

ACMUN 2026

Background Guide

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Committee

Agenda

“Protecting Indigenous Languages, Arts and Cultural Diversity”

A Letter from the Executive Board:

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the Executive Board, we are delighted to welcome you to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Committee (UNESCO). The agenda put forth before us is “Protecting Indigenous Languages, Arts and Cultural Diversity”.

Over the course of two days, you are going to enter a forum for discussion and debate and, hopefully, learn skills that will come in handy in your life.

We would highly encourage you to have a strong foundation of research, raise your placard, and speak with confidence. Interact with other delegates not as competitors but as partners, because at the end of the day, you will be preparing a resolution on the agenda that aims to provide practical solutions implementable across many nations. Always remember that you will be representing a nation— a nation that has its own dignity and culture. Remember also that the others sitting in the committee are representing other cultures, and to maintain a respectful tone with them.

We, as the Executive Board, are here to moderate the committee and guide you all, delegates, through the Conference. We look forward to having factual speeches, pressing debates, meaningful resolutions, and most importantly, making sure each and every delegate takes back home a memory and skill that would be useful for the rest of their lives.

Best wishes.

UNESCO

UNESCO, or the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**, was founded in 1945, when 41 countries signed what is today known as the UNESCO Constitution. It was officially formed in 1946, just after World War II ended, when the world had witnessed six years of devastating violence. The leaders who created UNESCO believed something important: wars don't just happen because of armies and weapons; they happen because of ideas. It works to achieve international peace and security, working through various fields such as culture, education, arts, and sciences. There are 194 member countries and 12 associate members in UNESCO. India has been a member of the organisation since 1946, and ever since, India has actively participated in UNESCO's mission.



UNESCO reminds us that not every global problem is solved with weapons or money. Some are solved by teaching, sharing ideas, and protecting what makes each country's culture special. As delegates, you'll debate how to turn these ideas into real solutions.

What Indigenous Actually Means:

Before diving deeper into our topic, let us first discuss what the word “indigenous” means. *Indigenous* refers to **“People or objects that are native to a certain region or environment. They may grow there, live there, be produced there, or occur naturally there.”** Now, for our purposes, this includes things like a language, a dance/art form, a cuisine, or anything culturally relevant that is native to a particular area. Now that we know what indigenous means, let us look at how indigenous cultures are relevant to our discussion.

For most of human history, humans have lived in closed-off societies, with limited exposure to the outside world. Any contact with a foreign society happened through trade, and even then, exposure was limited. Hence, each society had its *own cultures*, each evolving on its own, but largely undisturbed by the outside world.

This began to change only over the past 500 years. Trade became more profitable, and with that began a chain of events, leading to the Industrial Revolution, the World Wars, and globalization. This is what created the world we see today. A world that is unbelievably interconnected. In the years since, our world has become increasingly interconnected. As we become increasingly connected, however, are we losing touch with our roots?

Although we call it **“globalization”**, the increasing interconnectedness between countries has primarily been centred around the spread of English-speaking cultures. Everything from food, clothing, to language and even movies, there has been a clear dominance of these cultures. Hence, while some cultures are being appreciated and celebrated abroad, cultures and habits native to a land are becoming increasingly irrelevant.



This is the heart of our topic.

We must remember that no culture is beneath or worse than any other. There is value, and indeed beauty, in every culture, no matter where it is native to.

Historical Context (Root Causes):

As we mentioned earlier, it was the rise of certain **colonial powers** that began this decline of indigenous cultures and languages. The colonisers forced their own culture and language, branding it as “civilised”, and ran campaigns showing indigenous culture to be “backward” and “inhuman”. There were attempts to erase indigenous identities through unfair laws and restrictions. The establishment of foreign-language schools and **Western education systems** played a big role in these campaigns, as children slowly forgot their own mother tongue.

The idea of a particular culture being more “civilised” and others being “animal-like” has been the most harmful of all of colonialism’s exports. Globalization has been softly pushing this same narrative, providing visibility to certain dominant cultures, media, and lifestyles, making it harder for many indigenous groups to hold onto their own identities.



The modern world, filled with skyscrapers, is also hugely different from the surroundings of indigenous cultures. Society is more urban and less community-oriented than ever. Hence, what we refer to as their “way of life” (staying close to nature, living in close communities, etc.) is becoming increasingly rare. They might have particular **traditions** and ideas about marriage, teaching children, the division of labour in the household, and so on, and these ideas could be different from the rest of society. Yet, our modern nation-states and international bodies make it very difficult for their “way of life” to be accepted. This leaves them with no option but to move away from their traditions and embrace an urban identity, losing all uniqueness just to fit into our world.

