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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), 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.

[16 August 2026]

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



Closing the Gap Between Education Rights and Reality for Indigenous Women and Girls

Graduate Women International (GWI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1947, has a 108-year commitment to advancing the right to safe, quality education and lifelong learning for women and girls.

GWI acknowledges that the education rights of Indigenous women and girls are well established. Their full realization is not. Despite important work by the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), a persistent gap remains between international recognition and the lived reality of Indigenous women and girls. GWI calls for renewed, sustained and accountable action to close this gap.

GWI calls on the HRC to give renewed and continuous attention to the right to education of Indigenous women and girls across the full education continuum.

GWI recognizes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the significant contribution of the EMRIP in providing expertise to the Council, identifying good practices and supporting implementation of the Declaration. GWI particularly welcomes approaches that place the knowledge, experience and meaningful participation of Indigenous people at the center of decisions affecting women and girls' right to education.

These advances provide a strong foundation. They also make the persistent gap more visible.

The question is no longer whether Indigenous women and girls have a right to education. That right is firmly established by the HRC and EMRIP. Nor is the question whether the barriers they face are known. They have been repeatedly documented throughout the United Nations mechanisms and by civil society organizations such as GWI.

The question GWI is asking the HRC is whether realization of that right is receiving the uninterrupted, targeted, and accountable attention it requires from the United Nations, its HRC and other mechanisms.

This question is particularly timely in 2026, ten years after the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was dedicated to Indigenous Peoples' Right to Education. Subsequent themes have rightly addressed other critical dimensions of Indigenous rights, including Indigenous women's role in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge, Indigenous youth and self-determination, Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact, artificial intelligence (AI) and, in 2026, Indigenous midwives and safeguarding life and well-being. [1]

Education runs through each of these thematic issues. The transmission of traditional knowledge requires intergenerational learning. Self-determination requires access to knowledge and education. Preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures requires education systems that respect and incorporate them. Equitable participation in AI requires digital access, literacy and skills. Preservation of Indigenous health knowledge requires recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems alongside access to formal education and lifelong learning.

Education must therefore be understood as an enabling right through which Indigenous women and girls exercise many other rights, including those related to culture, language, health, economic participation, leadership, decision-making and self-determination.

GWI has raised these concerns consistently for more than a decade. Its 2013 Policy Resolution on Education for Indigenous Peoples called for culturally appropriate education, adequate funding, infrastructure, technology and implementation of UNDRIP.[2]

In its written statement to the HRC36 in 2017, GWI drew attention to unequal access to quality and culturally appropriate education for Indigenous girls and identified linguistic and cultural exclusion, discrimination, unsafe journeys to school, gender-based violence,

inadequate sanitation, early marriage and pregnancy, and unequal domestic responsibilities among the barriers to education. [3]

At the HRC51 in 2022, GWI again addressed inequalities experienced by Indigenous Peoples through education, emphasizing the continuing gap between rights established under UNDRIP and their implementation at national level and specifically recalling the work of EMRIP. [4]

Nearly a decade later, and despite continued international advocacy, many of the barriers identified then continue to impede the education of Indigenous women and girls. Their persistence raises a critical question for the HRC: how long can well-established rights remain unrealized before recognition is matched by measurable implementation and accountability?

GWI recognizes that UNDRIP provides a clear normative foundation that the HRC commits to uphold. Article 14 recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, to education in their own languages and culturally appropriate methods, and to access all levels and forms of State education without discrimination. Articles 13 and 15 protect language, culture, histories and knowledge, while Article 44 guarantees the rights recognized in the Declaration equally to women and men.[5] But the strength of this normative framework must ultimately be measured by the extent to which these rights are realized in practice, which remains the concern of GWI.

Additionally, GWI urges the HRC to recall and recommit to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls that recognizes the intersecting discrimination they experience and addresses barriers to education. [6]

The normative framework is substantial. Implementation remains GWI's central concern.

