

## Leaflet No. 10: Indigenous Peoples and the Environment

### Key words and ideas

**Cultural diversity**

**Biological diversity (or biodiversity)**

**United Nations Conference on Environment and Development**

**Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

**Conference of the Parties (COP)**

**Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-sessional Working Group on the Implementation of**

**Article 8(j) (of the CBD)**

**Global Environment Facility**

***Summary:** The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit), held in Brazil in 1992, represented a turning point in the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights relating to the environment. A number of legal instruments adopted at the Earth Summit, such as the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity, established international legal standards to protect indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional knowledge and practices in the area of environmental management and conservation. Most importantly, there now exists an international legal framework which recognises the unique relationship indigenous people have with their traditional lands.*

### Main issues

The world's biological, cultural and linguistic diversity are imperiled. While the nature and extent of the threat to the Earth's biological richness is much debated, there is no doubt about what is happening to humanity's cultural and linguistic diversity.

Indigenous peoples account for most of the world's **cultural diversity**. Their distinct ways of life vary considerably from one location to another. Of the estimated 6,000 cultures in the world, between 4,000 and 5,000 are indigenous. Approximately three-quarters of the world's 6,000 languages are spoken by indigenous peoples.

Many of the areas of highest **biological diversity** on the planet are inhabited by indigenous peoples. The "Biological 17", the 17 nations that are home to more than two-thirds of the Earth's biological resources, are also the traditional territories of most of the world's indigenous peoples. (The countries that comprise the "Biological 17" are: Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, the United States of America, and Venezuela). When looking at the global distribution of indigenous peoples, there is a marked correlation between areas of high biological diversity and areas of high cultural diversity. This link is particularly significant in rainforest areas, such as those found along the Amazon, and in Central America, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, New Guinea and Indonesia. Of the nine countries in which 60 per cent of human languages are spoken, six also host exceptional numbers of plant and animal species unique to those locations.

In November 2000, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF International), in collaboration with the international NGO Terralingua, published a report entitled, *Indigenous and Traditional Peoples of the World and Ecoregion Conservation: An Integrated Approach to Conserving the World's Biological and Cultural Diversity*. The report reveals that 4,635 ethno-linguistic groups, or 67 per cent of the total number of such groups, live in 225 regions of the highest biological importance. The study reports that languages spoken by indigenous and traditional peoples are rapidly disappearing. Since the ecological knowledge accumulated by indigenous peoples is contained in languages, and since in most traditional cultures this knowledge is passed on to other groups or new generations orally, language extinction is leading to loss of ecological knowledge.

It is widely accepted that biological diversity cannot be conserved without cultural diversity, that the long-term security of food and medicines depends on maintaining this intricate relationship. There is also a growing realization that cultural diversity is as important for the evolution of civilization as biodiversity is for biological evolution. The promotion of homogenous cultures poses a serious threat to human survival on both fronts. A workshop on "Drug Development, Biological Diversity and Economic Growth," convened by the National Cancer Institute of the US National Institutes of Health in 1991, concluded that "Traditional knowledge is as threatened and is as valuable as biological diversity. Both resources deserve respect and must be conserved".

Languages--the storehouses of peoples' intellectual heritages and frameworks for each society's unique understanding of life--are considered one of the major indicators of cultural diversity; yet given the rate of language extinction, cultural diversity is threatened on an unprecedented scale. In one century, the world has lost about 600 languages. Nearly 2,500 languages are in danger of immediate extinction; an even higher number are losing the "ecological contexts" that keep them "living" languages. At current rates, 90 per cent of languages will be lost in the 21st century; most of them are spoken by indigenous and traditional peoples. These languages, and their associated ecological knowledge, are being lost at a growing rate because of the expansion of markets, communications, and other aspects of globalization that promote dominant languages at the expense of native ones.

The link between culture and environment is clear among indigenous peoples. All indigenous peoples share a spiritual, cultural, social and economic relationship with their traditional lands. Traditional laws, customs and practices reflect both an attachment to land and a responsibility for preserving traditional lands for use by future generations. In Central America, the Amazon Basin, Asia, North America, Australia, Asia and North Africa, the physical and cultural survival of indigenous peoples is dependent upon the protection of their land and its resources.

Over centuries, the relationship between indigenous peoples and their environment has been eroded because of dispossession or forced removal from traditional lands and sacred sites. Land rights, land use and resource management remain critical issues for indigenous peoples around the world. Development projects, mining and forestry activities, and agricultural programmes continue to displace indigenous peoples. Environmental damage has been substantial: flora and fauna species have become extinct or endangered, unique ecosystems have been destroyed, and rivers and other water catchments have been heavily polluted. Commercial plant varieties have replaced the many locally adapted varieties used in traditional farming systems, leading to an increase in industrialized farming methods.