These are just a few of the reasons for the endangerment of indigenous cultures.

Challenges:

Many Indigenous communities are in **poverty** with less access to **healthcare** and education, and **fewer job opportunities** than others. **Losing their lands** for the development of cities and for building infrastructure has worsened their traditional way of living. Since indigenous languages, customs, and their ecological knowledge are very closely related to their land, losing it often leads to losing their cultural practices too.

Despite efforts to **decolonize legal systems** and promote indigenous rights, many indigenous communities still struggle with **systemic inequalities and injustices**. Their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions are often not given **proper value** or turned into **commercial products** by **external actors**, while indigenous peoples themselves may lack the resources or legal mechanisms to protect their knowledge and cultural heritage.

Indigenous knowledge and resources are frequently **exploited** by **external entities** such as different companies by using it for making their products for their **own profit** without permission or **proper compensation**. This exploitation not only **reduces** the chances of **economic benefits** for the indigenous communities but also erodes **cultural unity**.

Traditional knowledge, which has been passed down through generations, is mostly not given much importance by **existing legal systems**. This **lack of recognition** makes indigenous communities more **exploitable** and reduces their ability to control and benefit from their intellectual and cultural heritage.



Lastly one of the ongoing major cause that is **discrimination** and excluding them socially leads to them being more and less likely to foster connections with the wider population while not being able to openly express their **unique identity**, preventing any chances of the spread or learning from them their cultures, languages, or arts and gives them fewer chances to fully take part in society while still keeping their traditions alive.

Key Issues at Stake:

You might be wondering, “Why is it necessary to preserve a culture?”. After all, isn’t culture supposed to be an ever-evolving phenomenon? For example, why do we not speak in Victorian English anymore, or even make an attempt to preserve it, and what difference does that make in trying to preserve a dying language native to some remote island?

One of the most immediate results of not protecting Indigenous languages is that they could disappear completely, taking centuries of oral history with them. Indigenous communities have traditionally passed down their history, beliefs, legends, and myths through their own spoken language instead of written scripts. When a language is forgotten, those oral traditions or customs often go with it, causing a huge loss of past knowledge and cultures.

Imagine how many amazing stories from the past would be forgotten, or have already been forgotten, because no one alive today could understand them.

The decline of Indigenous languages also puts traditional and medicinal knowledge at great risk. This knowledge has been learnt and passed down through generations and generations through close relationships with nature. **Indigenous communities have important knowledge about keeping biodiversity safe, effective farming methods, water management, forest protection, and mainly the healing properties of native plants, as shown in India through Ayurveda.** But when languages disappear, a lot of this knowledge becomes harder to find because it is often remembered in Indigenous oral traditions. As a result, losing Indigenous knowledge will harm our efforts to protect biodiversity, fight climate change, and manage the environment more sustainably.

Protecting a culture is also a matter of immense **sentiment**. The community and culture a person grows up in, determines a lot of their outlook towards life as each and every language has a unique way to identify and understand things around them, Some cultures could be extremely welcoming, while others may not but the point is that, someone’s culture may be their identity and it is something that must be preserved as it is generations worth of knowledge passed down.

Another major problem is the **loss of traditional arts and craftsmanship**. Indigenous artistic traditions, including weaving, pottery, carving, beadwork, music, dance, and storytelling, hold centuries of cultural expression and their unique identity. As younger people move to cities or take on dominant cultural practices favoured by the government in place of their own, this leads to many of these skills no longer being

passed down from generation to generation. This craftsmanship is generations' worth of hard work being passed down in hopes that every child will carry on this art.



Once it fades away from the surface of the earth, it becomes extremely hard to revive it.

Utilisation of Technology for Preservation

The power of technology remains immeasurable as it plays a huge role in today's society, from researching for your MUN to even preserving culture. Technology can play a huge role in documenting indigenous languages, conserving art forms, and letting the world know about the various cultures all around the world.

Let's take the example of “**The Missing Scripts**”, an initiative launched as part of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032) which raised the realization that nearly half of the world's writings remain absent from digital platforms, many of which were indigenous writings as they face a threat to be extinct. The Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages provides enabling conditions for digital empowerment, access to information and language technologies, and artistic creation in Indigenous languages. In this context, The Missing Scripts project fits seamlessly with the proposed outputs in the Global Action Plan, contributing to the goal of enhancing the practical use of Indigenous languages.



Thus, this proves that technology can play a big role in helping us protect and preserve various forms of arts and languages. These initiatives can have an influential effect on the issue we are trying to resolve.

