

# Introduction

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## **Listen to us - we are the future**

This book aims to resolve the lack of information and knowledge about Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Youth from the first-hand perspective of Indigenous Youth. The information available in the literature, academia, legal writing, film, and pop culture about Indigenous Peoples very often portrays Indigenous Peoples as the noble savages, the fierce savages or as extinct nations.<sup>1</sup> We, Indigenous Peoples, are a dead race in the minds of many in the world. We belong in old black and white movies and history books—relics of a shameful past that many would rather forget. With this book, we ask you to challenge the colonial past, to see past the mere illusionary idea of indigeneity. We also invite you to embrace our truth—the truth is that we are alive, and our roots are strong.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Williams, *Savage Anxieties: The Invention of Western Civilization*, (United States of America: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

This book would behoove everyone to read from cover to cover, as it is multi-authored by fourteen Indigenous Youth, two selected from each of the seven Indigenous socio-cultural regions of the world: (1) Africa; (2) Asia; (3) the Arctic; (4) Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation and Central Asia; (5) Latin America and the Caribbean; (6) North America; and (7) the Pacific.

This compilation provides a rich perspective from each region; at the same time, it addresses different challenges. In this book, we, Indigenous Youth, explore the human rights challenges that we face nowadays, including how we view our identity as Indigenous youth in the face of modernization and globalization. We get a glimpse of how the Youth practice Traditional Knowledge in a contemporary world and live their everyday life in a culture filled with traditions. Some write about the health of their communities—be it spiritual or physical. Others write about experiences with migration and immigration. The Youth expound upon their experiences with sexism and racism, and their lifelong battles for land rights and intellectual property protection for Indigenous knowledge. Some Youth come with portrayals of poverty and unemployment, while others write about technology, innovation and the education systems in their region. This richness on the different issues addressed by the authors responds to the need that the book be an honest testimony of Indigenous Youth. This is why, for the first time ever, the

Indigenous Youth, under the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, are narrating their own stories.

### **The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus**

The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC) is a platform for Indigenous Youth to advocate before the international community, to participate in international decision-making processes that affect their lives, and to bring awareness to the issues concerning Indigenous Youth on local, regional, national, and international levels.

The GIYC is comprised of numerous Indigenous Youth from various states, organizations, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Since the first session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), young Indigenous participants have gathered together and, since the caucus's formal inception in 2006, developed statements voicing concerns of the Youth. The UNPFII formally recognized the GIYC as a working caucus in 2008. The GIYC is a caucus with a simple organizational structure. It is led by the Co-Chairs, who are elected for a one-year term at an annual meeting during the UNPFII. Each of the seven regions also appoints up to three Focal Points per region each year for a one-year mandate. The roles of the Focal Points are to facilitate discussion and consensus within each region. Alongside the Co-chairs and the Focal Points are the Advisors—former Co-chairs and

Focal Points—who provide guidance and expert knowledge to the leadership and to various working groups within GIYC.

The GIYC provides a link between the Indigenous Youth and other organizations. Currently, our area of work covers the UNPFII, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

### **Understanding the Indigenous Youth movement**

Each Indigenous People has its own culture, language, and worldview. We, as Peoples, are very different; however, we, as Indigenous Peoples, face similar challenges. The GIYC also aims to be a global response to those inter-connected challenges. For example, the lack of opportunities in Indigenous territories pushes Indigenous Youth to migrate to urban areas looking for better educational and employment opportunities. Once they have migrated to urban areas, they face harsh discrimination. Urban areas are often hostile to Indigenous Peoples' cultures and ways of life. Indigenous migrant Youths rarely have access to education or employment opportunities.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Q'apaj Conde, *Informe Perspectiva de Jóvenes Indígenas a los 10 Años de la Adopción de la Declaración de Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos*

addition, although physically and psychologically separated from their culture and territories, they inherit a responsibility to protect their traditional lands and culture, including their Traditional Knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, from misappropriation.<sup>3</sup> The trauma of colonialism, discrimination, and the difficulties they face in trying to protect their territories and Traditional Knowledge force Indigenous Youth into unsustainable and desperate situations in which, lamentably, many engage in self-harming behavior and/or commit suicide.

