



General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 September 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Sixtieth session

8 September–3 October 2025

Agenda item 5

Human rights bodies and mechanisms

Written statement submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Towards a Declaration on Diversity: Advancing Indigenous Knowledge Systems and ‘Vivir Bien’ in a Plural Human Rights Framework

The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) affirms that universal human rights form a non-derogable floor. Yet the practical realisation of those rights is culturally situated. Where interpretation is applied in a single, universalist register, it can neglect civilisational nuance, collective identities and traditional institutions. This results in avoidable tensions for Indigenous Peoples, whose languages, knowledge systems, spiritual practices and land-based lifeways are essential to their dignity and wellbeing.

We therefore support a non-binding United Nations Declaration on Diversity, complemented by an annual United Nations Diversity Day, to sit alongside existing instruments and to encourage proactive, programme-led inclusion. The Declaration would neither dilute universal protections nor create competing standards. Rather, it would provide a voluntary framework that recognises plural pathways to realise rights—explicitly including Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and community philosophies such as Vivir Bien / Códigos del Vivir Bien—and promote policy coherence across sectors (health, environment, education, climate and digital).

SHRG’s own experience—in Sikh traditions of equality, pluralism and stewardship (exemplified by Langar and living in harmony with nature)—shows that societies become more resilient when participation is meaningful, diversity is normalised, and public services are organised to include rather than assimilate.

How a Declaration on Diversity Would Help Indigenous Peoples (From Commitment to Outcome)

Endorsing States would translate recognition into practice through clear, low-cost and measurable steps:

1. Participation and FPIC: Require meaningful participation and free, prior and informed consent in decisions affecting Indigenous lands and waters, medicines, languages, sacred sites and cultural expressions.
2. Indigenous-led programmes: Implement at least one Indigenous-led programme per year, co-designed with representative institutions—for example, integrating traditional medicine pathways; community guardianship of biodiversity; language access across courts, health and education.
3. Diversity & Indigenous Impact Assessments: Screen new laws, policies and projects for cultural impacts and adopt mitigation plans co-created with affected communities.
4. Protection of knowledge and sacred heritage: Establish administrative protocols for safeguarding traditional knowledge, protecting sacred sites and ceremonial objects, ensuring dignified access and—where appropriate—repatriation.
5. Language justice: Guarantee language services across public administration and ensure community-based language revitalisation and multilingual public information.
6. Policy coherence across regimes: Conduct regular reviews to align sectoral measures with human rights and biodiversity commitments, correcting rules and practices that inadvertently suppress ancestral lifeways.
7. Data, indicators and accountability: Report annually using indicators co-designed with Indigenous organisations, with disaggregation and community validation; share concrete results each year on Diversity Day to encourage peer learning.

These measures do not replace universal rights; they operationalise them in culturally appropriate ways and make institutions more responsive, predictable and fair.

Practical Focus Areas

- Traditional medicine and health: Safe integration of traditional practices with referral pathways, community-defined quality standards and protection of sacred knowledge.
 - Biodiversity and land stewardship: Support for customary sustainable use, community protocols and equitable benefit-sharing.
 - Education and public information: Curricula and campaigns that present diversity—including IKS and sacred perspectives—as a public good.
 - Multilingual public services: Constitutional and administrative arrangements for equal access to justice, health, education and participation.
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