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Human Rights Index

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HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

*Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)**

Indigenous peoples—ethnic populations historically associated with a given territory who maintain linguistic and other cultural traditions distinct from the state societies within which they reside—are commonly denied privileges and rights that the dominant cultures surrounding them take for granted. While accounting for the majority of the world's cultural and linguistic diversity, they suffer disproportionately high rates of poverty, malnutrition, internal displacement, and landlessness and low levels of health care, literacy, and longevity. They are, however, entitled to all the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural protections that are afforded by legally binding international human rights instruments generally. They also merit the human rights protections that are extended to indigenous peoples specifically—as in the 1989 Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries and the very recent (September 2007) UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- 4 Number of states (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States), each with sizeable indigenous populations, that refused to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by 143 other nations on 13 September 2007, even though the Declaration is technically non-binding (AFP 2007, OHCHR 2007)
- 15 Percent of the world's poor who are indigenous people although they comprise only 5% of the world's population, which suggests large-scale socioeconomic and political discrimination based on indigenous identity (Indian Health Service, 2001; UNGA, 2007; World Bank, 2007)
- 20 Number of indigenous leaders summarily executed in Brazil in 2003, as part of a campaign of organized violence against some 400,000 indigenous men, women, and children, many of whom were assassinated by powerful military and landowning elites intent upon perpetuating colonial history via forced relocations and fierce opposition to the federal legalization of indigenous territories, and by wielding undue influence over local authorities and trials (UNHCHR, 2004; ECOSOC, 2006)
- 75 Percent of Native American women who experience sexual assault in their lives, overwhelmingly (70%) at the hands of persons of different ethnicity, the highest percentage among all ethnic groups in the United States but rarely reported or punished, largely because of inadequate law enforcement, thus denying to Native American women their human rights to personal security, equality before the law, and freedom

- from discrimination and degrading treatment (National Organization for Women, 2001; Amnesty International, 2006 & 2007)
- 100 Tons of mercury left from the mining practices of the California Gold Rush (1848–1855), poisoning the state’s Clear Lake, home to the native E’lem Pomo people, and producing high levels of toxic runoff that despoils the natural environment and food chain on which the E’lem Pomo depend, thereby infringing upon their rights to habitat, health, and subsistence (International Indian Treaty Council, 2005; UNHCHR, 2006)
- 142 The number of Hopi boys known to have been sexually assaulted by a white teacher at a Christian boarding school for Native American children in the 1980s, the school and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs nonetheless declining then to investigate subsequent allegations of abuse despite known discriminatory practices by which the students were compelled to accept Christianity over their native beliefs and prohibited from using any language but English—all in contravention of their rights to protection from physical abuse, to an education respectful of their cultural and linguistic identity, and to freedom from forced assimilation (UNICEF, 2004; UNHCHR, 2006; ACLU, 2007)
- 650 Minimum number of nuclear explosions caused by the U.S. Government on Western Shoshone land in Nevada, half of which have leaked radiation into the immediate atmosphere, complementing the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission’s dumping of radioactive materials over Inupiat land in Alaska—each action raising major health concerns among the native peoples affected while destroying their habitats and thus prejudicing their rights to health and life-sustaining environments (Alliance for Human Research Protection, 2002; ACLU, 2007; Arctic Peoples, 2007)
- 2500 Number of languages spoken by indigenous and traditional peoples—the storehouses of their intellectual heritages and frameworks for each society’s unique understanding of life—presently in danger of immediate extinction due to the expansion of markets, communications, and other aspects of globalization that promote dominant languages at the expense of native ones, threatening on an unprecedented scale the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to their native cultures and of people everywhere to the values of worldwide cultural diversity (OHCHR, 2000; UNHCHR, 2006)

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