

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

A NEW PARTNERSHIP
INTERNATIONAL YEAR 1993
UNITED NATIONS—HUMAN RIGHTS

THE 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous People, launched by the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Human Rights Day, 10 December 1992, "will provide an opportunity to focus the attention of the international community on one of the planet's most neglected and vulnerable groups of people", according to Antoine Blanca, United Nations Coordinator for the Year.

To mark the Year—a landmark event in the history of indigenous peoples' struggle for survival and recognition of their rights—the United Nations family of organizations will evaluate and enhance its programmes and activities relating to indigenous peoples. International efforts will be aimed at strengthening global cooperation for solving the problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, environment, development, education and health.

A major public awareness campaign will be mounted to inform the international community about the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples—particularly their strong views on land, resources and the kind of development they want for their future generations.

Perhaps most important, indigenous peoples themselves will be given a platform to convey their message and to promote an understanding of their cultures and ways of life. Says Erica-Irene A Daes, Chairperson/Rapporteur of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, "Indigenous people have told us that their human rights are part of a total quest for well-being. This holistic approach, which recognizes the interconnection of development, peace, environment and human rights issues, is one which is increasingly recognized by the United Nations itself. We do not want the International Year to be a lot of empty words; we want there to be real advances".

BACKGROUND

Indigenous peoples are descendants of the original inhabitants of many lands, strikingly diverse in their

cultures, religions and patterns of social and economic organization. An estimated 300 million indigenous people live in more than 70 countries, from the Arctic regions to the Amazon and Australia.

For centuries, however, their special relationship to the land—an elemental symbiosis crucial to their survival—has been threatened by colonialists and the demands of others for living space, food and resources. Today, indigenous peoples are among the most disadvantaged groups on Earth. When integrated into a national society, they confront discrimination and exploitation and often suffer under the worst living conditions. Those remaining on their traditional territories face disruption of their cultures and physical displacement as their lands are claimed for national development.

Indigenous peoples have been demanding justice from the international community for many years. They have organized locally, nationally and regionally and are active in the international arena, seeking respect for their cultures and ways of life and full participation in decision-making processes that affect them. A generation ago, many indigenous peoples were not entitled to vote. Today there are increasingly visible partners in the struggle to protect the global environment and promote sustainable development and resource use.

THE ISSUES

Improvements in the condition of the world's indigenous peoples will depend on action taken on many issues, among them :

- Land;
- Self-government and self-development;
- Resources;
- Environment;
- Culture, language and education;
- Health; and
- Social and economic conditions.

OBJECTIVES

The Year's theme—"Indigenous people: a new partnership"—will encourage the development of new relationships between States and indigenous peoples and between the international community and indigenous people. This new partnership must be equitable and based on mutual respect and understanding. Toward that end, the Year will foster:

- Participation of indigenous people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects affecting their living conditions and future. This is to be achieved through meetings and consultations with organizations of indigenous people.

- Projects for indigenous peoples. These are to be promoted through consultations between indigenous communities and States as well as between indigenous peoples and the appropriate United Nations agencies. They will be assisted by the newly created United Nations Voluntary Fund for the International Year for the World's Indigenous People.
- Knowledge about standards for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. This means cultivating an awareness among indigenous peoples of the draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being prepared by the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention (no. 169) on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and other appropriate international legislation.
- A programme to promote public awareness of the situation of indigenous peoples and the threats to their existence. This will be done through special observances, meetings and other promotional and cultural activities as well as through media coverage.
- Present information, prepared in partnership with indigenous people, about the situation prevailing in the country and the activities initiated during the Year;
- Encourage participation of indigenous people in the preparation and implementation of all activities undertaken in connection with the Year; and
- Encourage indigenous organisations and communities to prepare their own programmes and activities.

At the international level, the General Assembly recommended that the United Nations system :

- Increase its cooperation, coordination and technical assistance for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health;
- Fund concrete projects for indigenous communities, reflecting the wishes of the indigenous people, that can have a direct benefit to them;
- Increase publicity, especially to indigenous peoples, on the work of the United Nations in areas related to the objectives of the Year.
- Increase awareness of the existence of relevant international legal instruments related to the objectives of the Year and promote their widespread ratification and implementation;
- Establish networks of indigenous organizations and communities for the sharing of information and experience in fields such as health care, bilingual education and resource and environmental management;
- Contract or second indigenous organizations or persons with relevant expertise in carrying out projects for the benefit of indigenous communities;
- Promote an international trade fair of indigenous products; and
- Provide technical assistance to Governments wishing to make provisions in their legislation for protecting and promoting the human rights of indigenous people, in particular on questions of land, environmental protection and strengthening cultural identity, and provide technical and financial assistance for implementing such legislation.

PLANNING FOR THE YEAR

The General Assembly has appointed the Under Secretary-General for Human Rights as Coordinator for the Year's activities and the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva as the coordinating body. The Centre is working in conjunction with the ILO and other United Nations agencies and offices. A small secretariat, including indigenous people, has been established in the Centre to assist the Coordinator.

A programme of activities and projects for the Year is being finalized on the basis of consultations with representatives of Governments and indigenous peoples. To that end, the General Assembly has adopted a programme of activities to be undertaken at the national and international levels.

