

Committee: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Topic: Protecting indigenous people's rights amidst resource exploitation in the Amazon Rainforest

Student Officer: Aloï Gkania

Position: Deputy President

Topic Introduction

Protecting the rights of indigenous people in the Amazon Rainforest is crucial as they face increasing threats from resource exploitation. Their lands are often targeted due to their lack of political power and rights, resulting in logging, mining, and agricultural expansion that leads to their displacement, environmental and physical harm.¹ The current situation is distressing, with deforestation rates rising and illegal activities imposing on indigenous territories.

Acknowledging indigenous rights not only preserves their cultures and lives, but also ensures the protection of the biodiversity and balance of the Amazon. This issue is a matter of human rights, as recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)² and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).³ These documents ensure the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands and resources.

The Human Rights Council (HRC) plays a crucial role in addressing these violations. By observing and reporting on the human rights situation in the Amazon, the HRC ensures that the rights of indigenous people are upheld and that governments are held accountable for their actions. Ensuring the protection of these rights is important not only for the survival of indigenous cultures but also for the

¹"How Illegal Mining Caused a Humanitarian Crisis in the Amazon." *Yale E360*, e360.yale.edu/features/brazil-vanomami-mining-malaria-malnutrition-lula#:~:text=The%20onslaught%20of%20illegal%20miners.

²United Nations. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>.

³Nations, United. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.



preservation of one of the world's most crucial ecosystems, the Amazon rainforest. This protection is directly linked to the conference theme of “Sustainable Consumption and Production”, as safeguarding the Amazon and its people is vital for maintaining the ecological balance necessary for sustainable development.

Definition of key concepts

Indigenous People

“Indigenous People are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced.”⁴

Resource Exploitation

Resource exploitation refers to the extraction and use of natural resources for economic gain. In the Amazon rainforest, this involves activities like logging, mining and agriculture, which can lead to environmental damage and the displacement of indigenous communities.

Environmental Degradation

“Environmental degradation is a process through which the natural environment is compromised in some way, reducing biological diversity and the general health of the environment. This process can be entirely natural in origin, or it can be accelerated or caused by human activities.”⁵

Cultural Preservation

Cultural Preservation is “the effort put forth by parents, educators, and students from diverse cultures to protect their heritage practices from disappearing because of lack of use, curricular exclusion, or devaluation by the broader society.”⁶

⁴The World Bank. “Indigenous Peoples.” World Bank, 2022, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples#:~:text=Indigenous%20Peoples%20are%20distinct%20social.

⁵“Environmental Degradation.” Wwww.eionet.europa.eu, www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet/en/concept/15154#:~:text=Environmental%20degradation%20is%20a%20process.

⁶“What Is Cultural Preservation | IGI Global.” Wwww.igi-global.com, www.igi-global.com/dictionary/cultural-preservation/62136.



Logging

“Logging, or commercial logging, involves cutting trees for sale as timber or pulp. The timber is used to build homes, furniture, etc. and the pulp is used to make paper and paper products.”⁷

Agricultural expansion

Agricultural expansion is the process of converting forests and natural land into farmland for growing crops and raising livestock.⁸

Background Information

Historical Background

Indigenous groups such as the Yanomamo and Kayapo have been living in the Amazon for thousands of years, slowly accumulating a detailed knowledge of the rainforest and methods to subsist from it. “Some estimates suggest that the first human settlements in the Amazon date back 32,000 to 39,000 years, during which time Amazon people have developed lifestyles that are well integrated with the benefits and drawbacks of the rainforest.”⁹

However, history has seen increased exploitation of the Amazon due to the rising global demand for minerals and agricultural land. This exploitation, driven by economic goals and weak regulations, has caused serious harm. Deforestation for logging and farming has destroyed habitats and reduced

⁷Algee, Lisa. “What Is Logging?” *WorldRainforests.com*, worldrainforests.com/kids/lesson_plans/lisa_algee/logging.html.

⁸“AGRICULTURAL EXPANSION: THE BIGGEST DROUGHT for EARTH.” *Www.linkedin.com*, www.linkedin.com/pulse/agricultural-expansion-biggest-drought-earth-anumeenacare.

