

## Concept Note: UN-Habitat side event UNPFII 22nd Session

**25 April, 10:00 – 11:15; Conference Room 4**

### **Indigenous youth as key change makers for urban climate resilience**

#### **Introduction**

This side event will explore the key role of indigenous youth in co-creating positive change in building urban resilience to the climate crisis. The discussion will draw on impactful practices by cities, national governments, civil society and UN-Habitat and the UN system, empowering children and young indigenous persons to take an active role in urban decision-making around climate resilience, thus shaping the future of their cities and communities.

Due to their dependence on and traditional relationship with their lands and natural resources for their basic needs, livelihoods and cultural identity, indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted not only by the practices causing climate change, such as extractive activities, but also by the results of it, including environmental degradation, natural disasters, and water scarcity, etc. Consequences may include increased socioeconomic disadvantages, loss of lands and livelihoods and “a new form of forced eviction of indigenous peoples from their ancestral land.”<sup>1</sup>

Young persons and others facing compounding discrimination due to intersectional factors, such as gender, age and disability may experience an even greater risk of exclusion due to existing inequalities exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

These may be contributing factors to an increasing trend in urbanization among indigenous peoples, though it must also be pointed out that this is not a new trend, with push and pull factors of urban mobility having impacted indigenous peoples over the past decades. Urban life may offer increased opportunities around accessing employment, education, health and participation. Yet urbanized poverty and the feminization of poverty also affects urban indigenous peoples, who are at a higher risk of living in poverty and facing human rights violations such as discrimination, and thus more likely to be affected by the negative impacts of urban climate change.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, indigenous peoples are key advocates and actors of change in urban climate mitigation and adaptation. For example, “indigenous, local, and traditional knowledge systems and practices, including indigenous peoples’ holistic view of community and environment, are a major resource for adapting to climate change,”<sup>3</sup> and “Indigenous peoples interpret and react to the impacts of climate change in creative ways, drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to find solutions which may help society at large to cope with impending changes.”<sup>4</sup>

Throughout its efforts localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring a human rights-based approach to sustainable urban development, UN-Habitat has promoted the voices of indigenous activists and civil society to be part the discussions and decision-making. For example, the Indigenous Peoples and the City Declaration adopted in the lead up to the Habitat III Conference recognized the “knowledge, practices and values of indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> [United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, 1 November 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> [UN-Habitat and United Nations Human Rights, Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration, 2010](#)

<sup>3</sup> [IPCC, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)

<sup>4</sup> [United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change](#)

communities in urban territorial planning and resilience towards climate change.” Similarly, the Youth DeclarACTION on Sustainable Urbanization developed as part of the National Urban Forum Youth 2030 Cities, in Ecuador emphasized that “indigenous youth are an especially important part of urban settlements and that our dynamism, skills, creativity, and commitment contribute to the construction of a better urban future.”

Indeed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognizes that “engaging Indigenous Peoples and local communities using just-transition and rights-based decision-making approaches, implemented through collective and participatory decision-making processes has enabled deeper ambition and accelerated action in different ways, and at all scales, depending on national circumstances” to address climate change.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that urban climate resilience and mitigation measures cannot be taken without the effective participation of indigenous peoples. Indigenous youth specifically must not be excluded from these discussions and decision-making.

This event will therefore discuss impactful practices ensuring the effective participation of indigenous youth in key climate adaptation and mitigation decision-making fora at all levels, from the global to the local. Speakers will share their experiences of what has worked, as well as the challenges they encountered and their lessons learnt.

### **Guiding Questions**

- Why is it important that indigenous youth are listened to and can participate in climate change related decision-making?
- What do you see as the main challenges?
- How can international organizations such as UN-Habitat support young indigenous change makers?

### **Expected outcomes**

- Promote successes by Member States, local authorities, civil society and individual indigenous activists as well as UN entities in ensuring that indigenous youth can meaningfully participate in discussions around climate mitigation and adaptation at all levels
- Share local experiences that can be replicated to other contexts
- Provide a networking opportunity for national and local governments with civil society, activists and the UN system

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<sup>5</sup> [Synthesis report of the IPCC sixth assessment report \(ar6\)](#), 2023