In 1997, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations commissioned a study on indigenous peoples and land rights. The study confirmed that access to land and resources is crucial for the survival of indigenous peoples. It emphasized the need to recognize and secure indigenous land rights and urged governments to consult with indigenous peoples in the management of land and resources.

Yet, development projects in many countries continue to cause environmental damage to water and natural resources. In some countries, governments and multinational corporations continue to construct hydroelectric dams and roads, and conduct mining and logging activities, that threaten to harm the land's fragile ecosystems and damage large areas of land inhabited by indigenous peoples. The development of tourism, including cultural tourism and ecotourism, may also have a negative impact on the environment and welfare of indigenous peoples.

## **Indigenous peoples and the environment**

The **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development**, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, was an important development for indigenous peoples and their rights related to the environment. The Conference, or Earth Summit as it is called, recognized that indigenous peoples and their communities have a critical role to play in managing and developing the environment. The importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and practices was acknowledged, and the international community committed itself to promoting, strengthening and protecting the rights, knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples and their communities.

During the Earth Summit, indigenous peoples and NGOs gathered in Kari-Oca, Brazil, to share their concerns about the environment. The Kari-Oca Declaration and the Indigenous Peoples' Earth Charter adopted at this meeting expressed the values of the world's indigenous peoples and recognized their distinct relationship with the Earth. The united voice of indigenous peoples helped influence the outcome of the Earth Summit.

Another important result of the Earth Summit was the adoption of the **Convention on Biological Diversity**. The Convention recognizes the close dependence of many indigenous communities on biological resources and the desirability of sharing the benefits that come from using traditional knowledge, innovations and practices to conserve biological diversity, including species diversity.

Diversity of species is important to the natural functioning of ecosystems, and the survival of species is an indicator of the health of the environment. Indigenous peoples have already lost, or risk losing, ancestral lands and sacred sites, many of which contain the world's richest biodiversity. Governments that have adopted the Convention on Biological Diversity are obliged to introduce domestic legislation, or amend their constitutions, to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in the conservation and sustainable use of their environment.

The right of indigenous peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of natural resources is also recognized in the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and the UN draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The draft Declaration provides for the right of indigenous peoples to own traditional lands and manage their environment and its resources.

Since the Earth Summit in 1992, interest in the rights of indigenous peoples and the environment has continued to grow. Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are increasingly aware that traditional lands and natural resources are essential to the economic and cultural survival of indigenous peoples. Some countries, such as Canada, Australia, Finland, Brazil and the Philippines, have adopted legal measures that acknowledge indigenous land rights or have established legal procedures for indigenous participation in land-related issues.

A growing number of governments have amended their national Constitutions to recognize the ancestral rights of indigenous peoples to occupy, own and manage their traditional lands and territories. Many countries have established Environment Ministries and developed national Environment Policy Statements and Strategies. Even though some governments now consult with indigenous peoples on land rights and the environment, many States still have not introduced laws or policies that provide for indigenous land claims or promote participation of indigenous peoples.

## **UN environment organizations and processes**

- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)
- UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

- UN Declaration on Environment and Development (the “Rio Declaration”) and Agenda 21
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Inter-governmental Forum on Forests

You should contact the Secretariats of each of these agencies for updates on how they are addressing issues relevant to indigenous peoples and the environment.

### **The United Nations’ human rights bodies**

Concerns related to land rights and rights related to the environment can be addressed through the various bodies of the United Nations that deal with human rights, including both charter and treaty bodies. (See Leaflet no. 3 on “UN Charter-based Bodies and Indigenous Peoples” and Leaflet no. 4 on “Human Rights Treaty Bodies and Indigenous Peoples”).

### **The United Nations Environment Programme**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the UN’s focal point for environmental action and coordination among governments, UN agencies and NGOs. UNEP promotes and coordinates the sharing of environmental information and implements projects that support its agenda for sustainable development, i.e., projects that promote economic, social and environmental development.

UNEP’s main decision-making body, the Governing Council, is composed of 58 Member States that are elected by the UN General Assembly. The Council meets twice a year at UNEP’s headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, to review the state of the world’s environment and to establish UNEP’s programme priorities. The Secretariat of UNEP, also located in Nairobi, coordinates UNEP’s activities with international, national and regional inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. UNEP has six Regional Offices serving North America, Europe, Africa, West Asia, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **UNEP and indigenous issues**

Following the 1992 Earth Summit, UNEP assumed responsibility for ensuring that States recognize and foster the traditional methods and knowledge of indigenous peoples, and for ensuring that indigenous peoples share in the economic and commercial benefits that accrue from the use of those traditional methods and knowledge.

