

Tribal peoples

What does Survival mean by ‘tribal peoples’?

People who have lived in tribal societies for many generations. They are usually the original inhabitants of the places they live in, or at least they and their ancestors have lived there for a very long time. They provide mainly for themselves, living off their land by hunting, fishing, gathering or growing vegetables, or keeping animals. They are usually ‘minorities’: fewer in number than the other (non-tribal) peoples who are often their neighbours.

Their societies are distinct from those of non-tribal peoples – they often have a different language, customs and culture inherited from their ancestors, and think of themselves as being different from neighbouring peoples. They usually have a very strong spiritual attachment to their land.

Tribal peoples live in more than 60 countries, and number over 150 million individuals – this is a huge number, equal to more than half the population of the United States.

Are tribal peoples the same as indigenous peoples?

Not necessarily. ‘Indigenous peoples’ are all the original inhabitants of a country, but ‘tribal peoples’ are only those who live in distinct tribal societies. For example, all Aborigines in Australia are ‘indigenous’, but only some still live in tribal societies and see themselves as tribal people.

Laws about ‘indigenous peoples’ are concerned with indigenous minorities and always apply to tribal peoples.

What are the threats to tribal peoples?

Their land ownership rights are ignored, and all too often their lands are invaded: by settlers; by businesses such as oil, mining or logging companies; by cattle ranchers; by private or government ‘development’ schemes such as road-building and dams; or for nature reserves and game parks.

Disease can follow such invasions, and often proves fatal. The loss of their land can lead to hunger, ill health and depression. Tribal people are sometimes even imprisoned, attacked or killed to get them off their land.

This happens because some people wrongly see tribal people as ‘primitive’ or ‘backward’, and have racist beliefs that tribal people should not have the same rights as others. Such views are often behind attempts to ‘integrate’ peoples forcibly – almost always a disaster for the tribe. This happens all over the world – but tribal peoples are fighting back.

The law and tribal peoples

International law clearly says that tribal peoples own the lands they live on and use. Your country may also have its own laws about tribal peoples. National laws should not contradict international law, though in fact many do.

Your own country’s laws

Indigenous organisations should be able to provide copies of the relevant national laws and explain what they mean.

If not, ask the government (either the department that deals with indigenous peoples or the ministry of justice or law). Often such requests will be ignored. In that case, we suggest you carry on asking repeatedly.

International law

The two most important laws about tribal peoples are Conventions 107 and 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), part of the United Nations (UN). If your country has signed up to either of these conventions, then it is law in your country. More countries sign the newer Convention 169 (but not 107) all the time.

To the right is a list of those countries which have signed these conventions (at the time of printing), and important sections of their texts.

Even if your country has not agreed to these conventions, they can still be used to show your government what the international standards are, and to urge it to apply them.

What if your country’s laws disagree with international law?

You should point this out to the ministry of justice or law, preferably by writing. Such letters will often be ignored, but it is useful to send more letters repeatedly, to the most senior person responsible – the minister or even the president.

Can the United Nations help tribal peoples?

The United Nations (UN) is an association of national governments. Its main purpose is to prevent war between countries.

It can only help you a little, if at all. It will hear cases of violations of peoples’ rights by governments. But because it is controlled by governments, it is unlikely to take any action.

Survival can advise on using the UN, but results are only likely after a very long time (if at all). Do not expect the UN to be the solution to your problems.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (Convention 169)

Article 14 states: ‘The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognised’. It obliges governments to identify the lands and protect these rights.

Article 4 guarantees ‘special measures’ to protect tribal peoples and their ‘institutions, property, labour, cultures and environment’.

Article 5 ensures recognition and protection of their ‘social, cultural, religious and spiritual values and practices’.

Article 6 obliges governments to consult with tribal peoples on all ‘legislative or administrative measures’ affecting them, and establish ways for tribal peoples to participate in decisions made by government.

Article 7 ensures a right for tribal peoples to decide the priorities for any ‘development’ affecting them or their lands.

Article 8 guarantees respect for tribal peoples’ customs and laws.

Article 15 calls for protection of tribal peoples’ rights to their land’s natural resources, and states that, if the government retains the ownership of the mineral resources on tribal land, the people concerned must be consulted about and benefit from any exploitation of them, and be compensated for damage.

These countries have agreed to ILO Convention 169:

Argentina	Denmark	Mexico
Bolivia	Ecuador	Netherlands
Brazil	Fiji	Norway
Colombia	Guatemala	Paraguay
Costa Rica	Honduras	Peru

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (Convention 107)

Article 11 ‘The right of ownership, collective or individual, of the members of the populations concerned over the lands which these populations traditionally occupy shall be recognised.’

