the UN to deliver aid to those displaced in rebel-held areas in June 2013 and the UN did pass a resolution in December 2013 (UN Resolution 68/242) restating its concern about the situation of the Rohingya minority with increased reports of communal violence. The resolution additionally called upon the government of Myanmar to protect these minorities and ensure respect for human rights and full access to humanitarian assistance without discrimination. The Myanmar government was additionally encouraged to facilitate inter-community dialogues and address the root causes of the issue in Rakhine.

**Figure 3: Map of Myanmar showing Rakhine**



Source: *The Economist*

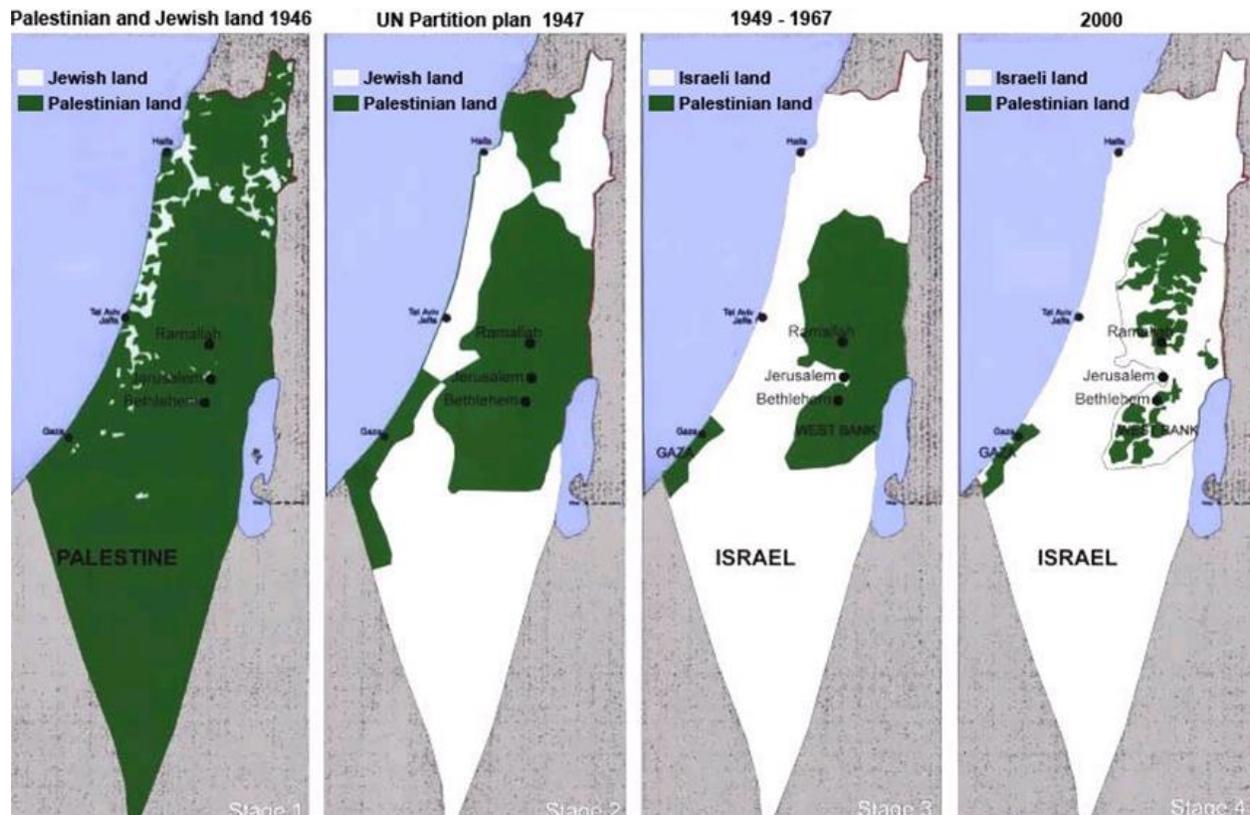
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Indigenous populations right to self-determination and some level of autonomy is also a pressing matter in international affairs in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China and in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Beginning with China, the Tibetan Autonomous Region was established following the invasion of the region by the People's Republic of China in 1950 which was ended through the diplomatic relations between the central authority in the PRC and the Dalai Lama, representing the Tibetan population, where the Seventeen Points Agreement granted Tibet special status and autonomy which allowed Tibet to continue its traditional self-rule while under Chinese sovereignty. Following a popular rebellion in the region after China displayed little regard for its commitments, the TAR was established under China's Law of National Regional Autonomy; the law divided half of traditional Tibetan areas into twelve lesser autonomous areas that highlighted central control outweighing the notion of autonomy as well as a view of national security instead of indigenous rights by the Chinese central government.

