

Committee: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Topic: Addressing and Combating Discrimination Against Indigenous Peoples in North America

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Position: Deputy President (former)

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Esteemed delegates of the Human Rights Council,

My name is Jack Sellwood Costy. I am in year ten at Champion School Athens, and this year I have the honour of serving as your Deputy President of the Human Rights Council, in the 7th Deutsche Schule of Thessaloniki Model United Nations.

During this conference, we will be discussing an issue of utmost importance to all peoples of North America, in The United States, Canada, and Mexico, and one which could impact both of those societies in the future. Discrimination in any form is a sentiment that should not be tolerated, and in this case, it is generated due to a difference in race between these two groups. During this conference, I hope that you will be able to bridge the differences between these two groups of people and form a new idea for the North American future, where there is a place for the Indigenous North American Tribe.

Model United Nations is where solutions should be found for today's issues by the young people of tomorrow. The ideas that are suggested and discussed at this conference could have a great impact on the world. This experience will teach you to think critically and act according to the situations that we face.

Should any questions require answering concerning the following study guide, your preparation, or anything else about the conference, I am contactable at the e-mail address: jsellwood@champion.edu.gr.

I look forward to meeting and working with you at this upcoming conference.

Yours sincerely,

Jack Sellwood Costy.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

This topic is of great importance to the indigenous and non-native peoples of North America and has been deliberated over many centuries. Each generation has had its method of dealing with this issue, but the overwhelming consensus is that something must be done. The Indigenous people of North America were those who pre-dated the British, French, and Spanish colonists of those areas, and those who were quashed by the aforementioned occupation.

This topic is one of great importance to, not only the native people of North America but also to the non-native population as it greatly affects the lives of both parties. With the vast amount of government funding necessary for reparations, healthcare, and other aspects of Native American life, this issue affects everyone.

With human lives in jeopardy at this moment, due to the discrimination and subsequent treatment of native populations, the time to act on this issue is now. Despite many current and historical efforts to find a permanent solution to this problem, the majority of them failed, resulting in a few minor gains, leaving the native population in a very unstable position.

For a solution to be found, direct action must be taken to end racism and discrimination against these populations. The people of North America must be educated on how to treat natives and with that, a solution can be found.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Indigenous:

'Refers to the people who originally lived in a place, rather than people who moved there from somewhere else'¹. In this case, the Indigenous people who lived on the North American continent before it was colonised by Europeans were the Native Americans, in Australia the Indigenous population is known as the Aboriginals, etc.

Discrimination:

'Treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way than how you treat other people, because of their race, gender, sexuality, etc.'²

American Indians:

'American Indian, member of any of the aboriginal peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Eskimos (Inuit and Yupik/Yupiit) and Aleuts are often excluded from this category because their closest genetic and cultural relations were and are with other Arctic peoples rather than with the groups to their south'.³

¹ ("DISCRIMINATION | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary")

² Cambridge dictionary - <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discrimination>

³<https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian> A history of disease, food and ideas.



1. 'Photograph of Chief Joseph and family, c. 1880, by F. M. Sargent - Washington State History Museum'⁴. An example of an American-Indian family

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Life Before colonists

The year 1492 brought the first instance of colonisation of the North American continent. Christopher Columbus sailed to America under the instructions of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain in search of the western Passage to India. On arrival, he perceived that it was India he had found, and called the natives Indians. Before this year, life was significantly different for the indigenous peoples of North America. Their lifestyle was substantially agrarian. It was generally nomadic, with people moving from season to season through multiple areas, and their diet revolved around hunting and farming.