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, making up 5% of the global population and 15% of the world's poor; and yet we safeguard 80% of the biodiversity of the world.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous Peoples are often the poorest in their nations and have some of the

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*Indigenas*, (Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: 2017), [http://www.fondoindigena.org/drupal/sites/default/files/field/archivos/Informe\\_jo%CC%81venes.pdf](http://www.fondoindigena.org/drupal/sites/default/files/field/archivos/Informe_jo%CC%81venes.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> María Eugenia Choque, *Study on the treatment of traditional knowledge in the framework of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the post-2015 development agenda*, E/C.19/2015/4 (2 February 2015), <https://undocs.org/E/C.19/2015/4>.

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Indigenous Peoples Infographic," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, last modified November 23, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/resources/infographics/infographics-details/en/c/454472/>

highest rates of poverty and suicide.<sup>5</sup> They are looked down upon and regarded as backward because of their unwillingness to part with their rich cultural heritage. It is estimated that among the 370 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, approximately 45% are between 15 and 30 years of age.<sup>6</sup> This group of Indigenous Peoples faces numerous challenges, including frequent marginalization, migration and early motherhood.

### **Challenges**

Indigenous Youth from all over the world undergo many challenges across the globe. There is a tremendous diversity amongst Indigenous communities and Peoples, each of which has its own distinct culture, language, history, and unique way of life. Despite these differences, Indigenous Peoples across the globe share some common values derived in part from an understanding that their lives are part of an inseparable cycle with Mother Earth.

### **Colonization**

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<sup>5</sup> G.H. Hall and H.A. Patrinos, *Indigenous peoples, poverty, and development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Q'apaj Conde, "The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus," in *The Indigenous World 2018*, ed. Pamela Jacquelin-Andersen (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2018), 580-589.

The violent colonization of Indigenous Peoples, their Waters and Lands across the globe has caused many of the several challenges that Indigenous Peoples face today. Colonization has created a collective trauma that has been transplanted onto Indigenous Youth. It has rooted a racist relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous societies. For Indigenous Youth, decolonization is a must. Decolonization is a range of actions that go from thinking with our own head—this means to use our own systems of knowledge<sup>7</sup>—to learning our own history and creating international solidarity among Indigenous Peoples and with non-Indigenous allies. Colonization is a violent act, not necessarily manifested as physical violence, but violence nonetheless because it dehumanizes the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized becomes an object or a nonbeing; at the same time, the colonizer loses his humanity in performing cruel and inhumane acts to what they consider to be non-beings. Decolonization, for Indigenous Youth, is the act of taking back our humanity.

### **Living in two worlds**

Indigenous Youth live between two worlds—the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous—and our battle to protect our Lands and Waters and our human rights is made immeasurably more difficult by the ignorance about us, by the lack of

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<sup>7</sup> Fausto Reinaga, *Revolución India*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (La Paz: Editorial Obrera, 2016).

knowledge about our cultures, our heritage, and our everyday lives. The fact that we want to show you is this: that Indigeneity and modernity are not mutually exclusive; we live with our feet on our lands and phone in our hands, listening to our elders while we speak in both our Indigenous languages and colonial tongues understood by the rest of the world.

### **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**

Free, prior, and informed consent was established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>8</sup> (UNDRIP) as a fundamental safeguard to the right of self-determination<sup>9</sup> and non-discrimination.<sup>10</sup> Thereby,

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295 (2 October 2007), Articles 18, 19, 23, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, Article 3; United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, 171 (16 December 1966), Article 1, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3aa0.htm>; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, 3 (16 December 1966), Article 1, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c0.html>.

<sup>10</sup> *Supra* note 8, at Articles 1, 2; United Nations General Assembly, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, United Nations,



FPIC is a reflection of Indigenous Rights established in international customary law and international human rights treaties.<sup>11</sup> From an Indigenous Youth perspective, FPIC restores control and decision-making to Indigenous Peoples over their lives and their futures. Not all Indigenous Youth are aware that the FPIC is a collective right, as the implementation of it has been sparse. This means that the future of the next generation is dimming. Governments and large corporations do not always consult Indigenous Peoples and their Youth, and in many cases, the Indigenous Peoples are not even aware that they have the right to free, prior, and informed consent.