These countries have agreed to 107 but not yet to 169.

Angola	Ghana	Panama
Bangladesh	Guinea Bissau	Portugal
Belgium	Haiti	Syria
Cuba	India	Tunisia
Dominican Rep.	Iraq	
Egypt	Malawi	
El Salvador	Pakistan	

Survival has worked for tribal peoples in those countries written in bold, as well as in many others which have not agreed to either law.

Defending your rights

Survival has worked with hundreds of tribal communities and organisations worldwide – each is different and has its own approach. But here are a few issues and ideas that are raised by peoples all over the world.

Ideas for communities & their leaders

Your community should of course make its own informed decisions about the future and not be bullied by outsiders!

Most leaders consult with their people before doing or agreeing to anything. This is very important. Leaders often need to explain everything carefully and regularly, finding out what their people really want and making sure they fully understand events and the likely consequences.

Communities sometimes complain that they do not know what their leaders are doing – some leaders avoid this by giving their communities regular updates of events and, for instance, recording meetings onto audio tape.

The opinion of women may differ from that of men, and is just as important. It is helpful of course to listen to older people, who are more experienced. Young people may need to have the situation facing your people – and what is being done to improve the future – explained to them.

The key to your people’s survival is almost certainly your land. Some peoples have regretted giving it up and found the consequences, in the end, to be catastrophic.

New technology, such as radio transmitters or satellite phones, can be very helpful. It will become easier and cheaper to get computers, and so use email and the internet. Cameras, video and audio tape can also be used to record events.

Whatever happens, never give up!

Ideas for organisations & their leaders

People need to feel close to their organisation’s leaders, to see and talk with them often. Organisations become weak if leaders do not do and say what their people want.

Organisations dependent on just one leader risk serious problems if something happens to him or her. But organisations with too many leaders can be badly weakened by any disagreements. Many organisations fail because of internal disagreements.

It is dangerous when organisations become dependent on a funding source – particularly a company or government. Some find that funders start influencing decisions too much; others that they can’t continue if funding stops. Some of the most successful movements for tribal peoples’ rights use very little money.

Your representatives come under great pressure, needing to listen to your people’s views and present a unified force to outsiders. They may have to travel, which can be tiring and stressful, and need to be strong, honest and careful, as many are tricked, offered bribes or threatened.

Remember that most people outside will have little idea of how you live or what your problems are: it is important to explain things as clearly and briefly as possible.

How can governments & companies be persuaded?

For more than 30 years, Survival and indigenous and other organisations have been persuading governments and companies to stop violating tribal peoples’ land rights and human rights. (See some examples on other side.)

Under international law, tribal peoples own the lands they live on and use – this is a good place for negotiations to start. Quote the law and point out how it is being broken.

If a company is involved, write to its head and ask to see its policy about tribal peoples. It may not have one – but such a letter will make the company realise that you know what your rights are. If it does have such a policy and is violating it, write and tell the company head.

It is better to write, if you can, and keep writing, than to telephone. Keep copies of all the letters you write. In general, it is always a good idea to write to the most senior person you can, even to your country’s president.

Remember that governments often break the agreements they make. It is important to keep pressuring them until you see real changes in your situation. Governments and companies will not change their behaviour just because it is the right thing to do – they will usually only act if they feel forced to, so keep the pressure on!

What about using the press?

It is always useful to involve the media in your own country, if it is not controlled by government. Governments and companies can often be shamed by publicity into changing their behaviour.

If you want to use the press, keep writing to the editor of the principal newspaper. Decide how much you are willing to help them – for instance, giving photographs of your people in ‘traditional’ dress, if they ask for them. Papers are much more likely to publicise your case with a picture.

The press may have a foolish attitude to your problems and characterise your people as strange or ‘primitive’. Try not to be put off by this – they will eventually learn!

Survival International

What is ‘Survival’?

Survival International is an organisation set up in 1969 to promote and protect tribal peoples’ rights. Its offices are in Europe but it has staff from five continents and supporters in over 90 countries worldwide.

What rights does Survival uphold?

The main ones are the rights of tribal peoples to own, communally, the land and territory they have always lived on and used, and to choose how they wish to live.

How does Survival work?

It turns public attention onto governments and companies which are violating tribal peoples’ rights. Thousands of Survival supporters write letters to those in power and Survival ensures these cases attract press attention around the world. It educates the public that tribal peoples are not inferior or ‘primitive’, but just live differently from other peoples.

What sort of cases does Survival work on?

