

Acknowledgements

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We hope that the book will make even more visible the continuing and robust Indigenous Youth voices that bring new life and broad horizons to the struggles for social justice, peace and human rights and for a sustainable world of well-being and diversity.

Dali Angel Pérez, Victor Anthony
Lopez-Carmen, Elsa Stamatopoulou

Co-editors 15 February 2019

About the Cover Art

My name is Seqininnguaq Lynge Poulsen and I am a 17-year-old young Inuk woman from Greenland. I'm a high school student in Nuuk, Greenland, and a visual artist. I dedicate a lot of my time to human rights activism, mostly focusing on Indigenous Peoples and the LGBTQ+ community.

To bring this painting and the people in it to life, I painted using a watercolor palette. I chose to work with watercolor because not only is it the medium I'm most experienced in, but also because it is such an interesting and beautiful medium. It's always so fun to work with, though it can be a bit hard to control. The water mixes with the paint and flows. Sometimes it feels like it has its own life, which is what I wanted for this painting. That it has life, energy and feelings, just like we all do.

I had a lot of ideas for what I wanted to paint and visualize for the book. We have so many groups of Indigenous Peoples and it's obvious that I can't represent each Indigenous group in one painting. But I still wanted a painting that Indigenous Peoples could identify with. A painting that they could look at and see themselves, feel home. A painting that could help them be more proud of their culture, their people, and their identity.

For many years, I have felt that we, Indigenous Peoples, haven't been represented

enough in the art world, or in any worlds for that matter, and that we all have something to say to the rest of the world. And that's pretty much what I wanted to represent in this painting. That all of us Indigenous Peoples are here and have always been here. That we all have words and feelings to let out. But I also wanted to show that even though we are different people from different parts of the world, a lot of us have stories that share a lot of similarities. And that we all are going to take care of each other and protect each other, no matter where we come from and who we are.

Seqininnguaq Lyngge Poulsen
6 February 2019

Foreword

Shaped by their Indigenous identity, unique cultural heritage, sustainable living and connection to the earth and nature, Indigenous young people have much to contribute to our world as agents of positive change.

At the same time, however, many Indigenous young people face tremendous challenges as a result of the intergenerational impact of colonization and assimilation policies, as well as the ongoing struggle to exercise and safeguard their rights and identity as Indigenous Peoples. Institutional discrimination, such as social and educational exclusion, the lack of inclusive health services or the lack of political representation, exacerbate this situation. It is critical therefore, that national, regional and local Governments around the world, along with the United Nations and others, uphold and uplift the rights of Indigenous youth, as contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Maintaining their roots in the Indigenous community or pursuing an education and employment in cities far from home, is a dilemma that many Indigenous young people find themselves confronted with. While opting for the latter can offer opportunities for personal and professional advancement, it can also further expose Indigenous young people to risks and increase their vulnerability.

Both the lack of recognition to the right to maintain their Indigenous identity and the few incentives to protect it have created hostile environments for young people. Indigenous youth, more than any other age groups, are exposed to pressures to assimilate with the external societal culture, especially due also to their generation's high levels of activity on the internet and social media networks. Subsequently, they are among the first to face and resent discrimination, unfounded stereotypes, violence, loss of their languages, as well as social, educational, economic and political exclusion.

Their situation is worsened by the lack of access to quality health services that respond to the particular needs of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous youth. This goes from poor sanitation, malnutrition, lack of access to adequate sexual and reproductive health services, education and information, high levels of alcoholism and substance abuse, and severe lack of attention to mental health issues, especially to the problem of the worryingly high levels of self-harm and suicide, that Indigenous youth experience.

Furthermore, many Indigenous youth have come to witness the intimidation, harassment, forms of violence and undue criminal prosecution that their leaders and/or peers have been subjected to when seeking to defend their rights, including their environmental rights. This was most recently

manifested as a result of organized protest against large-scale projects involving extractive and infrastructure business, as was also pointed out by the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in her 2018 report.

Despite these incredible challenges, Indigenous young people are the bearers of the diversity and cultural richness of their peoples and driving positive changes in their communities from within. It is a mistake to think of them as victims, rather than actual survivors with an enormous potential for transformation. Moreover, Indigenous youth are able to “walk between both worlds”—the Indigenous and society as a whole—and play a main role with regards to representation, mediation and conflict resolution.

We therefore need to nurture, support and tap into this incredible potential that Indigenous youth possess. This is important for the benefit of Indigenous young people themselves, as well as for their communities and societies as a whole.

To fully achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nation Member States in 2015 as the global roadmap to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable future for people and planet, it is vital to empower Indigenous young women and men and to equip them with the skills to engage in its implementation, monitoring and review. We need to ensure that

young Indigenous Peoples have a voice not only in their communities, but also in national and international policy and decision-making.

The good news is that the United Nations has committed to seriously step up its work on youth issues all over the world. To this end, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, recently launched the United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030, which seeks to facilitate increased impact and expanded global, regional and country-level action to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people in all their diversity around the world, and to ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks.

With the launch of Youth 2030, the United Nations reached a new milestone in its work *for* and most importantly *with* young people, and obviously we need to include Indigenous youth to advance the vision underpinning the United Nations Youth Strategy of “a world in which the human rights of every young person are realized, a world that ensures that every young person can reach their full potential and that recognizes young people’s agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change.” The success of engaging Indigenous youth depends on their capacity and opportunity to actively participate in the various decision-making processes concerning their

peoples' future. This includes providing them opportunities to join in intergenerational dialogues that aim to revitalize their languages, customs and traditional lifestyles. At the same time, as young people, they may be encouraged to take advantage of the new technologies and social media to overcome the lack of information and misconceptions when it comes to the 'Indigenous world.' Similarly, it is crucial to further expand partnerships with Indigenous youth to tap into their knowledge and expertise in matters such as human rights and land protection and education and health issues.

This publication stands as a unique effort to bring together and amplify the voices of the Indigenous young people from around the world, giving them a much-needed space to express their own perspectives and views on what it means to be Indigenous and young in today's world. By presenting these diverse personal testimonies, this publication is offering us a channel to bring the unique insights and voices that too often go unheard.

I highly commend this important initiative of Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus for embarking on such a remarkable endeavor. These kinds of collaborations are indispensable in the construction of a better future for Indigenous Peoples, especially for young Indigenous people. I am inspired and confident that this work will make a significant contribution in the

building of more tolerant, more inclusive and more resilient societies that come together to work in favor of peace, security, sustainability and full observance of human rights. Please count on my full support and commitment to work closely with Indigenous youth as we seek to advance sustainable development and sustainable peace for all, while ensuring we leave no-one behind.

Jayathma Wickramanayake
United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on
Youth
10 January 2019