

Indigenous Commission Report, January 2025-June 2026

Submitted by Hilary N. Weaver, Global Commissioner

Commission membership

The Indigenous Commission consists of six members: Hilary Weaver (Global Commissioner from the United States), Pamela L. Begay (from the United States representing the North American region), Carole Tana-Tepania (from Aotearoa/New Zealand representing the Asia and Pacific region), Charles Rutikanga (from Rwanda representing the African region), Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek (from Sweden representing the European region), and Daniel Flores (from Argentina) who filled the position of regional representative from Latin America and the Caribbean in early 2026 that had been vacant in 2025.

Progress and achievements

The Indigenous Commission has developed a schedule of meetings that occur every other month. Each year we develop an annual workplan that identifies tasks, timeframes, and members of the commission who will take the lead on each project. This workplan provides a focus and structure for our work.

As Global Indigenous Commissioner, Hilary Weaver participates in regular meetings with other Global Commissioners. This provides an opportunity to facilitate collaborations across commissions. It enables us to learn from and replicate their models, as we see fit. Likewise, other commissions adopt or adapt our practices, as they see fit, and seek out collaborative opportunities. We also recognize that the Indigenous Commission may develop distinct ways of operation based on our values, accountabilities, priorities, and protocols as Indigenous people, as we identify how all peoples may benefit from integration of Indigenous Knowledges, norms, practices, values, and skills in service delivery, locally and globally. The Global Commissioner has also participated in regular meetings with the Secretary General and interim Secretary General of IFSW to ensure that the work of the Indigenous Commission is in alignment with IFSW goals and strategies and to apprise IFSW leadership of developments and opportunities identified by members of the Indigenous Commission.

The Global Indigenous Commissioner has been involved in significant collaborative work with other Global Commissioners as well as IFSW staff to operationalize and implement the terms of reference that were passed by the IFSW Executive at the beginning of 2025. These efforts are resulting a more robust and collective model of work. The Indigenous Commission developed a Concept Note describing the focus of the Commission and a role description for regional representatives. The regional representative role description was integrated into a vacancy announcement to fill the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) representative slot on our

commission. The call for applications opened in August 2025, the appointment process was a collaborative effort that involved the Global Indigenous Commissioner, LAC regional leadership, and members of the IFSW Secretariat. This process resulted in appointment of a new LAC Regional Representative on the Indigenous Commission in February 2026.

Highlights for the Indigenous Commission during 2025 and the first half of 2026 include participating in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues twice, participating in conferences in Canada and Norway, having a commission abstract accepted for a workshop at the SWSD conference in Nairobi, issuing five statements through IFSW to commemorate key days, and exploring collaborative opportunities with other IFSW commissions and external entities.

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and international conferences



The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) takes place annually in New York City and the Indigenous Commission has always identified participating in this event as a priority. In 2025 the UNPFII theme was *Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within United Nations Member States and the United Nations system, including identifying good practices and addressing challenges*. The increasing costs associated with participating in the UNPFII and the lack of a Commission budget led to this being the first year since the inception of the commission that we did not offer a side event during the Forum. The Global Commissioner attended sessions for the first four days (self-funded) and met with the Executive Director of the Indigenous organization Cultural Survival to explore possible collaborative opportunities.

The 25th session of the UNPFII took place in 2026, with the theme, *Ensuring Indigenous Peoples' Health, including in the Context of Conflict*. The Indigenous Commission developed a statement on this topic that was entered into the record of the Forum. The 2026 UNPFII was attended by

Global Indigenous Commissioner Hilary Weaver (self-funded) and European Regional Representative Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek, who received travel support from her region that enabled her participation. A version of the Indigenous Commission's statement with an introductory preface was released by IFSW shortly after the Forum and can be found here: <https://www.ifsw.org/statement-social-workers-roles-in-ensuring-indigenous-peoples-health/>. While attending the UNPFII, Commission members also explored collaborative opportunities with the NGO Cultural Survival and the Rousseau Foundation that are described in more detail below.

The Indigenous Commission offered a 90-minute workshop at the International Indigenous Voices in Social Work (IIVSW) conference held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada August 12-15, 2025. Four members of the Indigenous Commission (Pamela L. Begay, North American Regional Representative, Carole Tana-Tepania, Asia Pacific Regional Representative, Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek, European Regional Representative, and Hilary Weaver, Global Commissioner) attended the conference and participated in the workshop. The IIVSW conference draws Indigenous social workers from around the world as well as some non-Indigenous allies committed to Indigenous issues. The Indigenous Commission saw this conference as an ideal opportunity to highlight the work of IFSW and to gather information from conference participants to inform the work of the Commission. Workshop participants were very interested in establishing communication channels with the Commission. Participants noted the importance of the Commission advocating for changes in colonial systems and how Indigenous leadership can help redefine paradigms and shape the future of social work.