Diseases brought on by Europeans

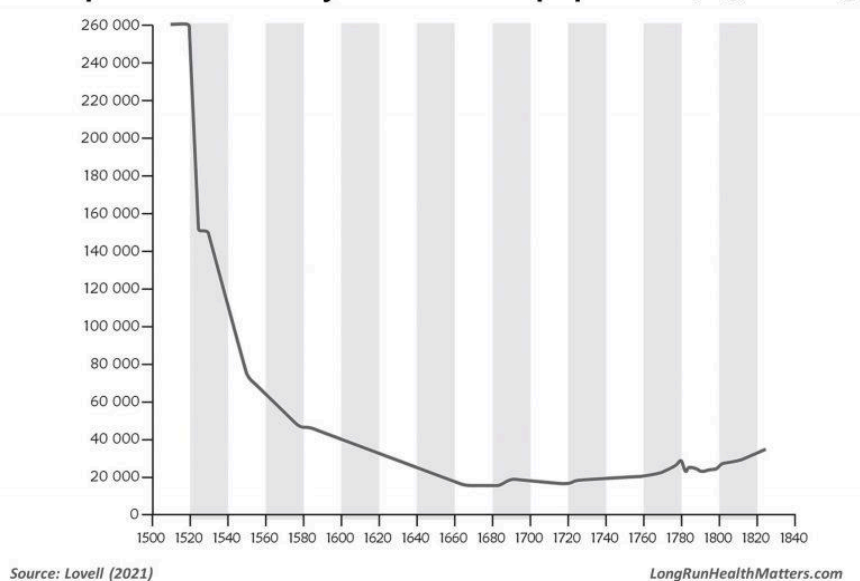
Furthermore, Europeans when colonising the continent for the first time transmitted deadly diseases and viruses that the Native Americans had no immunity to, as they had never experienced them. This meant that viruses such as smallpox, measles, typhus, and cholera were transmitted from European settlers to American Indians⁵, resulting in the deaths of around 95% of the native American population, or circa, i.e. 20,000,000 people.⁶

⁴ <https://www.bridgew.edu/stories/2023/united-states-treatment-native-americans> (image)

⁵ <https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/qian/resources/NunnQianJEP.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/qian/resources/NunnQianJEP.pdf>

Collapse and recovery of the Indian population, 1520-1825



2. A graph illustrating the rapid decline in the population of the native American people due to European diseases.⁷

Social Dynamic changes

With the occupation of much of the Native land as well as the illnesses transmitted to the Native American population, the social dynamics of the native American population were bound to change. With the great European powers scrambling to claim the New World, Native American tribes were often recruited to fight for one side or another, resulting in the separation and segregation of American Indian tribes, thus preventing them from working together against the common enemy. Moreover, it was a common practice for the winners of the battlefields to enslave the Native American allies of the defeated army and transport them to other lands, trading them as slaves. Essentially the slave trade allowed the constant displacement of Native Americans, an act that stripped Natives from the ability to group and retaliate. Hence, the social system of the Native Americans was effectively eradicated and replaced with the quarrels of European colonists and their impact on the native way of life.