UNEP also works with indigenous and local communities to implement and evaluate projects that are identified and funded in support of the Convention on Biological Diversity. UNEP has been involved with the conservation of biological diversity since 1972, when the issue was first identified as a priority at the UN Conference on Human Environment, in Stockholm, Sweden. In a major report, *The Global Environment Perspective*, published in 1987, UNEP identified the need for an international, legally binding instrument to protect the world’s biological resources. In 1987 and 1988, UNEP convened two Ad Hoc Working Groups of Experts on Biological Diversity. These Working Groups reviewed existing biodiversity-related conventions and prepared the framework for the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit.

Indigenous peoples also participated in UNEP’s Global Biodiversity Assessment project. This research project identified five major causes of biodiversity loss: degradation or outright loss of habitats, over-exploitation of biological resources, pollution, the introduction of non-native (alien or exotic) species, and climate change. The report concluded that forests, marine and coastal areas, and agricultural and inland

water ecosystems are among those most threatened. The project also included research into “Human Values of Biodiversity,” which focused on traditional, religious and cultural values related to biological diversity and emphasized the interdependence between indigenous peoples and their environment. The research culminated in the report, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity: A Complementary Contribution to the Global Biodiversity Assessment*, which was published by UNEP in 1999.

UNEP also addresses the rights of indigenous peoples under international environment law. A recent UNEP publication, *New Way Forward: Environmental Law and Sustainable Development*, includes a chapter dedicated to indigenous peoples and the environment.

### **Participating in UNEP activities**

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### **The Convention on Biological Diversity**

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international treaty—and, as such, a legally binding instrument—that promotes international cooperation to manage, conserve and foster the sustainable use of the world’s biological resources. It is one of a number of such instruments located under the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The three primary objectives of the Convention are to conserve biological diversity, promote the sustainable use of its components, and promote the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits that accrue from the use of genetic resources.

The Convention, which came into force on 29 December 1993, focuses on protecting the world’s ecosystems. Parties to the Convention conduct programmes to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of biological diversity associated with inland waters, marine and coastal areas, forests, dry-land ecosystems, and agricultural lands that are vital to human well-being and the global environment. The Convention also promotes the protection of traditional knowledge, which plays an important role in conserving the world’s biological resources.

### **Decision-making and implementation: the Conference of the Parties**

The Convention’s supreme decision-making body is the **Conference of the Parties (COP)**--the governments of the countries that have ratified the Convention. The COP is composed of nearly 180 Contracting Parties, making it one of the world’s most popular conventions. The COP meets every two years; the next meeting is scheduled to take place in The Netherlands in May 2002. The COP’s functions include adopting amendments and protocols to the Convention (such as the recently adopted Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety), establishing programmes, and creating various subsidiary bodies to assist the COP in its tasks. One such body of particular relevance to indigenous peoples is the Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-sessional Working Group on the Implementation of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, known as “the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8(j)”.

### **The Convention and indigenous peoples - Article 8(j) and related provisions**

The Convention contains a number of provisions of particular importance to indigenous peoples. These provisions are contained in Articles 8(j), 10(c), 17.2 and 18.4. Of these, Article 8(j) is regarded as the core provision. It calls upon Contracting Parties to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, subject to national legislation. The Convention encourages Parties to promote the wider

application of such knowledge, innovations and practices with the approval and involvement of the indigenous peoples concerned. Article 8(j) also requires that benefits arising from the application of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices should be shared equitably with the indigenous communities concerned.

The Convention does not use the term “indigenous peoples”, but refers to them in terms of “indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles”. This phrase is interpreted to include the estimated 1.5 to 2 billion people around the world who have not adopted industrialized practices to exploit agricultural, forest, animal and fisheries resources.

Article 10, which deals with the sustainable use of components of biological diversity, requires that each Contracting Party protect and encourage the use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation and sustainable use requirements. This Article has important implications for cultural survival, since particular species form the spiritual and economic focus of many indigenous cultures. The continued customary use of such species is therefore essential to the existence of such cultures.

At its fifth meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2000, the COP recognized that maintaining knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities is dependent on maintaining cultural identities and the material base that sustains them. The COP invited Parties and governments to take measures to promote the conservation and maintenance of such identities (Decision V/16, para. 16).