Pamela L. Begay, Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek, Hilary Weaver, & Carole Tana-Tepania at the IIVSW conference (in front of the screen); Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek (at the desk)

The Indigenous Commission also contributed to the IFSW European Regional conference held in Oslo Norway October 6-8, 2025. Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek, the European Regional Representative, received support to participate in the European Delegate meeting that occurred prior to the regional conference. Her presence in the Delegates meeting allowed her to meet and participate in discussions with other regional delegates, providing an opportunity to share information about the Indigenous Commission and receive feedback from delegates about our work. During the meetings and conference in Oslo, and the conference extension in Alta, Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek had an opportunity for to learn more about the region she represents and form ongoing connections with Sámi social workers in Norway as well as other IFSW members and leadership.

The theme of the European Regional conference was *Bridging Communities: Building Sustainable Futures* with one of the conference subthemes being *Indigenous Wisdom and Environmental Stewardship*. The Indigenous Commission's European Regional Representative and Global Commissioner worked with leadership of the European region to secure two prominent keynote speakers. Miriama Scott, an esteemed Māori social work leader delivered a keynote address on the first day of the conference entitled, *Sustainability is Custodianship: It is not a Responsibility; it is an obligation*. On the closing day of the conference, Michael Yellow Bird a prominent Native American scholar and member of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation delivered the keynote address, *The Power of Ceremony: Indigenous Contemplative Practices, Neurodecolonization, and the Medicine Wheel*. Additionally, the Indigenous Commission offered a workshop in which Miriama Scott offered reflections on the circumstances that led to establishing the Indigenous Commission, Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek described the work of the IFSW Indigenous Committee that was a predecessor to the Commission, Hilary Weaver described the Commission's current work, and Michael Yellow Bird offered reflections on how participation of Indigenous social workers has evolved in national and international social work organizations. The presentations concluded with Roy-Arne Varsi from the Norwegian Sámi Association Sámi Sosialbargiid Searvi sharing his perspectives on their work with Sámi communities and visions of collaborative future work. A robust discussion with the audience followed the presentations.



Presenters at the Indigenous Commission session at the IFSW European Regional conference: Miriama Scott, Hilary Weaver, Margaretha Karlberg Uttjeck, Roy-Arne Varsi, and Michael Yellow Bird.

The IFSW European Regional conference was followed by a two-day post-conference extension in Alta Norway. The theme of the post-conference was *Indigenous Social Work in the North* and was attended by commission members Margaretha Karlberg Uttjek and Hilary Weaver. The opening keynote address, *Reclaiming our Voices- Indigenous Resilience*, was offered by Hilary Weaver on October 9, 2025.

The International Indigenous Voices in Social Work conference held in Calgary and the IFSW European Regional conference held in Oslo each gave the Indigenous Commission a platform to raise awareness about our work and engage in dialogue with social workers from around the world. We see participating in conferences like this as an important opportunity to further our work. The Indigenous Commission has an abstract accepted to present a workshop at the 2026 Social Work and Social Development conference and looks forward to connecting with conference participants in Nairobi.

Statements

The Indigenous Commission developed four statements that were published by IFSW during 2025 and another published in June 2026 (in addition to the UNPFII statement noted above). These statements call attention to important issues within Indigenous communities around the world. They serve an educational purpose and are a “call to action” to mobilize social workers to address critical issues. Beyond raising awareness and calling for action, these statements provide social workers with resources and tools for their work, indicating how they can continue to expand their knowledge on these topics. Our statements have been used in schools of social work and have been seen by external entities such as foundations that have common interests and reached out to us to explore collaborative opportunities.



The Indigenous Commission issued a statement to recognize International Water Day, March 22. The statement describes the significance of water for Indigenous Peoples and for all of us in our shared world. The statement goes on to describe some of the responsibilities that Indigenous Peoples carry for water, actions that social workers have taken, and our shared path forward. The statement can be found at <https://www.ifsw.org/ifsw-indigenous-commission-statement-for-world-water-day-2025/>.