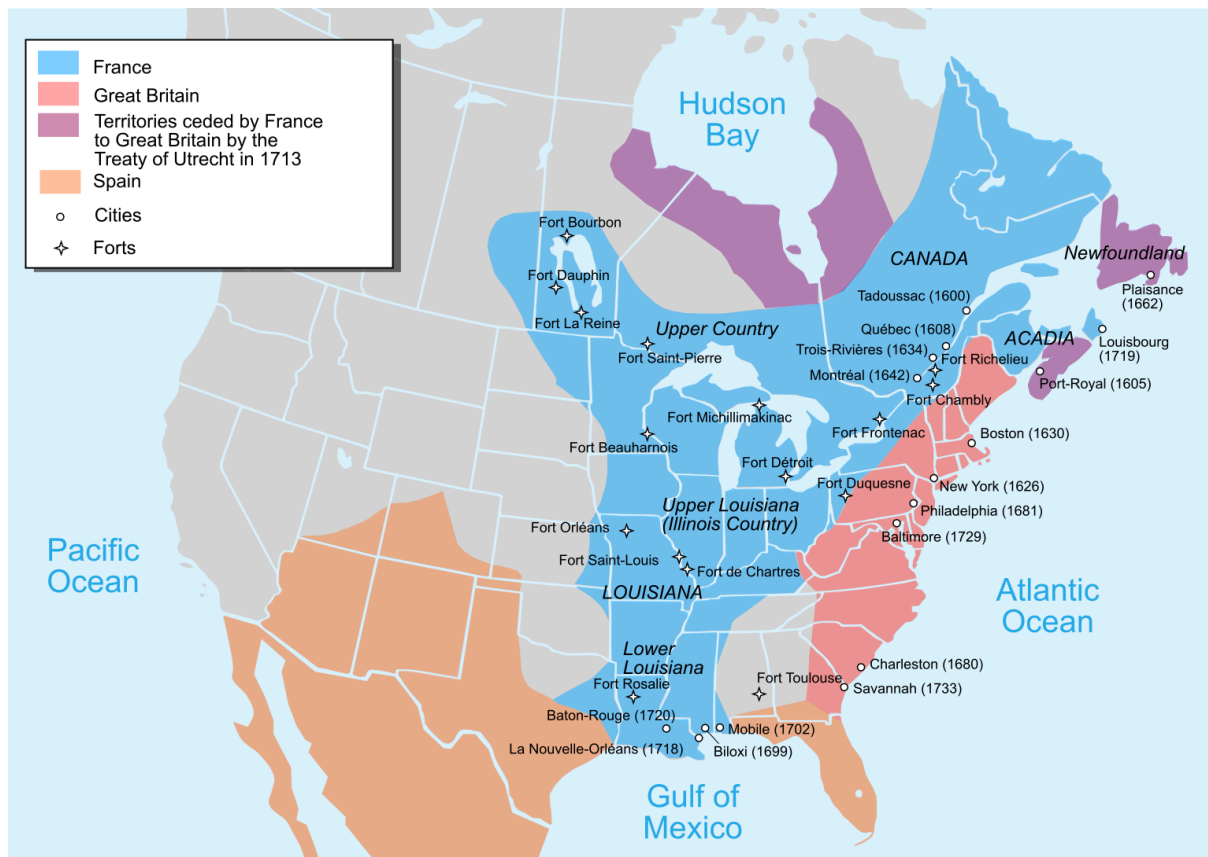
Land Ownership and the Change of the Native American Economy

The Native American concept of land ownership significantly differs from that of the European settlers. Native Americans considered themselves equal to the land and nature respecting their surroundings as if they were sentient, meaning no one could own land. Furthermore, to the native Americans, the definition of one's relative did not solely encompass one's familial relatives, but also the plant and animal life that the earth supports resulting in a harmonious relationship with nature. However, with the occupation of North America, land ownership

⁷<https://lrhmatters.com/drivers-of-health/epidemic-disease-and-indigenous-survival-in-colonial-latin-america> (Image)

became a driving force of all new powers in the area. The French, the Spanish, and the British fought several wars concerning the distribution and ownership of land in North America.

The Native’s approach to nature had prevented them from developing a way to protect their lands, as they had never considered land ownership and distribution. Thus, they had no means of protecting their land and themselves. This allowed the colonists to occupy territory almost unimpeded.



3. Map of the land distribution between the colonial powers in North America, and the date of colonisation.⁸

Forced Displacement of Native Americans:

Countries of North America have a lengthy history of adopting methods such as land displacement to transport Native Americans from one tract of land to another. In 1786, the United States of America set up its first native American reserve, compelling the Government to begin the process of migration of Native Americans. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson prompted legislation, forcing Native Americans to move to lands beyond the Mississippi River which at the time was not a part of the United States. The bill was opposed by the Cherokee tribe. However, the overwhelming support and signatories of the document allowed the bill’s

⁸ <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/ushistory1/chapter/134/> (image)

enforcement by 1838. During that year many tribes, including the Cherokees, were forced to migrate further to the west. This involved much blood spilled, and those who did survive had to march for a thousand miles to the agreed territory. Approximately 4,000 Cherokees died during this journey.



4. Map showing the forced migration of Native Americans to Oklahoma Territory.⁹

Forced Institutionalisation

All North American countries, after having attempted to eradicate Native Americans by other means, at some point turned to the use of institutions such as schools to remove any trace of the indigenous culture from them. Mexico was the first country to implement this solution with the Native Americans located around Tenochtitlan, the ancient capital of the Aztec Empire. Native children were sent to these schools to be educated in the manner of the occupying power as well as to disconnect them from their indigenous origins. The United States and Canada quickly followed suit resulting in several indigenous generations being entirely cut off from their native roots. These schools taught children how to be servants in white homes and to undertake other menial tasks. They were often violent and aggressive leading to the deaths of many of the students. Many refer to those forced into the schools as the ‘Lost Generation’.

