

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

May 19, 2011

United Methodist Women has been in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of the world and their efforts for human rights and freedom for many decades. Recently, members have studied the Native American struggle as one of the United Methodist Women mission studies. This year is the 10th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), which will be held May 16–27, 2011, at the United Nations (U.N.) headquarters in New York City. It is a review year of what has happened over the past decade and planning for the next decade.

What the Session Will Address

- The follow-up to the recommendations of UNPFII: Economic and social development, environment and free prior and informed consent.
- Human rights: Implementation of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, dialogue with the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples and other U.N. agencies and funds.
- Future work of UNPFII, including issues of the economic and social council and emerging issues.
- Draft agenda for the 11th session of UNPFII in 2012. Adoption of the report of UNPFII on its 10th session.

In addition to the official U.N. session, indigenous organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), U.N. agencies and governments also organize side events related to the issues in discussions that are held at the U.N. and the Church Center for the United Nations.

Background on the Creation of UNPFII

UNPFII was established in July 2000 by the U.N. economic and social council on the recommendation of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. It's composed of five U.N. regional groups nominated by the U.N. and seven geocultural regions nominated by indigenous peoples on the basis of the need to accurately reflect cultural regions.

The mandate of UNPFII is to address indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights; to provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the economic and social council; to raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of

activities related to indigenous issues within the U.N. system; and to prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues.

The establishment of UNPFII was the first time indigenous peoples became members of a U.N. body, a body that offers indigenous peoples the opportunity for full participation, which is unprecedented within the U.N. system.

The United States has announced for the first time its support for the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, so it is important to encourage the United States to implement the declaration without reservation and to recognize the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and other basic human rights.

Background on Indigenous Peoples

According to the U.N., "It is estimated that there are at least 5,000 indigenous groups composed of 300 million people living in more than 70 countries on five continents. Their way of life, livelihood, religion and culture are inextricably intertwined with and dependent on the traditional environment in which they live. In most countries, indigenous people are not members of the dominant, majority groups. Although they may consider themselves 'nations,' they have no status as States and often have no voice through their governments. In many parts of the world, the cultures of indigenous peoples are precariously balanced on the edge of extinction."

Previous issues addressed by UNPFII:

- Indigenous children and youth.
- Indigenous women.
- Millennium Development Goals and indigenous peoples.
- Territories, lands and natural resources.
- Climate change, biocultural diversity and livelihoods: The stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges.
- Indigenous peoples: Development with culture and identity: Articles 3 and 32 of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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executive secretary for U.N. affairs**

This is one of the current programs that UMW is actively involved in. UMW does take stands on political issues with special regard to women and children experiencing justice. If you are interested in other social action issues or would like to learn more about justice for others, check out UMW on line and learn about our stands on other issues like Human Trafficking and Fair Trade. Southern California experiences many injustices that UMW is actively involved in.