

Foreword

'Individually is precious', wrote Rabindranath Tagore, 'because only through it can we realize the universal.' UNESCO has consistently dedicated itself to fostering cultural identities at the same time as seeking to further understanding between the world's diverse cultures. A rich polyphony of cultural expressions is the only universality worthy of the name.

No voices have been so systematically excluded from the 'concert of nations' as those of the world's indigenous people. Their dominant experience of world history has been the violation of their fundamental rights and the erosion of their distinctive identities. The world's 'first peoples' have been the last to make themselves heard in the crescendo of collective self-affirmation that has marked the emergence of the modern era.

Only recently has their long silence begun to be broken as they have discovered ways of promoting their cause through cross-territorial and cross-regional alliances. The international arena has proved a particularly valuable forum for asserting rights too often denied them at the national level. Following the award of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, the United Nations observed in 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, designed to further the recognition and empowerment of indigenous people worldwide. The International Year has seen the adoption by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' Working Group on Indigenous Populations of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, to be submitted in due course to the United Nations General Assembly, together with the declaration by the

General Assembly of an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1994–2004). The title of the present publication recognizes the part being played by the United Nations system in the continuing campaign to ensure that first peoples enjoy those 'first rights' due to all.

In the context of the 1993 International Year and as a follow-up to the commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Encounter between Two Worlds, UNESCO has undertaken a range of activities on behalf of indigenous populations. A New Partnership: Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations System has been prepared in conjunction with the UNESCO Associated Schools Project (ASP) – an international network of over 3,000 institutions in 119 countries designed to impart to young people attitudes and ideas conducive to the transition to a global culture of peace, equity and sustainable development. Written by a pioneer in the field and based on many years of teaching and research at the ASP-affiliated United Nations International School, it is primarily intended as a teaching guide to the critical issues facing indigenous people throughout the world and the role of the United Nations in helping to address them.

Judith Zinsser's persuasive advocacy of the cause of indigenous peoples should prove a valuable contribution to an ongoing debate within the international community and at the national level. UNESCO would hope in due course to complement the present study with other publications offering a variety of perspectives on this most complex and challenging issue.

The question of indigenous people's rights is,

indeed, inseparable from a whole series of wider questions – the safeguarding of cultural diversity within a context of progressive globalization, reconciling the claims of minorities and majorities within democratic societies, rethinking humanity's relationship to nature in the context of our current ecological dilemmas. It is essential, then,

that we should heed the voices of the world's indigenous people – for their sake but likewise for our own. The key concept here is partnership – between indigenous people and the United Nations, but more fundamentally between the peoples of the world in their entirety.

Federico Mayor
Director-General of UNESCO

Introduction

From its very beginnings UNESCO has supported the diversity of the world's cultures: customs, languages, artefacts, all that constitutes a people's distinct heritage. UNESCO has also created opportunities for cultures to share those heritages with others. This guide on indigenous peoples and the United Nations system is just a small part of that larger effort. It was commissioned under UNESCO'S Associated Schools Project (ASP), a worldwide network of teachers, students and educational administrators committed to fostering new kinds of teaching materials and learning environments which encourage all peoples to live and learn in harmony with each other and the world's resources. It is UNESCO's humanistic, cultural and international education programme's contribution to two initiatives: UNESCO's World Decade on Cultural Development and the United Nations Year of the World's Indigenous People (1993).

My interest in this subject began with a project for the United Nations International School in New York City. The United Nations International School, or UNIS, as it is called by the staff and students, was founded in 1948 at Lake Success, New York, by some of the first civil servants of the United Nations. UNIS joined the UNESCO Associated Schools Project in 1974; in 1993 it numbered over 100 staff and approximately 1,300 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The school has always felt an obligation to provide not only a wide-ranging education for members of the United Nations community, one embracing innovative approaches from many cultures, but also specific work on the United Nations, its parent body.

Beginning in 1972 the Humanities Department of the secondary school embarked on a long-term project: to create units about various aspects of the United Nations that could be taught in each of the five years of the required humanities sequence. The issue of 'human rights' became central to all of these units. This guide originated within this sequence.

In expanding the UNIS materials for an international educational community I have been forced to experiment in a variety of ways both as an historian and as a teacher. First, readers should know that I have endeavoured to speak in many voices. There are three main perspectives: those of the indigenous peoples, the member governments and the United Nations. I realize that the audience will also be diverse. Many teachers and students will, like me, come from Member States, from dominant national groups. However, the text, the resources and the strategies must also be acceptable to indigenous peoples and to the United Nations, its commissions, agencies and intergovernmental organizations.

Throughout the historical sections I have tried to let my own views intrude as little as possible. Part 1: Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights, Part 2: Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations System, and Conclusion – A Partnership of Equals, attempt to give equal weight and value to all three perspectives: the indigenous, the governmental and the United Nations'. In the pedagogical sections, however, I have a clear bias. This should be evident in Part 3, the section on teaching approaches, classroom techniques and resources. I want these materials to further the

avowed goals of UNESCO: international understanding, co-operation and peace, and the realization of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For those who wish to explore my historical reasoning and writing in greater depth, I have included lengthy annotations. The appendices consist of three of the key documents used in Parts 1 and 2, the 1993 draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples formulated by the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the Kari-Oca Declaration from the indigenous meeting at the World Conference on the Environment (1992). These documents are intended not only for teachers but also for students interested in constructing their own descriptions and analyses of the issues.

In the sections on teaching approaches and resources I have attempted to extend my practical experiences at UNIS into a worldwide context. As I have worked with classes over the years I have come to believe that many of the important lessons cannot be taught. Rather I must create

assignments and educational environments that allow my students to discover these lessons for themselves. Part 3 of this guide, 'Learning about Indigenous Peoples, Member States and the United Nations through the Associated Schools Project,' challenges colleagues to do the same in their classrooms.

To indigenous educators the guide may seem conservative, to those of us educated in the European manner, radical. Whatever one's approach or perspective this study of indigenous peoples gives us the opportunity to learn about the interrelationship between environments and peoples, to see how members of the indigenous nations have acted on their own behalf, to analyse the realities of international politics and to appreciate the role that the United Nations has played in the definition and protection of human rights. My purpose will be achieved if readers of the guide become engaged with these issues, the questions they raise and the complexities of defining and then protecting human rights throughout the world.