Separation from communities

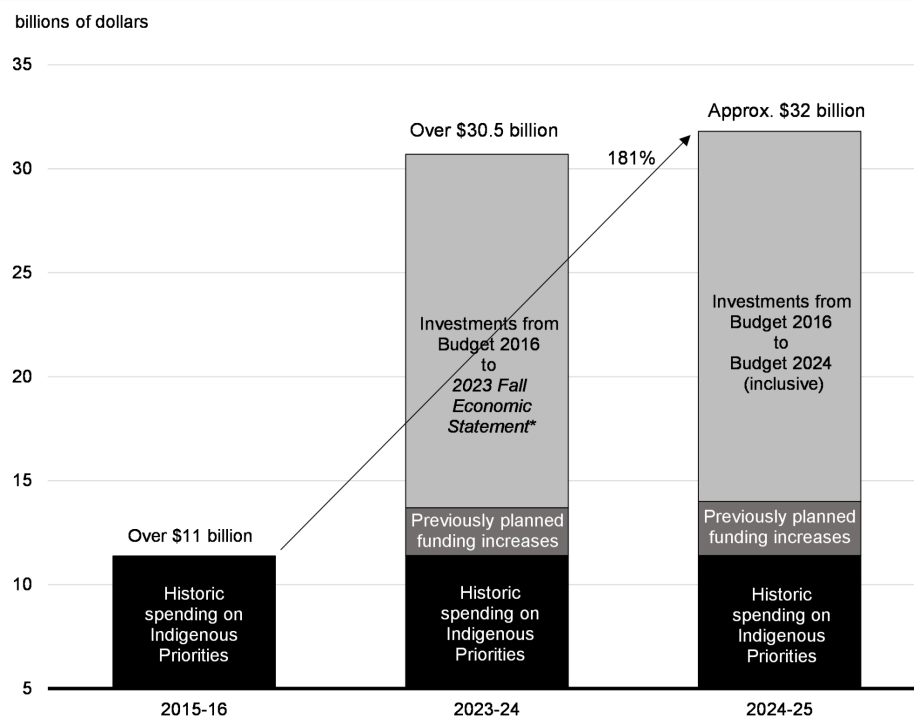
⁹ <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/media/trail-of-tears-map-18275/> Trail of tears map, (Image)

Due to the factors mentioned above, many Native Americans were separated from their original communities or found that their communities had been ‘moved, renamed, combined, dispersed, and, in some cases, destroyed’¹⁰. The years of upheaval due to the European colonies resulted in a complete change for the Native American people who, from being the only inhabitants of their areas, were transformed and diminished to the bottom of the social ladder, treated as such, and then cast aside to try and rebuild themselves.

Measures to protect Native Americans today

1. Enhanced budgets for tribal communities

In recent years, the amount of money being invested in the rehabilitation and re-institution of indigenous populations in America has increased significantly. In 2023, United States President Joseph Biden announced that the government would be spending a record amount of money on Native Americans that year with 4.4 billion US dollars going into the Department of the Interiors tribal program. Canada, too, has increased its financial support for Indigenous people by 181% since 2015¹¹ indicating a good direction for the future of Native Americans. In Mexico, too, many projects and government programs benefit the Indigenous population significantly. For example, Payments for Environmental Services in Mexico in the last ten years have seen the beneficiaries being 20% indigenous Mexicans.



5. Graph depicting investments in Indigenous priorities since 2015¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/native-american/#:~:text=The%20centuries%20that%20followed%20the.%2C%20in%20some%20cases%2C%20destroyed.>

¹¹ <https://budget.canada.ca/2024/report-rapport/chap6-en.html>

¹² <https://budget.canada.ca/2024/report-rapport/chap6-en.html>, Graph on Canadian spending

The Economic Situation of Native Americans Today

Due to historical factors already mentioned, as well as others such as the fact that Native Americans face more obstructions to quality education and professions or that Native American Households and Businesses can not as easily access credit and financing as other Americans. Native Americans are on the whole in a worse socioeconomic position than the average American. This can be seen in how the Native American population reacts to issues such as inflation which has caused 69% of Native Americans financial problems, or that 27% of the Native American population live in poverty.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Canada

In Canada, the Natives are separated into three distinct groups: The First Nations, The Inuits, and the Métis each with its distinct history and culture. They are also the fastest-growing population in Canada, with a 9.4% increase between 2016 and 2021 as well as the youngest population in Canada.