The failure of the Seventeen Point Agreement and China's policies of economic development, which are seen by Tibetans as self-serving efforts to facilitate resource extraction and open up Chinese migration to Tibet while suppressing opposition, have been seen as falling short of the promises in the UNDRIP. A key moment in the experience of Tibet's struggle for autonomy came on the heels of the 2008 Beijing Olympics with the Tibetan Memorandum which outlined eleven policy areas of hoped for autonomy enshrined in the PRC Constitution. In addition to the request for more robust autonomy in the sectors of language, culture, religion, education, environmental protection, natural resource utilization, economic development & trade, public health, and internal public security, the memorandum also sought to unify all contiguous Tibetan autonomous areas into one state. The Chinese central authority, however, was dismissive of the UNDRIP requirement of negotiating with freely chosen representatives of the indigenous population and in turn shifted down the discussion to only the Dalai Lama's demands to control any unrest that may have ensued with the arrival of the Beijing Olympics.

On the case of Israel and the Palestinians, the issue of indigenous peoples right to ancestral lands is caught in limbo between two ethnic groups with two very different view on land rights and territorial integrity in the Levant.

**Figure 4: Demographic Shifts in Palestine 1946-2000**



Source: [fasttimesinpalestine.wordpress.com](http://fasttimesinpalestine.wordpress.com)

The changes in the demographic landscape of Israel and Palestine has been altered since the 1967 Israeli occupation in the West Bank through the transferring and settling of Jewish civilian populations on to land confiscated from the Palestinian territory. Currently, the swelling number of settler movement into the West Bank over the past 20 years stands at some 344,799 settlers within 130 settlements that were authorized and protected by the Israeli state with another 200,000 settlers that have moved into East Jerusalem. These efforts by the Israeli state are seen by the Palestinians as efforts to prevent an emergence of a contiguous Palestinian state by altering the demographic composition of these territories through policies that undermine the indigenous claims the Palestinians hold in the West Bank and Gaza. The root of this issue is that the border lines of 1967 seem to be constricting around the Palestinian minority within West Bank and rendering those Palestinian communities stateless through negating the populations' right to property and historic affinity to the land.

This negation is evident by the authorization by the Israeli cabinet for the demolition and removal of Umm al-Hiran in November 2013. The reasoning behind the order was that the settlement in the Negev Desert was unauthorized and the lack of permits was cause for the demolition and forced eviction in order for the building of a Jewish community named Hiran which was planned and approved eleven years prior in 2002. This ongoing contestation of Palestinian land rights and the Israeli government using its authority to define policies to favor the Jewish population promote segregation along ethnic affiliation lines through what Hatem

Bazian of the Harvard International Review labels as a “biblical theology of dispossession”. This ultimately is the process of utilizing religious texts as the means of gaining legitimacy to the efforts at collectively displacing and silencing of the indigenous Palestinians and to address this crisis without accounting for the textual manipulations and theologically-sanctioned dispossession of the Palestinians will only delay future instances of violence directed at the indigenous population.

### **Country Positions:**

There is no region of the world that does not have to manage the varying interests and issues dealing with indigenous and minority representation. While some regions have the capacity to accommodate indigenous populations into the institutions within a given polity, many regions must cope with a lack of resources needed to properly and effectively address this problem. This problem encompasses a number of factors, both beneficial and detrimental, which this committee must take into account as they pass resolutions setting the universal standards that coincide with the principles of the UNDRIP and UN Charter.

#### *North and Central America*

The regional dynamic in regards to indigenous and minority rights is rather sound in North and Central America, yet several factors aim to threaten indigenous rights. Several Native American tribes within the United States and Canada have protested and denounced economic development programs such as the Keystone XL pipeline which aims to compromise the territorial integrity of Native American reservations the pipeline is projected to pass through. This project also risked indigenous communities’ access to natural resources such as water in the Ogallala Aquifer in the Midwestern US.