Survival generally seeks cases where the people are least able to get their voice heard by outsiders, and so need most help. These are often where a tribe has little contact with outsiders. It takes up cases where the people are victims of the worst violations.

Once a case has been adopted, Survival tends to work on it for a very long time – 20 years or more is not uncommon – until its specific goals have been met.

Can Survival fund projects?

This is not Survival’s principal activity. In some cases, Survival will look for funds for specific projects with tribal peoples (to assist their health care, education, marketing, organisations etc.). But you should not rely on this.

If you need funds for a project, you can contact Brot für die Welt, Christian Aid, Cordaid, ICCO, Trócaire and other agencies. Survival can help you contact them.

Who does Survival work with?

Survival is entirely independent of all other organisations but works closely with many – particularly organisations formed and run by tribal peoples themselves.

Some other organisations have similar names to Survival but are not in fact connected to us. You can recognise anything from the real Survival by its handprints symbol.

Who funds Survival?

Survival is the only large organisation working for tribal peoples all over the world which refuses to accept funds from any national government. It is funded by individual supporters and by some other charitable organisations. It also receives funds from some indigenous organisations.

Over the years, well over 250,000 people in nearly 100 countries have supported Survival. When Survival asks its supporters to write to governments and companies, thousands of letters are sent.

Does Survival make profit from its work?

No, Survival is a not-for-profit organisation. Its accounts are strictly controlled by independent auditors and by England’s Charity Commission. All its funds are used to further its work with tribal peoples.

Is Survival a religious organisation?

No. Survival pursues no religious objectives other than to support tribal peoples’ right to choose their own religions.

It works with missionaries who support tribal peoples’ rights, but opposes those who force their own beliefs on others.

Does Survival have any connection with any government or political party?

No.

Is Survival connected to any company?

No. It does sometimes meet with companies to make the case for tribal peoples’ rights, or accompany tribal people to meet with companies – but it is not connected to any company.

Survival does not accept funds from any company which violates tribal peoples’ rights or is likely to do so.

Does Survival represent tribal peoples?

No. Survival works to protect their rights and to repeat their concerns internationally, but it never negotiates or makes agreements in their name, nor does it claim to represent them.

The only exceptions are that Survival has sometimes been asked by the recognised representatives of a tribe – after extensive discussion with their people – to negotiate on their behalf about a specific situation or issue. An

example of this is when Survival is asked to represent a tribe to the UN.

Also, tribal representatives often use Survival’s special status at the UN to put their own cases, but speaking under Survival’s name.

Does Survival believe that tribal peoples should stay as they are?

No. Survival has no opinion about how tribal peoples should be in the future – it believes that they should be allowed to decide for themselves. Survival believes that tribal peoples – like all peoples – have always adapted to changing circumstances, and will continue to do so.

What information does Survival produce?

Survival produces books, bulletins and films about particular cases and our work in general, and audio tapes especially for tribal peoples. These are available free to all tribal people – contact us if you want to receive them.

Many tribal peoples use these materials to take part in campaigns for other peoples, writing letters, signing petitions, or just expressing support.

How should tribal peoples make use of Survival?

Let Survival know of what is happening in your area. All information is carefully studied. If Survival takes up your case then it is especially important to keep Survival informed, giving as many facts as possible.

It is not possible for Survival to take on all cases – but please keep in contact, and we may be able to help in the future.