Mexico

Mexico too, has a substantial number of native cultures within its landmass which predate the European occupiers. Their population now represents 15.1% of the total population of Mexico. Some of the main challenges for the indigenous peoples of Mexico include a lack of recognition from the Mexican government and population, as well as being very vulnerable to diseases and other health issues.

The United States of America

The United States of America has a long and troubled history of indigenous populations and discrimination against them. Beginning in the 17th century, a conflict arose between colonists and natives. For many centuries native Americans were fought, discriminated against, and then forgotten about. Today the United States government, as well as many other organisations work toward conserving and repopulating the Indigenous people of the United States.

Organization of American States (OAS)

The Organization of American States has undoubtedly addressed the problem of discrimination against Native Americans. Different areas carry out specific tasks aimed at improving the protection and health of Native American communities. The inter-American human rights system further attempts to improve the rights of Native Americans and indigenous peoples of the Americas as a whole.

Native American Rights Fund (NARF)

The Native American Rights Fund helps Native American populations by providing them with 'adequate legal representation' in the United States Judicial system. It is a non-profit organisation and is funded by philanthropists.¹³

Many other International organisations for Indigenous peoples can be found here:

<https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/indigenous-human-rights-organizations/>

BLOCS EXPECTED

Bloc 1: Those who would integrate Indians into modern society and culture in North America.

This Bloc would consist of those countries that believe that maintaining a cultural separation from the people of North America while supplying necessary healthcare and education requirements is an unsustainable solution and that North Americans should be integrating and welcoming Indigenous populations into modern society.

Bloc 2: Those who would separate them from modern society to maintain their cultural specificity.

This Bloc would consist of those countries that believe in the importance of maintaining cultural heritage and continuing ancient traditions despite adversity. Those who believe that every economic and legislative measure should be taken to protect and encourage the Native populations.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS ¹⁴

Date	Description of event
1492	Christopher Columbus arrives in North America. And meets the Natives for the first time.
April 1513	Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon lands in North America and makes contact with the natives.

¹³<https://study.com/academy/lesson/native-american-rights-fund-definition-history.html#:~:text=The%20Native%20American%20Rights%20Fund%20is%20a%20non%2Dprofit%20organization,federal%20laws%2C%20and%20state%20policies>.NARF website

¹⁴ ("Native American History Timeline, <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-timeline>")

February 1521	Spanish explorer sets off from Spain again to begin a colony but is attacked soon after by the natives.
May 1539	Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto set off to conquer the land with help from captured natives.
1680	'A revolt of Pueblo Native Americans in New Mexico threatens Spanish rule over New Mexico.'
May 15, 1756	'The Seven Years' War between the British and the French begins, with Native American alliances aiding the French.'
1785	'The Treaty of Hopewell is signed in Georgia, protecting Cherokee Native Americans in the United States and sectioning off their land.'
May 28, 1830	'President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, which gives plots of land west of the Mississippi River to Native American tribes in land exchange that is taken from them.'
1838:	With only 2,000 Cherokees having left their land in Georgia to cross the Mississippi River, President Martin Van Buren enlists General Winfield Scott and 7,000 troops to speed up the process by holding them at gunpoint and marching them 1,200 miles. More than 5,000 Cherokee died as a result of the journey. The series of relocations of Native American tribes and their hardships and deaths during the journey would become known as the Trail of Tears.
1851:	Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, creating the Indian reservation system. Native Americans aren't allowed to leave their reservations without permission.
October 6, 1879	The first students attend Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, the country's first off-reservation boarding school. The school, created by Civil War veteran Richard Henry Pratt, is designed to assimilate Native American students.

