

## THE VOICE OF WHO CANNOT SPEAK: HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE



Climate change has influenced our world negatively. It is caused by pollution produced by the most industrialized countries all over the world. Those who are most affected by it, especially the indigenous peoples, usually have the smallest share of production of such pollution.

At least 350 million people worldwide are considered to be indigenous. They represent the 5% of the world's population. Most of them live in remote areas of the world ranging from the Amazon Forest to India, the Arctic and Australia. Very often in the past they inhabited lands which were rich in minerals and natural resources and due to this some of these indigenous populations were invaded and subdued by European colonizers. Some of them have lost their territories, others have lost their cultures and languages and others were extinct.

In the past and nowadays too, these populations have been endangered by climatic and ecological change, which is a phenomenon associated with human migration, development and processes. The movements of human beings across vast distances during periods of expansion is a longstanding and well-known process. With these movements all types of plants life, animals and diseases were transferred across regions. Human migrations have always brought shifts in lands and resources and have transformed the existing ecosystem. The expansion of human activity often disrupts the ecology, bringing many unintentional transformations. The greatest environmental

change in our world's history started with the European colonizers and the mingling of people from across the globe. Before the age of expansion, there were diseases specific to particular areas and ecological conditions that would rarely spread as long as the populations remained geographically separated. However, once different populations came into contact, biological risks increased dramatically. Indigenous peoples had no experience of numerous European illnesses and they lacked the immunity and resistance that other societies had built up over generations. In numerous locations around the world, population decreases of between 75 to 90 percent were common, making colonial occupation far easier than it might otherwise have been.

During colonial times, colonizers arrived and invaded indigenous tribes, such as the Native Americans, deeply affecting their territories and traditions. The government of the colonizing countries wanted to modernize them, to change their cultures and their territories. In their minds indigenous people had an enormous potential. To form these people and train them to live in the new colonial society, they established governments and protectorates, time-limited summer and day schools in countless indigenous communities. The students were taught by missionaries and government teachers. Several other countries established residential schools and removed children from the strong influence of their home communities, placing them in intensive cultural and educational settings. In remote areas, children were even taken away from their tribes until graduation. Many of these schools were created as industrial training centers and the students participated in manual and agricultural activities.

The new generations were trapped between two worlds: the first one which they did not fully understand, with their indigenous cultures and traditions, and the second one, which did not accept them, the modernized colonial world. Indigenous students did not enjoy and often complained about the harsh military-type regimen of their schools and the long hours of work. Residential schools tragically became sites of physical and sexual abuse. These students were treated differently simply because of their skin color and heritage and yet they were armed with the skills and abilities necessary to dominate the colonial society on their own. These students were often radicalized, many prominent aboriginal leaders emerged out of the residential schools. The education of indigenous people figured prominently in many areas of the world like Siberia and Australia. In many countries, Catholic and Protestant missionaries worked consistently to bring aboriginal children closer to the norms of the western world, attacking indigenous "superstitions" while teaching reading, writing and for example, arithmetic.



The global process of expansion, occupation and more recently of climatic changes transformed the world in ways that are only now becoming fully understood. There are many reasons why indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to climate change compared to other types of populations. First, their economic activities - such as agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, handcraft, production and hunting - depend on renewable natural resources. In addition, indigenous people are seriously affected by deforestation, which is destroying the natural environment in which they live. Their environments -tropical forests, small islands, coastal, polar regions and arid lands - are the most challenged by climate change and pollution, more than any other places. The destruction of their native lands force them to migrate to urban or semi-urban areas. This situation is extremely difficult for indigenous tribes, who are not used to living in the modern society. They are often marginalized and discriminated. Indigenous women are the ones who suffer the most, being at risk of exposure and violence. They have limited or no access to social services and they often have illegal and precarious occupations. Secondly, indigenous people have weak institutional support and representation, they are excluded from the decision-making processes of the world they live in. The United Nations intervened and helped indigenous people through its possibilities. In 2007 the United Nations Declaration on the rights of indigenous people was adopted by the general assembly. It is a declaration in which indigenous peoples' rights are gathered and guaranteed.

Firstly, the declaration states that indigenous people have the same rights as all the other human beings. They must not be discriminated in any way and their self-determination and self-government is guaranteed. They have the right to live in peace and freedom and to keep their culture and their languages, which they have the right to

practice, manifest and transmit to future generations. Moreover, they must be taken into consideration during decision-making processes and countries must prevent any type of discrimination and violation of their rights. Indigenous peoples can use and preserve their own medicinal plants and use the land which they own freely for their own development and to extract natural resources. Countries cannot exploit the land's resources without the natives' previous agreement. Their lands will not be used for any military activities. Finally, indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and promote their culture and traditions and they can have their own juridical system and laws.

In conclusion, indigenous people have always been in unfavorable positions, ever since the colonization of America, the defense of their rights has been a matter of argument and debate. The huge process made by the United Nations represents a cornerstone for the protection of indigenous people's rights, and constitutes the idea of freedom and equality, fundamental for a liberal and democratic world. The act of protecting other cultures and populations is crucial nowadays because all throughout history, episodes of violence and authoritarianism were seen, which had tragic and dramatic consequences. Nowadays it is fundamental to remember that no cultures are better than others and no one has the right to harm other populations.

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