⁹Amazon People.” *Wwf.panda.org*, wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/about_the_amazon/people_amazon/#:~:text=Life%20inside%20the%20rainforest.



biodiversity.¹⁰ These conflicts often involve legal battles, protests, and, at times, violent confrontations, highlighting the struggle of indigenous groups to maintain their cultural heritage and traditional way of life amidst relentless economic pressures. Despite their long history, indigenous groups often face prohibition from decisions about their lands. Their knowledge of the rainforest's ecology and sustainable practices is undervalued, leading to social inequalities and environmental damage.

Impacts

Environmental Impacts

Exploitation of the Amazon Rainforest has pernicious environmental impacts; deforestation for reasons such as logging and agriculture results in habitat loss, biodiversity decline, and increased carbon emissions, contributing to global climate change. Mining operations result in soil erosion, water pollution, and disrupt already weak ecosystems, further intensifying environmental degradation.¹¹

Societal Impacts

Protecting indigenous people's rights amidst resource exploitation in the Amazon Rainforest is crucial due to significant societal impacts, such as forced displacement, which leads to loss of ancestral lands, cultural disruption, and economic hardship. Resource extraction activities, such as logging and mining, violate indigenous land rights and self-determination by encroaching on their territories without consent. These actions disrupt traditional practices, threaten the survival of indigenous cultures, and increase poverty and food insecurity. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities often

¹⁰“Topic: Amazon Rainforest in Brazil.” *Statista*, www.statista.com/topics/6866/amazon-rainforest-in-brazil/#topicOverview.

¹¹wwf. “Amazon Mining.” *Panda.org*, 2020, www.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/amazon_threats/other_threats/amazon_mining/.



widen, leading to conflicts over land use and aggravating social inequalities. Concluding the urgent need for policies that safeguard the rights and well-being of indigenous populations.

Impacts on Indigenous People

Indigenous people in the Amazon face intense challenges from resource exploitation. Often marginalized and without secure land rights, they experience direct and indirect impacts on their cultural, identity, livelihoods, and physical health. Deforestation disrupts their ancestral land use patterns, threatens sacred sites, and reduces access to the natural resources essential for their cultural practices. Pollution from mining operations contaminates water sources, posing serious health risks and further marginalizing indigenous communities. These issues represent clear violations of multiple rights in both the UDHR, such as article 17 which states that everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others, and the UNDRIP, such as Article 8 which states Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.



Major countries/ organizations and alliances

Brazil

On September 21, Brazil's Supreme Court upheld Indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional lands by ruling against the so-called cutoff date, a legal argument that Indigenous peoples should not obtain title of their ancestral territories if they were not physically present on them on October 5, 1988, the day Brazil's current Constitution was adopted.¹² Brazil's management of the Amazon is pivotal, balancing economic development with conservation amidst significant resource exploitation. The country's policies aim to uphold indigenous rights and mitigate environmental impact, aligning with international human rights standards.

Peru

Like many countries in Latin America, Peru's Constitution recognises indigenous rights to land.¹³ Since the 1970s, moreover, the Peruvian government has issued land titles to "native communities" in the Amazon. There is solid evidence that, given the right conditions, such titled lands can slow down deforestation.¹⁴ The Peruvian Amazon houses diverse biodiversity and indigenous communities, central to conservation efforts and sustainable development policies. These initiatives prioritize local participation and rights protection, aligning with human rights frameworks to ensure equitable environmental governance.

¹²Indigenous Peoples Secure Decisive Victory in Brazil | Human Rights Watch. 25 Sept. 2023, www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/25/indigenous-peoples-secure-decisive-victory-brazil#:~:text=On%20September%2021%2C%20Brazil.

¹³*Examining Support for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Context of REDD+ in Peru.* www.cifor-icraf.org/publications/pdf_files/Flyer/REDD-safeguards-2.pdf.

¹⁴"Joining Forces to Support Indigenous Rights in the Peruvian Amazon." *Tenure Facility*, thetenurefacility.org/article/joining-forces-to-support-indigenous-rights-in-the-peruvian-amazon/#:~:text=Like%20many%20countries%20in%20Latin.



Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)

The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) promotes intergovernmental cooperation among Amazonian nations focusing on sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. By integrating human rights considerations into joint initiatives, ACTO supports indigenous communities and fosters regional environmental governance. Currently, ACTO is developing actions with Indigenous Peoples, especially the health area with the Peoples in Isolation in Initial Contact (PIACI) and transversally in the conservation and protection of biodiversity, forests, water management and food security, aspects that together contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation in the Amazon.¹⁵ For example ACTO's Contingency project plans for health protection for highly vulnerable indigenous peoples and in initial contact and ensure their health and well-being.

¹⁵Euroclima. "ACTO Launches the Project for the Creation of the Amazonian Regional Platform of Indigenous Peoples Supported by EUROCLIMA+." *Www.euroclima.org*, www.euroclima.org/en/recent-events/en-news/1749-acto-launches-the-project-for-the-creation-of-the-amazonian-regional-platform-of-indigenous-peoples-supported-by-euroclima#:~:text=Currently%2C%20ACTO%20is%20developing%20actions.



United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)¹⁶

UNEP's global environmental initiatives include safeguarding the Amazon's ecological integrity and indigenous rights by cultural perseverance, capacity building and empowerment, legal and policy advocacy and recognizing land rights. It advocates for policies such as Deforestation and Climate Change Policies, Sustainable Development and Monitoring and Enforcement that address deforestation and climate change while promoting sustainable development, ensuring compliance with international human rights standards in Amazonian conservation efforts.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The Climate Reality Project

The Climate Reality Project has directly supported indigenous rights in the Amazon Rainforest and successfully supported amplifying their voices in global discussions, advocating for policies that prioritize conservation and sustainable development, and collaborating with indigenous communities to implement climate-resilient initiatives such as Sustainable Land Management, Community-Based Monitoring Systems and Climate Education and Training.¹⁷

ILO Convention 169 (1989)

ILO Convention 169 (1989) directly addresses the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, including those affected by resource exploitation in the Amazon Rainforest. It requires governments to consult and cooperate with indigenous communities on issues affecting them, including resource management and development projects, ensuring their rights to land, natural resources, and cultural integrity are respected and protected.¹⁸

¹⁶Environment, U. N. "Indigenous Peoples and Their Communities." *UNEP - UN Environment Programme*, 23 May 2018, www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/major-groups-modalities/major-group-categories/indigenous-peoples-and.

¹⁷"Environmental Defenders in the Amazon." The Climate Reality Project, 11 Apr. 2024, www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/environmental-defenders-amazon.

¹⁸Ilo.org, 2024, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE.



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007)

UNDRIP (2007) protects indigenous rights in the Amazon by requiring governments to obtain their consent before any projects affecting them and ensuring their rights to land by Recognition and Legal Protection and Participation in Land Management, resources, and cultural integrity are respected. It's a vital framework for safeguarding indigenous communities amidst resource exploitation.¹⁹

Possible solutions

Strengthening Indigenous land rights

Strengthening Indigenous land rights is a crucial solution for safeguarding Indigenous Peoples' territories from exploitation. When indigenous communities obtain legal recognition of their lands, they gain the ability to defend it against illegal logging, mining, and agricultural expansion. This recognition involves establishing clear and enforceable land titles, a process supported by national governments and international bodies. Achieving this can be approached through a combination of national, regional, and international efforts through advocacy and awareness, Regional Human Rights Mechanisms and policy and legislative support.

¹⁹"United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>.



Organizations like the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) are crucial in supporting these legal processes. They provide essential resources such as legal aid and advocacy to help indigenous communities in securing their territories. This approach not only preserves the environment but also empowers indigenous peoples to sustainably manage their resources.²⁰

Facilitating indigenous participation in decision-making processes

Facilitating Indigenous participation in decision-making processes is vital to ensure their voices are heard in policies affecting their lands. Platforms like the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)²¹ enable indigenous representatives to advocate and fight for their communities in local, national, and international forums. By implementing indigenous knowledge and perspectives, these forums contribute to more equitable and effective decision-making regarding land use and resource management.

Enhancing and promoting international cooperation

International cooperation is crucial for protecting indigenous rights and the Amazon rainforest. Many threats to Amazon come from international demand for resources, underscoring the need for global collaboration. Organizations like the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) foster cooperation among countries like Brazil and Peru to promote sustainable development and protect both the rainforest and its inhabitants. Through shared resources, knowledge, and strategies, Member States can effectively combat exploitation and uphold indigenous rights.