### **Suicide and mental health**

Indigenous Peoples, and especially Indigenous Youth, are among those made most vulnerable in society. With suicide being the second leading cause of death amongst adolescents

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Treaty Series, vol. 660, 195 (21 December 1965),  
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3940.html>.

<sup>11</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Report of the African Commission's Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities* (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2005),  
[https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications//African\\_Commission\\_book.pdf](https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications//African_Commission_book.pdf).

worldwide, it has made its impact on Indigenous Peoples as well.<sup>12</sup>

Mental health and suicide will also be touched upon in this book. We hope that by shedding some light on the subject, and by showing how survivors of suicide attempts and bereavement have overcome their trauma, we can give hope for a brighter future.

### **Climate change**

Climate change is altering the physical, biological and social systems of many Indigenous communities across the globe. These alterations are often negative in nature, and go beyond changes to food supplies, to susceptibility to diseases and long-lasting cultural disturbances.<sup>13</sup> Indigenous Peoples have been at the forefront in the fight against global warming and its influence on climate change. As protectors of our ancestral lands, rivers and seas, we have fought against corporations for years, we have stood for water rights, fought against logging and deforestation, protested mining and demonstrated against the pollution of Mother Earth.

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<sup>12</sup> N.J. Pollock et al., “Global incidence of suicide among Indigenous peoples: A systematic review,” *BMC Medicine* 16, no. 145 (August 2018), doi:10.1186/s12916-018-1115-6.

<sup>13</sup> Clarence Alexander et al., “Linking Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge of Climate Change,” *BioScience* 61, no. 6 (2011): 477–484, doi:10.1525/BIO.2011.61.6.10.

## **Traditional Knowledge**

Traditional Knowledge represents a variety of skills, practices and processes, such as agricultural, hunting or fishing techniques. Traditional Knowledge also incorporates traditional cultural expressions such as dances, art, designs, and names, among others. Indigenous Peoples have the right to create, maintain and develop their Traditional Knowledge as part of their identity, a foundation of their well-being, and social cohesion. Indigenous Youth have the customary obligation to learn those skills and to protect them. However, misappropriation and misuse of Traditional Knowledge is a phenomenon occurring every day on a global scale. Indigenous elders do not always share the Traditional Knowledge, which gives identity to Indigenous Youth, because of the threat of misappropriation and misuse. An intellectual property system is urgently needed, addressing the needs and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Youth.

## **Food and agriculture**

Indigenous Youth have, in many cases, been denied their right to Indigenous education; in many places in the world, even the simple use of their own language and the practice of traditional customs have been banned. Yet, the traditional Indigenous practices have prevailed, and Indigenous Food Systems can now be documented as some of

the most sustainable ways of producing sustenance. In fact, according to Kuhnlein et al., “the traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples touch the full spectrum of life in ways that modern food systems do not.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Acknowledgements**

This compilation came to be through the work of each of the fourteen Indigenous Youths who contributed to the book. Their commitment is an example of the historical struggle of our elders and our Peoples. We would further like to acknowledge the enormous work of one of our Focal Points, who is also one of the co-editors, Victor Anthony Lopez-Carmen. It was he who suggested the book compilation during the annual GIYC meeting in New York in April 2018, and it was through the phenomenal efforts of the book’s co-editors that this compilation was produced. We are deeply grateful to our editors Dali, Elsa and Victor.

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<sup>14</sup> H.V. Kuhnlein, B. Erasmus and D. Spigelski, *Indigenous peoples’ food systems: The many dimensions of culture, diversity and environment for nutrition and health* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009).

We, Indigenous Youth, have listened to the stories of our elders, and we remember that we are the guardians of the forest. We are the protesters that stand for water rights, the sisters who demand environmental change in a world that is simultaneously melting and drowning, the brothers who advocate for policy change in a world that is plagued by droughts and floods, the communities who combat hunger and corruption. We are the survivors who are healing after the rape of our peoples and our lands, who, to this day, are fighting the people and corporations who want us gone for the sake of profit.

We, Indigenous Peoples, have been mowed down and burned, frozen and drowned, but our roots remained strong; we are sprouting and growing and we want you to witness our hybrid flowers blossoming. We demand the acknowledgement of our space in the contemporary world as Young, Indigenous and Living.

Indigenous Youth are not a relic of the past; rather, we are a promise of a better future. We thank you sincerely for reading this book.