States were invited to adopt the following measures to ensure the Year's success :

- Designate a contact person for the Year in the appropriate ministry and establish national committees composed of governmental, indigenous and non-governmental representatives to prepare a national programme of activities;
- Raise public awareness through information and education projects;
- Promote indigenous initiatives in such areas as radio and television and model projects on education, health, employment, housing and the environment;

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE:

Indigenous peoples: The Year was requested by indigenous organizations and the principal guidance for activities to be provided by them. The Centre for Human Rights will maintain contact with the representatives of indigenous people and help to keep them

informed of planned activities worldwide. Organizations of indigenous peoples are invited to contact the Centre about their own plans and suggestions for the Year.

Governments: The Secretary-General of the United Nations has opened a Voluntary Fund for the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, to which Governments are invited to contribute. Governments are also encouraged to consult with their own indigenous peoples and to promote programmes and activities during the Year. All countries, including those having no indigenous peoples, can contribute to the success of the Year through educational and cultural events focusing on indigenous peoples.

Non-governmental organizations: NGO's involved in human rights, development, environment, health, education or numerous other issues have an important role to play during the Year by focusing on the needs of indigenous people and developing appropriate projects with them.

The Media: Raising public awareness is a major objective of the Year. Print, radio and film media are encouraged to focus on the situation of indigenous people.

Concerned institutions and individuals: The success of the Year will depend heavily upon individuals and institutions that are not directly involved in United Nations activities. Organizations, schools, universities and youth groups, among others, are encouraged to take an interest in the Year and to develop appropriate activities.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
Contact:**

**The International Year for the
World's Indigenous people
Centre for Human Rights**

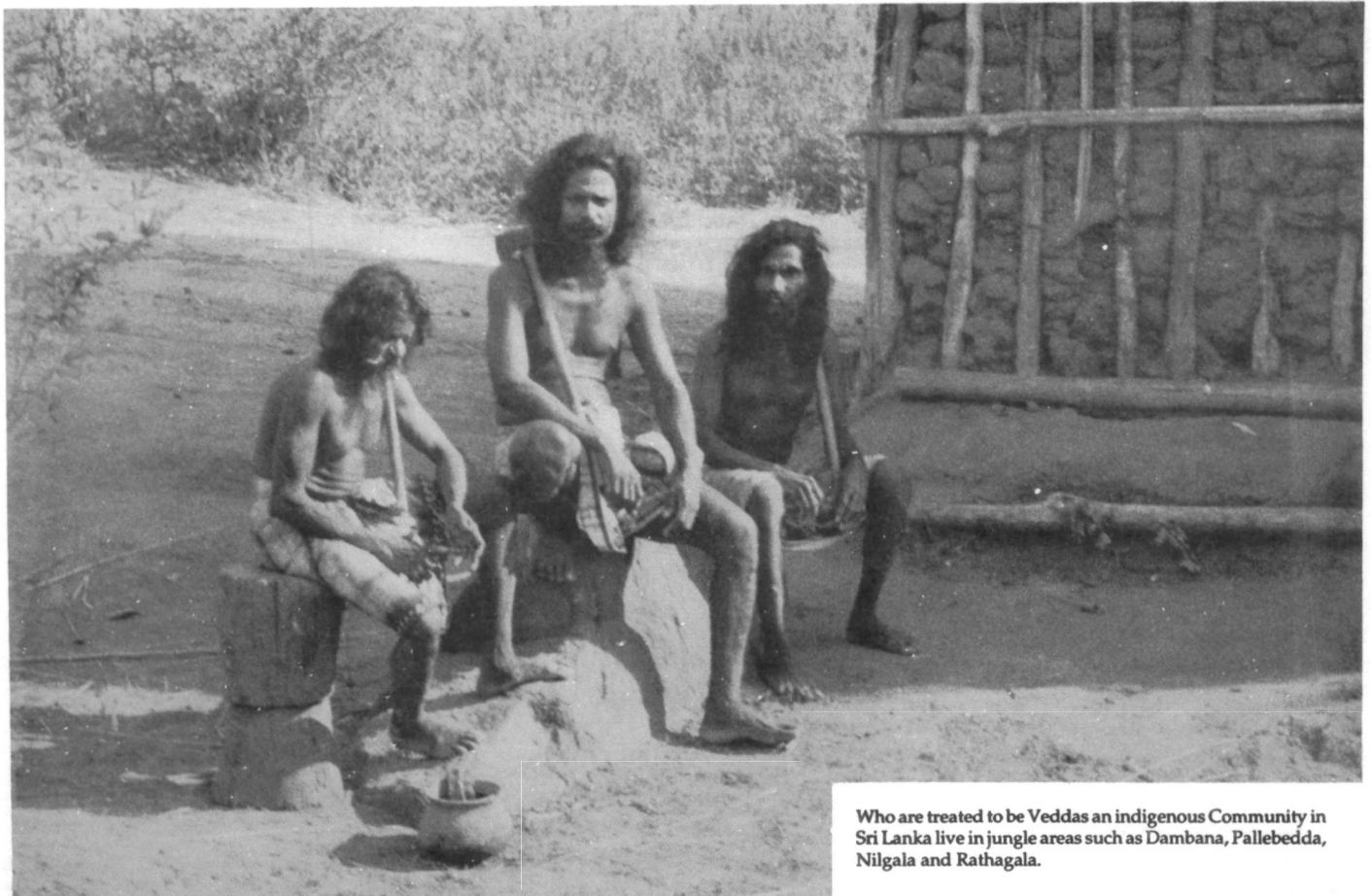
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Who are treated to be Veddas an indigenous Community in Sri Lanka live in jungle areas such as Dambana, Pallebedda, Nilgala and Rathagala.