Article 17, concerning exchange of information relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, requires that such information include indigenous and traditional knowledge, and, when feasible, repatriation of information. This has important consequences for those indigenous communities seeking to retrieve valuable information collected decades, if not centuries, ago by museums and research institutions about their traditional knowledge and practices concerning their use of plants and animals. Such information can be used to fill gaps in current knowledge, or even help revive certain traditional practices related to particular species.

Article 18 seeks cooperation for the development and use of technologies, including indigenous and traditional technologies. The COP recognizes that traditional knowledge should be given the same respect as any other form of knowledge in the implementation of the Convention, and therefore should be considered to be as useful and necessary as other forms of knowledge, including scientific knowledge.

### **COP decisions relevant to indigenous peoples**

Since the Convention entered into force, the COP has made a number of decisions on the implementation of Article 8(j) and its related provisions:

Decision III/14: The decision set the stage for the establishment of an inter-sessional process, which included a five-day workshop on Traditional Knowledge and Biological Diversity, which took place in Madrid in November 1997 (the Madrid Workshop).

Decision III/17: The COP decided that the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities must be protected in implementing the Convention, and should be considered in relation to other agreements, such as the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property.

Decision IV/9: This decision led to the establishment of the ad hoc open-ended inter-sessional working group on Article 8(j), and an invitation to submit case studies.

### **The Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-sessional Working Group on Article 8(j)**

The mandate of the Working Group includes:

- providing advice on the application of legal and other appropriate forms of protection for traditional knowledge
- providing advice to the COP related to the implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions, especially on the development and implementation of a programme of work at national and international levels
- developing a programme of work
- providing advice to the COP on measures to strengthen cooperation at the international level among indigenous and local communities, and suggesting ways to strengthen the mechanisms that support such cooperation

### **Invitation to submit case studies**

The case studies were to address:

- the interaction of traditional knowledge with other forms of knowledge in the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources
- the impact of international instruments, intellectual property rights and current laws and policies on traditional biodiversity-related knowledge
- the extent to which traditional knowledge has been incorporated into development and resource-management decision-making processes
- guidance on how to conduct research in indigenous and local communities concerning their traditional knowledge
- matters of prior informed consent, fair and equitable sharing of benefits, and conservation on indigenous and local territories
- intellectual property rights

These case studies were to be transmitted to the World Intellectual Property Organization, and to be used by Parties in initiatives for legislating the implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions.

Decision IV/9 also encouraged more direct indigenous and local community participation at the first meeting of the Working Group. Indigenous and local community representatives participated as observers, while some representatives attended as members of Country Party delegations.

Decision V/16: This decision, adopted at the fifth COP meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in May, 2000, is the principal decision concerning the implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions. The main elements of this decision concern:

- the extension of the mandate of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8(j)
- promotion of the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities, and particularly that of women, in implementing the Convention
- protection of the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities related to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources
- adoption of a programme of work for the Working Group.

### **Funding through the Global Environment Facility**

By ratifying the Convention, developed countries are committed to providing financial resources to ensure that developing countries can implement the Convention. This funding, which can be made through bilateral, regional or multilateral donations, is channeled through the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, which operates the financial mechanism of the Convention. The COP requested that the GEF finances projects that strengthen the involvement of local and indigenous peoples in conserving biological diversity and in maintaining the sustainable use of its components, and supports the priority activities identified in the programme of work on Article 8(j) and related provisions.

The GEF is an international effort implemented through the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UNEP, and The World Bank. If any indigenous communities are to be affected by any GEF-funded project, they are consulted before and during the project. The GEF's Small Grants Programme, administered by UNDP, is frequently used by indigenous NGOs. Further information can be found on the websites of the UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank.

### **Participating in the Convention on Biological Diversity**

Indigenous peoples can participate in the work of the Convention in several ways. They can participate in meetings held under the Convention as members of official delegations and/or as representatives of indigenous organizations or communities under observer status; submit case studies; and become members of expert panels and/or the liaison group.

To maximize their participation in the work of the Convention, indigenous communities, through their organizations, may wish to liaise closely with national governments. In some countries, the national government has supported the establishment of indigenous bodies to help implement the Convention, review the decisions of the Conference of the Parties, and participate in the various work programmes related to indigenous peoples.

#### ***Participating in meetings***

Given the wide range of issues addressed during meetings under the Convention, it is in the interest of indigenous peoples and their organizations to make sure that they are well-represented at those meetings. Observers from NGOs, including indigenous organizations and communities, may attend, participate in and contribute to meetings of the COP, as well as those of its subsidiary bodies. The Conference of the Parties encourages indigenous participation in the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8(j). Attendance at these meetings also provides important opportunities for indigenous representatives to share information, network and lobby.