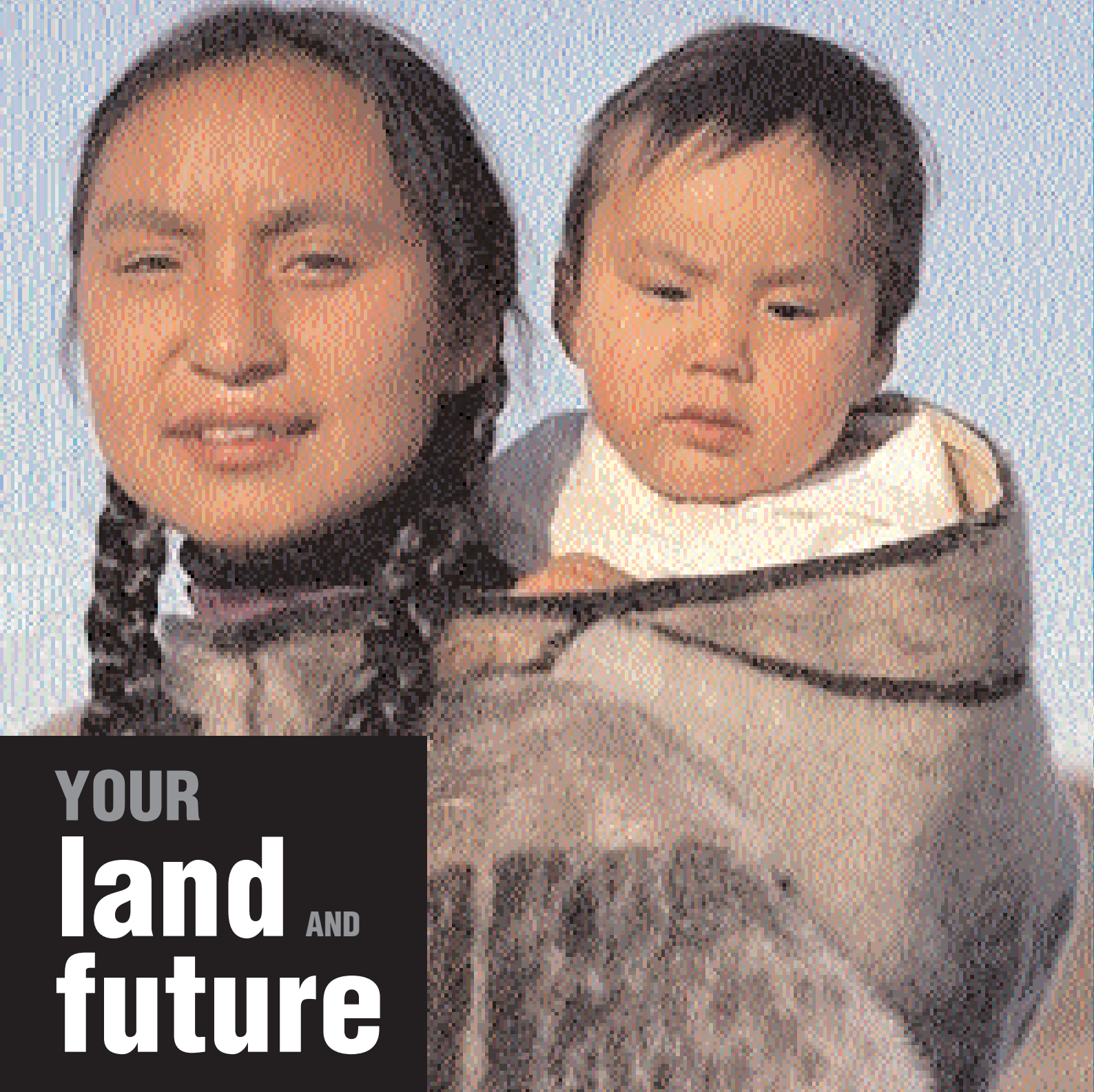
Tell others about Survival’s existence, and what it is and does, and give them copies of this poster.

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Survival





How can you contact Survival?

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This poster is for you to display in your community, such as in your health post, school or community centre. It is free and not to be sold. If you know of others who would like to receive it, or would like a copy on tape or in another language, please let us know.



www.survival-international.org



**YOUR
land AND
future**

SURVIVAL

Survival is a worldwide organisation supporting tribal peoples. It stands for their right to decide their own future and helps them protect their lives, lands and human rights. Survival works with peoples across five continents, campaigning for their rights and offering to help them in their struggle to survive.



JARAWA

In India, a road cut through the land of the isolated Jarawa, bringing settlers and disease. Government plans to settle the tribe risked causing more deaths. But after a campaign by Survival and local organisations, courts ordered that the plans be abandoned, the road closed, and the settlers removed.

BARABAIG

Barabaig women in Tanzania, Africa, were beaten and imprisoned for gathering discarded grain on the huge farms that had taken over their land. A Survival campaign led to their release.

KHANTY

Survival supporters wrote thousands of letters in support of the Yugan Khanty people of Siberia, Russia, whose land was threatened by oil companies. The authorities responded by banning oil and gas companies from invading and drilling in the tribal area for at least five years.

YANOMAMI

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Yanomami in Brazil suffered invasions of settlers and gold miners. With their support organisation CCPY, Survival began a 20-year campaign to secure their land. Brazil's government was eventually forced to recognise the whole Yanomami territory.

YORA

When the oil company Mobil began exploring in the land of uncontacted tribes in Peru, Survival and FENAMAD, a local indigenous organisation, began a campaign, sending thousands of letters to the company, and holding demonstrations. After two years, the company pulled out.

TRIBES AROUND THE WORLD HAVE SECURED THEIR FUTURE BY WINNING RECOGNITION OF THEIR RIGHT TO OWN THEIR LAND.