Legalities:

UNDRIP – UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007): The most comprehensive global statement, covering self-determination, land rights, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Not binding, but UNESCO bodies frequently invoke it when interpreting the 2003 and 2005 Conventions, and there have been ongoing efforts to formally align UNESCO's cultural heritage agenda with UNDRIP standards.

ILO Convention No. 169 (1989): The main binding treaty on indigenous and tribal peoples, covering land rights and consultation. Ratified by 24 states, mostly in Latin America.

ICCPR (1966), Articles 1 and 27: Self-determination and minority cultural rights, cited in cases involving indigenous cultural survival.

Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005): This convention focuses on protecting cultural industries and expressions from homogenization by globalized media/trade. Compared to the 2003 Convention, this instrument is considered more aspirational than obligatory, functioning more as a platform for long-term dialogue than a mechanism for enforceable short-term outcomes.

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003): This convention is the most relevant UNESCO instrument for indigenous peoples. It covers oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, traditional knowledge of nature, and traditional craftsmanship. The preamble explicitly recognizes that communities, particularly indigenous communities, play an important role in producing, safeguarding, and re-creating intangible cultural heritage. This includes indigenous oral traditions, languages, performing arts, social practices, and traditional knowledge concerning nature. The Convention has been widely ratified and gives indigenous communities a formal (though state-mediated) role in nominating and safeguarding their own heritage.

Culture features prominently in the International Labour Organisation's 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) and in the **Declaration on the**

Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), both of which are the main international instruments that frame Indigenous Peoples' rights. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, pursuant to the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2001 by the Commission on Human Rights, UNDRIP is the most comprehensive statement of the rights of Indigenous Peoples ever developed, giving prominence to collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law. The UNDRIP has been translated into almost 60 languages, most of which are Indigenous.

Sources:

*Any United Nations website is considered as a valid source along with **Reuters** and **Human Rights Watch**. You are free to refer to any website but make sure you fact-check the information.

Please note that Wikipedia is not an accepted source of information. However, the sources listed on a Wikipedia page may be considered trustworthy.

Official government websites and data published by them are considered legitimate.

Apart from institutions such as the UN, EU, NATO, and their affiliated organizations., here are a few trusted sources:

1. Reuters
2. BBC
3. The Hindu
4. RAND
5. Human Rights Watch
6. Amnesty International
7. The World Economic Forum
8. The World Bank

<https://www.unesco.org/en/decades/indigenous-languages/about/action-plan?hub=67103> - Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-indigenous-languages-gateways-worlds-cultural-diversity> https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/indigenous-languages-intangible-cultural-heritageecuador-and-world?TSPD_101_R0=080713870fab2000b1bc227b27cf6226fe4cc9cea69db2573de27edfc9f22d9d21dfe75183d74bb20838c1b2a4143000a7db7734fb205385df209ca06084ed927ee9a18e6254a13a965c8a48a2d1ab8c2f7b51f57393f3cc17482f818b65e521 - Indigenous Languages - Significance

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/preservationindigenous-cultures> - Preserving Indigenous Culture

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/the-arts/7-ways-we-can-help-protect-and>

[-conserve-indigenous-art-forms-in-india/photostory/107187293.cms?picid=10718730](#)

[4](#) - Ways to Preserve Indigenous Artforms

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-indigenous-peoples>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-preservation-indigenous-languages-intersection-technology-and-culture>

Please note that none of these are the **ONLY** sources accepted.

This list is non-exhaustive, and there are many more such sources.

This list is to give you an idea of a few such sources and to help you identify more such sources.

QARMA - Questions A Resolution Must Answer:

The following questions are some of the significant points that your resolution must include and the committee must discuss.

1. What is the role of local communities and local people in preserving indigenous culture at the grassroots level?
 2. Beyond state and national governments, what role could be played by international organisations such as the UN?
 3. What steps could be taken to empower indigenous communities to participate in modern society and civic life, while not compromising on their cultural identity?
 4. What role could technology (including AI) play in preserving and strengthening indigenous culture?
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Conclusion-

As we are at the end of this background guide, this document is solely based on the most basic and foundational information you need to know about the committee. Make sure that each and every delegate refers to websites relevant to the topic, issues with relevance to **your respective country**, such as issues, policies, legalities, organizations relevant to the agenda, and most importantly, the solutions and steps taken forward by your government to preserve the valuable culture that has been passed down through generations, which are worth every second preserving. Always ask yourself the 5WH questions when you hear a statement; this helps you to think wider and analyse the committee in more detail.

Good luck.

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