In Central America, there are over 6 million indigenous residents in the region and the issues facing these groups vary. The 2003 Law 445 of Communal Property System of Indigenous Populations and Ethnic Communities in Nicaragua allowed for the right of self-government in territories designated as indigenous lands. Additionally, a 2006 General Education Law further recognized the cultural foundations in these communities and recognized a Regional Autonomous Education System(RAES). Nicaragua also created the Autonomous Regions of the North and South Atlantic following indigenous resistances by members of the Miskitu in the Caribbean against the Sandinista National Liberation Front which came to power in 1979.

Furthermore in places like Guatemala, efforts are needed to bring indigenous populations out of poverty throughout the state and region as a whole. Indigenous populations in this region are seen to be 2.8 times more poor than non-indigenous persons and have 13 years less in life expectancy. In 2008, 73% of indigenous groups were classified as poor, with another 26% classified as extremely poor in spite of the fact that these populations participated in the economy at a 4.6% higher rate than non-indigenous populations. Means of better securing the foundations of indigenous populations right to autonomous governance and mechanism of bringing these communities out of states of poverty will be this committee’s task.

#### *South America*

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Indigenous populations can be found all throughout the regions of the Amazon within South America and their right to territorial integrity and collective rights must be secured. The Kichwa in Ecuador have seen a series of political and institutional reforms accompanied by enforcement of guarantees within the Constitution of Ecuador.

Recent policy reforms aimed at opening up extractive industries such as oil, copper, and gold to foreign investment from China, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina have caused disagreement between the government and indigenous social organizations. These groups have highlighted the risk towards the territorial and cultural integrity of these indigenous populations and further build on the uncertainty around the broad collective rights across the continent.

### *Africa*

The situation regarding indigenous rights on the African continent highlights the urgent efforts needed to ensure that the principles of the UNDRIP are truly universal. Indigenous rights are not fully recognized or protected on the continent as a whole and this presents a number of problems. The Amazigh(Tamazight[pl]) or “Berber” have populations all across Northern Africa, yet in countries like Algeria, the population is not recognized. NGO estimates believe that there are over 11 million Tamazight-speakers concentrated in five regions of the country but are present throughout the country. The language of the Berbers encompasses many of the cultural attributes of the people, but a historic continuance of urbanisation and “Arabisation” have eroded these features from the state. Regardless of the 2002 recognition of the Tamazight language, the indigenous group continues to be marginalized in state institutions, best evident in the 1992 Law of Arabisation.

In sub-Saharan African countries like Central African Republic, the pastoralist Mbororo and the forest-dwelling Aka (Pygmie) indigenous groups have faced dangers brought on by insurrection from neighboring countries which spill over into CAR. An insurrection originating from Chad took hold of the north-western region of CAR in the pastoralist community within the Ouaka prefecture, which resulted in robbery of Mbororo cattle and abductions for ransom by the foreign rebels.



recognition of indigenous rights is evident in Article 82, paragraph 2, revision 2 of the Rwandan Constitution which secures 8 seats in Senate to historically marginalized populations; however, only a single seat is held by a member of the Batwa community today. Following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, ethnic identities had been banned and thus there is no recognition of indigenous or minority language of the Batwa and regardless of the governments support for the UNDRIP, no laws exist specifically protecting the rights of the Batwa.

### *Eastern Europe/Middle East*

Minority rights and protection of minorities in regions dealing with a recent acceleration in extremist ideologies have brought this issue to the forefront. The vastly diverse population of Iraq, composed of Sunni and Shia Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Armenian Christians, Yazidis, Mandaeans, and Shabak, face a very real threat from the rapid rise of the extremist-Sunni group known as Islamic State which has declared a caliphate currently occupying a third of western Iraq and a third of eastern Syria. The strict interpretation of Sunni Islam aims to run the risk of reshaping the territorial integrity of the Iraqi state; furthermore, the rate of expansion the group has undertaken has led to numerous reports of heinous rights violations and acts of genocide against the numerous minority groups within IS-controlled Iraq.

Dealing with the rapid rise of the Islamic State group requires all states in the Greater Middle East to boost efforts at both containing and dismantling the group that has crossed state border as well as protecting the most vulnerable groups such as Christian, Yazidis and Kurds. Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates all have contributed to efforts at containing IS from expanding further north or south, but face criticism for broad support given to Sunni opposition groups in Syria's civil war, that arguably has led to Islamic State's manifestation. The three yearlong ongoing conflict in Syria has given rise to IS and has led to the worst humanitarian crisis in recent history with minority groups fleeing the country with little assurances that rights they may have held in Syria will be protected in their country of asylum.