For Indigenous women and girls, the right to education cannot be measured solely by enrollment. It requires safe access, attendance, retention and completion, and culturally and linguistically appropriate education that respects Indigenous identity and knowledge. It extends through secondary and higher education, technical and vocational education, STEM, digital education, adult education and lifelong learning.

Measuring implementation also requires data capable of revealing inequalities that aggregate education statistics can obscure, while respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights in the collection and use of those data.

GWI welcomes the increasing attention within the HRC and EMRIP to meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous women and girls must participate in defining the education they need, rather than solely receive education policies designed for them.

Building on existing HRC work and established international human rights standards, GWI recommends that the HRC:

1. Undertake a dedicated follow-up study on the right to education of Indigenous women and girls, assessing progress since its earlier work on education and identifying implementation gaps under UNDRIP and CEDAW General Recommendation No. 39. The study should examine the full education continuum and conclude with measurable recommendations, indicators and examples of effective State practice.
2. Establish an HRC accountability framework for the education rights of Indigenous women and girls, requiring States to demonstrate progress through measurable outcomes, allocated resources and implementation timelines, with unresolved recommendations tracked and revisited through subsequent HRC processes until action is demonstrated. Where repeated reporting cycles show no measurable progress, States should be required to identify the reasons for non-implementation, specify corrective measures, designate the responsible authority and establish a time-bound remedial plan.
3. Adopt adequately financed national implementation plans with measurable targets, timelines and responsible authorities, supported by identifiable budget allocations and public

expenditure reporting sufficient to demonstrate that resources designated for Indigenous women and girls reach the communities and education programs for which they were intended.

4. Require implementation strategies to address the specific barriers that cause Indigenous girls to leave or be excluded from education, including distance and safe transportation, gender-based violence, child and forced marriage, adolescent pregnancy, period poverty and sanitation, unpaid care responsibilities, disability, poverty and digital exclusion. National plans should identify which barriers are most significant within Indigenous communities and allocate resources accordingly.

5. Call upon States to guarantee culturally and linguistically appropriate education through concrete measures, including Indigenous-language instruction where communities seek it, recruitment and training of Indigenous teachers, curricula developed with Indigenous Peoples that accurately represent their histories and knowledge systems, and pathways allowing Indigenous women and girls to progress into secondary, higher, technical and professional education without relinquishing their linguistic or cultural identity.

6. Develop a core set of education indicators capable of making inequalities affecting Indigenous women and girls visible, including enrollment, attendance, dropout, completion, transition to secondary and higher education, literacy, STEM and ICT participation and digital access. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age, Indigenous status, disability and location where appropriate, while collection, ownership, governance and use must respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and participation.

7. Create structured mechanisms for Indigenous women and girls to participate directly in education decision-making and HRC processes concerning their rights, including consultations before policies are adopted, representation in monitoring and evaluation, opportunities to submit evidence on implementation, and accessible channels through which Indigenous women and girls can identify barriers and propose solutions. Their participation should be documented in resulting recommendations and reports should identify which recommendations from Indigenous women and girls were incorporated, which were not, and the reasons for those decision.

GWJ stands ready to contribute its education expertise and global experience to implementation of the seven recommendations. The measure of progress will be clear: Indigenous women and girls must be able to exercise their right to safe, quality education and lifelong learning fully, equally and in ways that respect their identities, knowledge and aspirations. Their right to education must become their lived reality.

[1] International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples previous themes.

<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples>

[2] GWJ Policy Resolution 9/2013. <https://graduatewomen.org/members-login/constitutional-material/resolutions/education-indigenous-peoples-2013-no-9/>

[3] GWJ HRC36 statement. 2017. <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Graduate-Women-International-HRC36-Official-Written-Statement-Submission.pdf>

[4] GWJ HRC51 statement. 2022. https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Graduate-Women-International-HRC51_reducing-IP-inequalities-through-education_FINAL.pdf

[5] UNDRIP 2007. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

[6] CEDAW General Recommendation 39. 2002. https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/CEDAW_C_GC_39-EN.pdf