²⁰"IWGIA - IWGIA - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs." *Www.iwgia.org*, www.iwgia.org/en/.

²¹"Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues | UN Press." *Press.un.org*, press.un.org/en/permanent-forum-indigenous-issues.



Bibliography

This text provides general information Statista assumes no liability for the information given being complete or correct Due to varying updates, and Statistics Can Display More up-to-Date Data Than Referenced in the Text. “Topic: Amazon Rainforest in Brazil.” Statista, www.statista.com/topics/6866/amazon-rainforest-in-brazil/#topicOverview.

The World Bank. “Indigenous Peoples.” World Bank, 2022, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples#:~:text=Indigenous%20Peoples%20are%20distinct%20social.

Wikipedia Contributors. “Exploitation of Natural Resources.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 May 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploitation_of_natural_resources#:~:text=The%20exploitation%20of%20natural%20resources.

“Environmental Degradation.” Wwww.eionet.europa.eu, www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet/en/concept/15154#:~:text=Environmental%20degradation%20is%20a%20process.

“What Is Cultural Preservation | IGI Global.” Wwww.igi-global.com, www.igi-global.com/dictionary/cultural-preservation/62136.

“Environmental Defenders in the Amazon.” The Climate Reality Project, 11 Apr. 2024, www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/environmental-defenders-amazon.

“Guardians of the Amazon: Protect Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in the Fight to Protect the Climate and Our Planet.” Greenpeace USA, 26 Apr. 2019, www.greenpeace.org/usa/guardians-of-the-amazon-protect-indigenous-peoples-rights/.

Algee, Lisa. “What Is Logging?” WorldRainforests.com, worldrainforests.com/kids/lesson_plans/lisa_algee/logging.html.

“UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Australian Human Rights Commission.” Humanrights.gov.au, humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-people#:~:text=Indigenous%20peoples%20and%20individuals%20are.

Boadle, Anthony, and Anthony Boadle. “Brazil Top Court Rejects Time Limit on Indigenous Land Claims.” Reuters, 22 Sept. 2023, www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-top-court-rejects-time-limit-indigenous-land-claims-2023-09-21/.

United Nations. “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>.

Nations, United. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” United Nations, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.



“Amazon People.” Wwf.panda.org,
[wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/about_the_amazon/people_amazon/#:~:text=Life%20inside%20the%20rainforest.](https://www.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/about_the_amazon/people_amazon/#:~:text=Life%20inside%20the%20rainforest.)

“Topic: Amazon Rainforest in Brazil.” Statista, www.statista.com/topics/6866/amazon-rainforest-in-brazil/#topicOverview.

wwf. “Amazon Mining.” Panda.org, 2020,
[wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/amazon_threats/other_threats/amazon_mining/](https://www.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/amazon_threats/other_threats/amazon_mining/).

Indigenous Peoples Secure Decisive Victory in Brazil | Human Rights Watch. 25 Sept. 2023,
www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/25/indigenous-peoples-secure-decisive-victory-brazil#:~:text=On%20September%2021%2C%20Brazil.

“Joining Forces to Support Indigenous Rights in the Peruvian Amazon.” Tenure Facility,
thetenurefacility.org/article/joining-forces-to-support-indigenous-rights-in-the-peruvian-amazon/#:~:text=Like%20many%20countries%20in%20Latin.

Euroclima. “ACTO Launches the Project for the Creation of the Amazonian Regional Platform of Indigenous Peoples Supported by EUROCLIMA+.” Wwww.euroclima.org,
www.euroclima.org/en/recent-events/en-news/1749-acto-launches-the-project-for-the-creation-of-the-amazonian-regional-platform-of-indigenous-peoples-supported-by-euroclima#:~:text=Currently%2C%20ACTO%20is%20developing%20actions.

Environment, U. N. “Indigenous Peoples and Their Communities.” UNEP - UN Environment Programme, 23 May 2018,
www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/major-groups-modalities/major-group-categories/indigenous-peoples-and.

Ilo.org, 2024, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE.

“United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>

“IWGIA - IWGIA - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.” Wwww.iwgia.org, www.iwgia.org/en/.

“Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues | UN Press.” Press.un.org, press.un.org/en/permanent-forum-indigenous-issues.

