

Nepal's Participation in the UNPFII Conference, 2026

(April 20 to May 1)

A Short Report

Prepared by

Buddha Bahadur Gurung

Secretary, INC

The 25th conference on the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was held from April 20 to May 5 at the United Nations Headquarters, New York. This year's theme was "Ensuring Indigenous People's health, including in the context of conflict."

The UNPFII is a high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (EcoSoc) established on 28 July 2000 by resolution 2000/22.

The 25th conference was opened by the temporary Chair, the Assistant Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the Department of EcoSoc. Many of the delegates participated throughout the conference wearing their traditional indigenous attire. The opening session was followed by statements from the Secretary General of the United Nations, the President of the General Assembly, the Governor of Canada, the President of the EcoSoc and the Assistant Secretary General for the Policy Coordination and Inter-agency Affairs.

Members of the Permanent Forum, representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, UN bodies and entities, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations attended the session.

Nepal's participation

The conference provided Nepal with an important platform to present its perspectives and concerns regarding indigenous peoples to the international community. This year Mr. Gyanendra Pun, Member Secretary of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), and Mr.

Buddha Bahadur Gurung, Secretary of the Indigenous Nationalities Commission (INC) participated in the conference on behalf of Nepal Government.



On April 22, Nepal delivered her statement on the theme “Ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ health, including in the context of conflict.” The statement highlighted Nepal’s initiatives to address the specific needs of indigenous communities. These initiatives included a specialized health program to combat sickle cell anemia, which is particularly prevalent among the Tharu people community in the Terai region, as well as the provision of free health insurance and social protection schemes for the endangered indigenous groups.

In the statement, Nepal emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous peoples’ traditional healing practices, herbal medicine, and community-based wisdom with modern healthcare systems. Nepal further stressed that indigenous peoples’ right to health is fundamentally linked to their relationship with the land, water, and forests.

Nepal concluded its statement by reaffirming its unwavering commitment to strengthening dialogue, partnership, and cooperation with all partners to achieve the goals of the Agenda 2030 and ensure the health, well-being, and dignity of Indigenous Peoples in Nepal and beyond.

Side Events

Representatives of the Government of Nepal participated in a side event titled “*The Gen-Z Movement in Nepal: Intergenerational Pathways for indigenous Land Rights and State Conflict*” on April 23. The event was

organized by Rastriya Adiwasi Janajati Mahila Manch Nepal (National Indigenous Women Forum).

The speakers included Sabnam Lama (Nepal), Twisa Tripura (Bangladesh), Shohel Bajang (Indonesia), Ritu Thapa (INWOLAG, Nepal). The New York based journalist Ms. Machchhe Gurung moderated the event.



The speakers shared their experiences and perspectives on Gen Z movements and indigenous rights issues in their respective countries. The event concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session.

Other events

The delegates of the government of Nepal also held a meeting with Mr. Lok Bahadur Thapa, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN at his office in New York. Mr. Gurung and Pun also joined an interaction programme organized by Tamu (Gurung) Society, New York.



Conclusion

The 25th UNPFII conference represented a rare convergence of indigenous cultures, identities, and voices from around the world. The event provided an important platform for indigenous peoples to make their voices heard within the international community. At a time when many indigenous communities continue to face discrimination, disease, marginalization, and the erosion of their cultures and identities, such global forums have become increasingly relevant and necessary.

**United Nations Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
25th Session, 2026 (20 April to 1 May)
UN Headquarter, New York, USA**

**Madam Chair,
Distinguished UNPFII Members,
Excellencies.**

It is a distinct honour to represent Nepal at this 25th session of the UNPFII today.

We welcome the convening of this important Session under the timely and compelling theme “Ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ health, including in the context of conflict”.

For Nepal, a multi-cultural nation rich in diversity and resilience, this theme resonates deeply with our national priorities and lived realities.

Madam Chair,

Nepal is home to a vibrant mosaic of 142 castes/ethnicities, including 60 Indigenous Peoples recognized under the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act 2002.

Our Constitution has provisioned a Commission on Indigenous Peoples as a constitutional body mandated to work for dignity, inclusion and upliftment of the Indigenous Peoples.

Guided by domestic laws and international frameworks such as ILO Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Nepal remains committed to advancing the policies that safeguard their identity and traditions, meaningful participation in governance, and equal opportunities for shared prosperity.

In the health sector, we have undertaken targeted and inclusive measures to address the specific needs of Indigenous communities. These include a specialized health program against sickle cell anemia, particularly among the Tharu community of the Terai region, and the provision of free health insurance and social protection schemes for the endangered groups.

We recognize that health equity requires tailored responses that reflect cultural, geographic, and socio-economic realities.

Central to our approach is the integration of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge with modern health system. Traditional healing practices, herbal medicine, and community-based wisdom are not relics of the past—they are vital components of sustainable and culturally appropriate health systems.

We believe that indigenous peoples' right to health is not limited to hospitals and medicine—it is

fundamental to their relationship with the land, water, and forests.

Nepal's "One Health Approach" underscores the intrinsic link between human health, environmental stewardship, and cultural heritage.

Language and education remain critical pillars of well-being. We have started mother-tongue education at the primary level to protect and promote indigenous languages.

The Gandaki and Bagmati provincial governments have recognized the Magar, Gurung, Tamang, and Newari languages as official languages.

These efforts not only preserve linguistic heritage but also enhance access to education and health information, thereby strengthening community resilience.

Madam Chair,

Nepal's successful peace process has taught us that conflict, displacement and structural inequality disproportionately affect the Indigenous Peoples, particularly their physical and mental health.

In response, we are expanding access of Indigenous Peoples to basic and specialized health services in remote and conflict-affected areas, with a strong emphasis on mental health and psychosocial support.

The Government of Nepal has provided social security allowances on a monthly basis for the education, health, and livelihoods of 10 endangered indigenous communities, including Raute (nomad), Banakariya, and Kusunda, among others.

Our goal is to ensure that no community is left behind due to geography or historical marginalization.

The daunting challenges—from difficult terrain and climate vulnerabilities to resource constraints—persist.

Yet, our resolve remains steadfast to advance inclusive health systems that uphold the dignity and rights of all Indigenous Peoples.

In closing, Madam Chair,

Nepal reaffirms its unwavering commitment to strengthening dialogue, partnership, and cooperation with all partners to achieve the Agenda 2030 and ensure the health, well-being, and dignity of Indigenous Peoples at home and beyond.

I thank you.