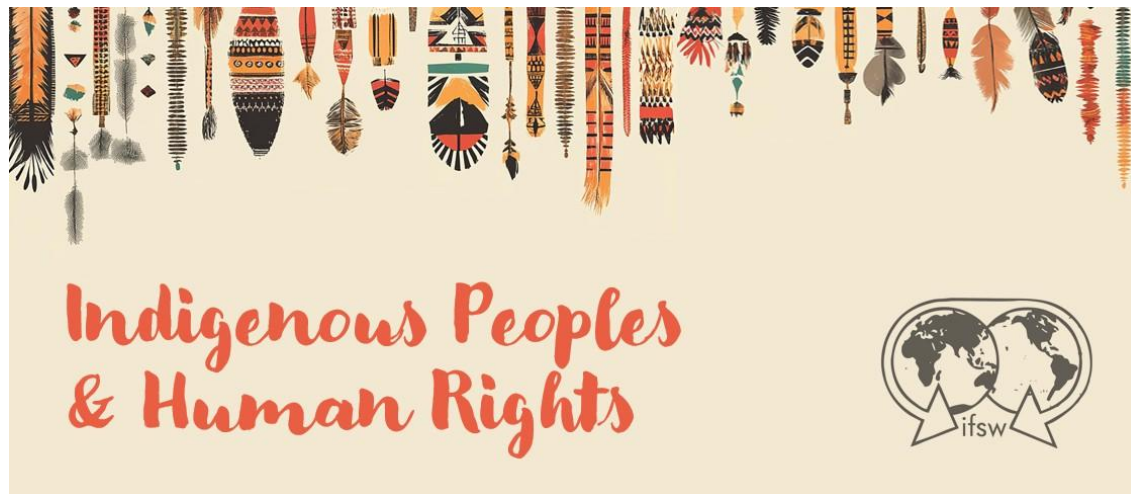


Each year the Indigenous Commission offers a statement in honor of World Indigenous Peoples Day, August 9. The 2025 statement drew on the theme, *Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination: A pathway for food security and sovereignty*. The statement describes how Indigenous Peoples have historically sustained themselves through deep, reciprocal relationships with their lands and traditional foods, calling on social workers to stand with Indigenous Peoples for food sovereignty, upholding their inherent right to self-determination, and recognizing the profound connection between traditional foods, culture, health, and wellbeing. The statement can be accessed at <https://www.ifsw.org/indigenous-peoples-right-to-self-determination-a-pathway-for-food-security-and-sovereignty/>.



The Indigenous Commission issued a statement to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons, October 1. The statement describes the significant roles that Elders play in their communities around the world, highlighting opportunities for social workers to enhance the wellbeing of Elders, draw on their strengths, and act in support of Elders' rights, aspirations, inclusion, and transmission of Indigenous Knowledges. The statement can be accessed at

<https://www.ifsw.org/international-day-of-older-persons-2025-older-persons-driving-local-and-global-action-our-aspirations-our-wellbeing-our-rights/>.



On the global observance of Human Rights Day, December 10th, the Indigenous Commission issued a statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of the IFSW policy statement on Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights, noting that IFSW passed this policy articulating how upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples was firmly grounded within the social work profession's value system years before the United Nations finalized and passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007. The commemorative statement describes the process of developing the IFSW policy, an overview of its contents, and the significance of this policy. The original policy can be accessed at <https://www.ifsw.org/indigenous-peoples/>. The commemorative statement can be accessed at <https://www.ifsw.org/commemorating-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-ifsw-policy-statement-on-indigenous-peoples-human-rights>.



In 2026, the Indigenous Commission issued a statement to celebrate World Environment Day, June 5. The statement describes the deep relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Earth, highlighting how this connection and its associated responsibilities are tied to the core mission of social work. Social workers understand that environmental justice is inseparable from social, economic, and human rights. When ecosystems are disrupted, destroyed, or stolen, it is the most vulnerable communities who face the immediate consequences: climate displacement, poverty, severe health crises, and social conflict. To stand up for human wellbeing means standing up for the defenders of the Earth. The statement can be accessed at: <https://www.ifsw.org/ifsw-indigenous-commission-statement-on-world-environment-day>

Opportunities for collaboration

The Indigenous Commission remains committed to collaborating with other IFSW Commissions on areas of shared interest. As a follow up to previous conversations with members of the IFSW Education Commission, the Indigenous Commission developed a proposal for a pilot survey to begin to identify how social work education programs integrate Indigenous Knowledges in their curricula. While both Commissions remain committed to this collaborative venture, limited capacity has slowed our ability to move forward with this initiative.

The Indigenous Commission continued its collaborations with the IFSW UN Commission in 2025 and 2026, particularly around exploring the feasibility of in-person participation of Indigenous Commission members at the UNPFII in New York City. In both 2025 and 2026 the Global

Commissioner met with members of the IFSW UN team based in the New York area about ways to strengthen communication and participation in the future. Following the recent appointment of a new North American Regional Commissioner for the UN Commission, the Global Indigenous Commissioner reached out and the two held a productive in-person meeting on strengthening our collaborative work, including regular meetings to facilitate participation of Indigenous Commission members in UN events. Follow up continues with periodic online meetings and connecting in person at the UNPFII in 2026.