The situation of the Palestinians within the Occupied West Bank further adds to the issues of indigenous rights. Historical territory given to the Palestinians following the 1967 War continues to struggle with settlement projects reshaping the demographic makeup of the West Bank and the persistent state of apartheid in the Palestinian territories. Recent escalations by the Israeli military and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip has further illustrated the need for honest, humane, and appropriate representation of the Palestinian state as Israel faces condemnation from a number of global organizations. The Arab Bedouin in Israel-proper additionally continue to face discrimination and second-class status of citizenship, but this should not be a surprise given the fact Israel has not signed on to the UNDRIP.

In the Eastern European states, calls for independence by the Russian-speaking minorities in Eastern Ukraine have brought global attention to the civil conflict not only compromising the government in Kiev, but worrying former Soviet states like Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Ukraine and Russia have recently put forth a process to ending the conflict in Ukraine and addressing the calls for more autonomy in the east of the country after negotiating a peace deal in Minsk, Belarus in September of 2014.

This process has also been attributed to the peace deal that settled the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh which escalated to a full conflict following the calls of the Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh for full autonomy and closer relations to

Armenia in 1988. Following the peace deal in 1994, sparse incidences of violence along the Line of Contact have broken out as recently as August 2014. The uncertainty and fragility of the peace risks compromising the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the protection of the Armenian populations within Nagorno-Karabakh.

### *Central Asia*

The former Soviet states of Central Asia all have had to deal with establishing their individual polities in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan all saw their economies suffer in the post-Soviet era and ethnic tensions have been persistent more in some states than others. In Afghanistan following the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the Afghan Civil War, Uzbeks, Turkmen and Hazara all sought to attain adequate representation in the government. Prior to the defection of General Dostam from the Najibullah regime in the northern provinces, the Uzbek population in Afghanistan had no political organization and Dostam was seen as the spokesman of Uzbeks in Afghanistan. When the Uzbeks in the Northern Alliance took up the fight against the Taliban later on, Uzbeks developed influence within the military and political structure of the northern regions of the country.

Like the Uzbeks, the Turkmen lacked any political representation or leaders in the post-civil war rebuilding process in addition to being historically excluded from decision making processes within the administrative structure. In 2004, the Turkmen were first represented by Nur Muhammad Qargin who was appointed Minister of Education. In this post, Qargin introduced projects pushing for school textbooks written in the Dari language, which is the language of other small ethnic groups in Afghanistan as well as the Turkmen.

In the Northern regions of Asia, Russia's multiethnic society recognizes 41 indigenous groups in the North, Siberia and the Far East including the Evenks, the Saami, the Yupiq, and the Nenets. Other more populous groups like the Sakha, Buryat, Komi and Khakass have traditionally inhabited territories from the Kola Peninsula to the Bering Strait but lack recognition as indigenous peoples despite inhabiting nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Russian territory.

In 1990, the Association of Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and Far East was established by a number of indigenous activists. Representing 42 indigenous populations, the organization was aimed at protecting rights of these populations both at the national and international level. Though Russia's Constitution has protections for indigenous communities in Article 69 regarding cultural, territorial and political rights, these efforts are complicated by recent legislation aimed at utilizing natural resources in the North. The natural resources of oil, gas and minerals within indigenous territories risk instigating conflict through energy projects such as oil pipelines and hydroelectric dams.

In China, the government recognizes 55 ethnic minorities and prides itself on being a unified multiethnic society. In 2010, the ethnic minority population was measured at 113,792,211 which made up 8.49% of the population. However, 734,438 ethnic minority members are unrecognized by the government and reside mostly in Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet. The PRC's constitution does have protections for recognized minorities including autonomous regions, local administrative governance and the right to language and cultural practice. Despite protections in the Constitution, Amnesty International have reported an asymmetric enforcement of these protections most evident in the regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. Reports of tight control of religious practice and numerous abuses and persecutions by

authorities against Uyghur Muslims which exploded during violent riots in 2009 between Uyghur and Han Chinese. The lack of meaningful political representation, restrictions on cultural and religious practices and loss of land in Xinjiang has drawn international pressure against China for its double standard in the province.