January 29, 1907:	Charles Curtis becomes the first Native American U.S. Senator.
January 4, 1975	Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which reversed the termination policy of previous decades when American Indian tribes were disbanded, their land sold, and "relocations" forced Indians off reservations and into urban centers. The 1975 act provides recognition and funds to Indian tribes.
August 11, 1978	The American Indian Religious Freedom Act is passed, granting Native Americans the right to use certain lands and controlled substances for religious ceremonies.
October 11, 1980	President Jimmy Carter signs the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. The act grants Indian tribes, including the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Penobscot, \$81.5 million for land taken from them more than 150 years ago.
March 15, 2021	Representative Deb Haaland of New Mexico is confirmed as secretary of the Interior, making her the first Native American to lead a cabinet agency. "Growing up in my mother's Pueblo household made me fierce," Haaland Tweeted after her confirmation. "I'll be fierce for all of us, our planet, and all of our protected land."

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

General Assembly Resolutions on Indigenous Peoples

UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.¹⁵

This declaration essentially encompasses the rights of indigenous peoples to be equal with their non-native counterparts, but also to assert their difference from the non-native Americans. It further asserts that many of the actions that North American governments took to quash the native populations such as force assimilation, they had no right to do.

¹⁵https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

[A/77/460](#) Rights of Indigenous Peoples (15 December 2022)

This resolution effectively addresses the problems including human rights and the preservation of language and culture that indigenous peoples face. That as well as the inclusion of women and youth to a greater extent in the continuation of those projects concerning the topics above.¹⁶

[A/RES/76/148](#) Rights of Indigenous Peoples (16 December 2021)

This resolution focuses on the effect of COVID-19 on discrimination against Indigenous peoples, the protection of Indigenous women and girls from domestic violence, and having their rights stripped from them. It also expresses concern over the increasing number of endangered indigenous languages and the extension of just law to all indigenous people. Furthermore, it expresses the need for funds to preserve Indigenous culture and maintain the standard of living and calls for governments and non-governmental organisations to support the United Nations in this effort.¹⁷

[A/RES/75/168](#) Rights of Indigenous Peoples (16 December 2020)

This resolution reiterates the importance of protecting indigenous women from violence as well as preserving the ancient cultures of each of the Native American tribes. And their native languages therein. It further reiterates the importance of transnational businesses and other enterprises to respect the specific challenges that are faced by indigenous people.¹⁸

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

A first attempt to solve this issue can be seen in the cultural assimilation of native Americans. Between the 1790s and the 1920s, an attempt was made by the United States government to acculturate the minorities of the land. Figures such as George Washington and Henry Knox were very influential in the introduction and implementation of these methods. After the American-Indian wars, boarding schools were set up to educate the natives. Native children

¹⁶(“A/77/460”)

¹⁷(“A/RES/76/148”)

¹⁸(“A/RES/75/168 General Assembly”)

were obliged to attend these and learned, in English, about the church and European school topics.¹⁹²⁰

The provision of funds for the commitment to tribal nations and communities:

The United States, Canada, and Mexico have all allocated significant percentages from their budgets to reparations and land reconciliation for the Indigenous Peoples of North America. In 2023 President Biden's Office released a report stating: 'The Budget makes the largest annual investment in Tribal Nations in history through \$4.5 billion for the Department of the Interior's Tribal programs'. However, this investment has not resulted in major changes in the living conditions or discrimination against indigenous peoples.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Making sure that the public in each of the relevant countries is aware of the indigenous populations and the discrimination that they face is essential to solving the problem of discrimination. When a topic is not understood, it is often feared and if a topic is not known it cannot be understood. Furthermore, children and adults absorb prejudices and opinions from the media and those around them. If discrimination can be stopped within the household, at school, and in the media, there is less of a likelihood that they grow up with prejudices against Indigenous people.²¹

Create places for Indigenous people to inform the government and general public of any mistreatment they have received. This can include the implementation of a state office which can be contacted in the event of need for support or help due to discrimination. With many points of view and opinions, the problem can be effectively dealt with.

Supporting organisations that work toward the abolition of discrimination against Indigenous peoples. There are United Nations, government, and non-governmental projects and organisations, all working toward ending discrimination against Native Americans. By funding and otherwise supporting these organisations, further steps can be taken to prevent this problem.

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¹⁹ https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/#:~:text=Survivors%20recall%20being%20beaten%20and,a%20shockingly%20high%20death%20toll

²⁰ <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/cultural-assimilation-of-native-americans>

²¹ <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/5-ways-fight-hate-and-discrimination>

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