In recognition of the longstanding commitment of members of the North American based branch of the IFSW UN Commission to the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples, even prior to development of the Indigenous Commission, we issued a statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of the IFSW policy statement on Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights. This organizational policy was drafted and moved forward by members of the UN Commission based in the New York City area and is described in the previous section.

In addition to regular online meetings, Global Commissioners periodically share their work and ask for feedback. For example, in March 2026 the Global UN Commissioner and Asia Pacific Regional UN Commission Representative sought feedback on a draft policy paper on *care economies and care and support systems*, asking for input from Indigenous perspectives. The draft paper was circulated to all members of the Indigenous Commission and the Global Indigenous Commissioner offered comments that were well received.

As noted above, members of the Indigenous Commission inform the work of IFSW beyond the work of the commissions. For example, members of the Indigenous Commissions helped with planning the 2025 European Regional IFSW conference and participated in sessions. In addition to the commission session highlighted above, the Global Indigenous Commissioner supported the conference by participating in a plenary panel on “Green and sustainable social work”.

The Indigenous Commission continues to explore collaborative opportunities with the NGO Cultural Survival. The Global Commissioner met with their Executive Director at the UNPFII in 2025 and 2026. These connections have led to two articles written by Indigenous Commission members that will be published in Cultural Survival Magazine’s special issue on health and wellbeing in June 2026. The Global Commissioner has provided their Executive Director with information on the work of the commission including our statements and 2025 year-end report as we explore additional collaborative opportunities.

Based on the statements that the Indigenous Commission has published on the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), a representative of the Rousseau Foundation reached out to IFSW. This resulted in an online meeting between the foundation representative and the Global Indigenous Commissioner exploring how members of our Commission could be involved with an event they are planning in New York City in September 2026. Information about the event was shared with all Commission members and a follow up in-person meeting was held in New York City between the foundation representative, the Global Indigenous

Commissioner, and the European Regional Commissioner. They have invited us to speak on at their MMIW event and at least two members of the Indigenous Commission hope to participate, pending funding support from the foundation.

The work of our commission is guided by Indigenous priorities and values of relationality and accountability. For the Indigenous Commission, we hold dual accountabilities; not only to IFSW leadership of the regions we represent but we also embrace an ethical mandate to Indigenous Peoples within those regions. During 2025 we deepened our working relationship with leadership in the Latin American and Caribbean region through the collaborative process of appointing a LAC representative to our Commission and we look forward to strengthening this relationship. Likewise, we deepened our working relationship with leadership of the European region through our support of their 2025 conference and the face-to-face conversations that happened in Oslo and Alta. We look forward to ongoing opportunities to connect with leadership from all regions of the world and the relationships that will be strengthened through our common work in Nairobi and beyond. The commission is also working to develop deeper relationships with Indigenous social workers around the world with the hope that these relationships will inform our work.

The European Regional Representative has maintained ongoing contact with Sámi social workers in Norway following networking opportunities that occurred at the IFSW European Regional conference in 2025. As these connections are growing, she has been invited to present on the work of the Indigenous Commission at the Sámi social workers association's annual meeting in Alta, Norway in the first week of June 2026.

Challenges

The Indigenous Commission faces several challenges in our work. Limited capacity affects our ability to take on projects. Throughout 2025, we had no representation from LAC, but we are happy to say that position has now been filled. Even with all vacancies filled we are a small group (five Regional Commissioners and one Global Commissioner). Each year we must be selective in the projects that we take on, knowing that we are six volunteers with a global mandate.

The lack of a budget for our work is also a major limitation. Participation in the UNPFII and conferences around the world can be expensive endeavours. We continue to seek financial support for our work and draw on our personal savings, but the lack of a Commission budget is a significant limitation.

Future plans

In 2026, the Indigenous Commission anticipates publishing two additional statements in recognition of World Indigenous Peoples Day August 9, and World Mental Health Day October 10. We will continue to work on strengthening connections across IFSW and developing communication channels with Indigenous social workers across all regions. We also hope to participate in the panel on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women hosted by the Rousseau Foundation in September 2026.

Beyond 2026, we anticipate continuing to explore opportunities to participate in the UNPFII and possibly other UN mechanisms but recognize these may be constrained by financial considerations. We plan to continue to issue statements, drawing social workers' attention to important issues for Indigenous Peoples. We will continue collaborations with other IFSW commissions, including moving forward with our plans to collaborate with the Education Commission to explore how Indigenous Knowledges are incorporated in social work education and practice.

We are exploring opportunities for offering sessions at international conferences but recognize that being a small commission we face limitations of our capacity as well as financial constraints. As IFSW partners with other global social work organizations, the Indigenous Commission looks forward to opportunities to actively contribute to discussions that refine our key documents on the Global Definition of Social Work, the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, and the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles.

By Hilary Weaver for the Commission