Furthermore, the Dalai Lama called for an international probe of China's treatment in Tibet which he accused the central government of "cultural genocide" against his people. Programs introduced by China aimed at expanding economic development in the Tibetan Autonomous Region have faced criticism from Tibetans, who see the initiatives as facilitating natural resource extraction and allowing easier migration of non-Tibetans into the province to shift the demographic makeup of Tibet in hopes of future generations resembling more Han and Sino Chinese traits to quell tensions by the indigenous Tibetans.

### *Southeast Asia/Pacific*

A number of states in the Southeast Asia and Eastern Pacific region all have vastly diverse ethnic populations and accommodations for their indigenous rights have been made in some areas. Nations such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Philippines and Thailand all have seen protests by indigenous communities primary as a result of economic development plans taking place in lands historically inhabited by the indigenous communities.

Indigenous rights in Bangladesh take the forefront in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) which was declared a tribal inhabited region following the eviction of thousands of tribal families and conflict instigated by the Kaptai Hydro Electric Project in the 1960s. A government initiative to transfer nearly 400,000 non-indigenous persons into the CHT worked to reshape the demographic makeup of the region and displaced an additional 100,000 indigenous people. Land dispossession in the CHT by numerous state agencies and corporate business interests in 2013 amounted to 3,792 acres of land seized, totaling at 1,279,003 acres in the tribal region. Furthermore in 2014, an additional 242.03 acres were seized by paramilitary forces in the Khagrachari and Bandarban districts.

The displacement of indigenous populations through economic development projects in Vietnam occurred with the approval of the Son La Hydropower Plant in 2010. In preparation for the project, over 90,000 ethnic minority Thais were relocated and left without access to indigenous agricultural lands and resulted in strained relations between the groups and the central Vietnamese authority. In Cambodia, the Kui people of the Prey Lang forest region faced additional loss of ancestral land. Between 1996 and 2013, numerous land grants for tens of thousands of forest for mineral extraction, timber and rubber plantation forced Kui communities to give up their traditional lands. In total, the Cambodian government had granted land concessions totaling 1.5 million hectares (half the arable land in Cambodia) to at least 117 companies.

Tribal groups like the Dongria in India have had tense relations with the Indian government following the approval of mining projects to the Vedanta Company. A 2011 ILO India Report highlighted the criticism the Dongria expressed with their claims of more than half the country's minerals obtained by the Vedanta Company had violated tribal rights. These grievances were addressed in 2013 with the Supreme Court ruling which required community consultation prior to proceeding with proposed mining operations. This move forward does fall in line with principles enshrined in the UNDRIP regarding free, prior and informed consent from indigenous peoples.

**Figure 6. Major ethnic groups of the Philippines**



Source: Election World, 2006

In the Philippines, one of the biggest deposits of undiscovered minerals resides underneath lengthy swaths of indigenous land and has caused tension to arise from indigenous communities over mining operations. In the Cordilleran indigenous region, 60% of the land is covered by mining operations or applications. Responding to opposition towards the mining operations, the government in the Philippines engaged in repression and militarization of the region resulting in spiking tension between indigenous communities and the military following 44 extrajudicial killings of indigenous leaders opposing mining operations.

While numerous nations in the region have had strained relations with their indigenous and minority communities, Thailand has made some positive gains. In 2010, a number of cabinet resolutions were passed focusing on restoring traditional livelihoods of the indigenous Chao Ley and Karen groups. Aside from the reforms passed in 2010, no real improvements have occurred but the foundations for change have been put in place for organization both national and international to further advocate for and implement.

### **Future Role of the UN**

The role the United Nations provides for the issue of self-determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples and minorities is a coordinating body for country's diverse and similar issues. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the key tool for measuring instances or policies that undermine the rights of indigenous persons. As far as groups that seek to form a separate polity from the nation their people reside within, the United

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Nations also has the power to recognize calls for self-determination and open the polity to various forms of aid. Monitoring mechanisms within the UN also provide crucial data and reporting with coordination with local organizations to evaluate the conditions of indigenous peoples and minorities to cite abuses by extremist elements in the country or abuses by the state.

Practical ideas for roles of the UN agencies that report on issues of indigenous rights may cite past resolutions that contain commitments countries in dispute may not be fulfilling. Organizations can additionally provide recommendations for improving communication and advocacy strategies to strengthen protections and representation of minority groups and the central government. The United Nations is the forum for nations and persons to encourage nations across the globe to express differing and like-minded options in order to come to a resolution that can ensure the safety and adequate representation of nations and minorities within those nations.

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