The Secretariat is responsible for notifying government and non-governmental bodies of scheduled meetings of the Conference of the Parties or of the Convention's subsidiary bodies. To make sure your organization is kept informed, you should contact the Secretariat and request that your organization be advised of any meetings. If you wish to attend any meetings, you must also advise the Secretariat, prior to that meeting, that your organization would like to be represented as an observer. If you wish to address participants at any of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties, you can request permission from the President of the Conference of the Parties prior to the meeting. Your organization should be involved in fields related to the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

For more information on how to participate in meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity, see the contact details below.

#### ***Submitting case studies***

Case studies addressing various issues concerning the implementation of the Convention help monitor, assess, and provide guidance on the effectiveness of national actions and work programmes adopted under the Convention. Case studies submitted to the Secretariat are vital to the preparation of documents and the development of recommendations to be considered at Conference of the Parties meetings and meetings of the Convention's subsidiary bodies. It is therefore important that indigenous organizations respond to these invitations to present evidence of how the implementation process is affecting their communities.

#### ***Becoming members of expert panels and the liaison group***

To assist in the implementation of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties periodically establishes various panels of experts, drawn from rosters of experts, identified by governments as people with



relevant expertise. Indigenous organizations may wish to liaise with governments to ensure that indigenous experts are nominated for inclusion in the panels and rosters.

A liaison group composed of representatives of indigenous and local communities reviews the documents, prepared by the Secretariat, that are to be considered by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8(j). Participation is open to any body or agency, governmental or non-governmental qualified in fields relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Observers have the right to participate in the proceedings of any meeting but without the right to vote.

### **Liaison with other international bodies and processes**

The Conference of the Parties also liaises closely with other inter-governmental agencies and UN bodies on issues related to the protection and application of traditional knowledge. This liaison can take the form of attendance at meetings, delivering updates on the work of the Convention, when invited, exchanging documents, and contributing to the preparation of documents. The Secretariat works closely with the World Intellectual Property Organization; the World Trade Organization; UN Conference on Trade and Development; the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the UN Commission on Human Rights; the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. It is regularly represented at inter-agency meetings concerning matters related to indigenous peoples. The Conference of the Parties has the lead agency role in the Inter-governmental Forum on Forests on matters concerning traditional forest-related knowledge, and liaises with the other environment-related bodies mentioned above.

### **Access to decisions of the Conference of the Parties and other documents**

The decisions of the Conference of the Parties are published by the Conference on Biological Diversity Secretariat a few months after each meeting and are made available on the Convention web site. Indigenous organizations should obtain copies of the decisions since they contain vital information concerning indigenous interests related to the many issues addressed by the COP.

About six weeks prior to meetings of the COP and of the other bodies established under the Convention, documents relevant to the meetings are distributed to the focal points of the Parties and to all other organizations, including indigenous organizations, that are registered with the Secretariat as observers. These documents are also available through the Conventions Clearing House Mechanism and through the Internet at [www.biodiv.org](http://www.biodiv.org).

### **Contact details for the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is located in Montreal, Canada. Secretariat staff are responsible for preparing documents for consideration by the COP and its subsidiary bodies, and for arranging and supporting their meetings. The Secretariat's address is:

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
World Trade Centre  
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Fax: 1-514-288-6588  
Internet: [www.biodiv.org](http://www.biodiv.org)

### **The UN Commission on Sustainable Development**

The Commission on Sustainable Development is part of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established following the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (the

Earth Summit) and is composed of 53 Member States. Those UN specialized agencies that are concerned with sustainable development are also represented on the Commission. The Commission, which meets once a year for two or three weeks, addresses issues related to sustainable development and monitors implementation of the programme of action that was adopted at the 1992 Conference.

The Secretariat of the Commission, located in New York, prepares papers containing background materials and reports on activities, and makes recommendations to governments. The reporting process is open to all of the major groups, including indigenous peoples, identified in the programme of action adopted at the 1992 Conference, and the Commission encourages these groups to participate. The Commission also encourages Member States to promote self-management by indigenous peoples over their traditional lands and resources.

### **Participating in the Commission on Sustainable Development**

NGOs that have consultative status with ECOSOC can participate in the Commission's meetings. Requests for consultative status are handled by the Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in the United Nations in New York (Room DC1-1480, United Nations, New York, NY 10017 - Tel. 212 963 4842, Fax. 212 963 9248). The person in charge of the Section is Ms Hanifa Mezoui. Organizations applying for consultative status must fill in a questionnaire which, when completed, is put before the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. This Committee makes its recommendations to ECOSOC which takes the final decision.

Completed applications must be received by June 1<sup>st</sup> of the year preceding the year the NGO wants to be considered.