



United Confederation of Taíno People

• Borikén (Puerto Rico) • Kiskeia (Dominican Republic) • Barbados
• Bimini (United States) • U.S. Virgin Islands • Kuba

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UCTP Call to Action Regarding the Proposed UNCCD Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body

To Indigenous Peoples and the UNCCD Secretariat:

The United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP), a provisionally accredited Indigenous Peoples organization to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), participates in the Convention's processes out of concern for the growing impacts of land degradation, drought, and desertification affecting Indigenous Peoples throughout the Caribbean region.

As Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean, we are witnessing increasing environmental pressures that threaten our lands, waters, traditional livelihoods, and community well-being. The archipelago of Borikén (Puerto Rico) and other Caribbean territories are increasingly affected by prolonged drought conditions, land degradation, and the growing impacts associated with desertification, including the transport of Saharan dust across the Atlantic. These conditions have significant implications for ecosystems, public health, food security, and the resilience of Indigenous communities throughout our region.

It is from this perspective that the UCTP has carefully reviewed the Draft Terms of Reference for the proposed "Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body" under the UNCCD.

While we recognize the efforts made by the UNCCD Secretariat and others to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' participation within the Convention, we believe that the current process and the proposed governance structure raise serious concerns that must be addressed before any further action is taken.

We shall also note that although the website for the TOR, affords for the page to be read in Spanish, and it is perceived that the document is in Spanish, once you press on the link the document is in English. This places Indigenous Peoples whose "primary" language is one of the 6 UN Official languages at a disadvantage. In our case, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The UCTP therefore calls upon the UNCCD Secretariat to immediately halt the current ToR development process and postpone any effort to establish the proposed body until Indigenous Peoples from all seven socio-cultural regions have had the opportunity to fully review, discuss, and collectively determine whether such a body is necessary, how it should function, and how it should be identified within the UNCCD framework.

Our position is based on the following concerns:

1. Failure to Uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The current consultation process does not meet the standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent as affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Indigenous Peoples have not been provided sufficient time, information, or opportunity for collective deliberation across all regions before advancing a governance structure that may directly affect Indigenous representation within the Convention.

2. Exceeding the Mandate of COP16 Decision 5

The UCTP is concerned that the proposed structure appears to go beyond the intent and scope of COP16 Decision 5, which requested support for the development of terms of reference while ensuring representativeness and respect for Indigenous Peoples' unique perspectives and priorities. The current proposal establishes a governance framework that requires broader discussion and consent from Indigenous Peoples before being advanced.

3. Inclusion of States within Indigenous Governance Structures

The draft proposes the formal inclusion of State Parties within the governance structure of the proposed body. The UCTP believes Indigenous Peoples must retain the right to establish and govern their own representative mechanisms independently. Indigenous Peoples are rights holders, while States are duty bearers. These distinct roles should not be merged within a single governance structure.

4. State Co-Chairing of the Proposed Body

The proposal for State representatives to serve as co-chairs alongside Indigenous representatives undermines the principle of Indigenous self-determination and risks compromising the independence of Indigenous participation within the Convention.

5. Absence of Explicit FPIC Provisions

Despite references to UNDRIP, the draft does not contain clear provisions recognizing FPIC as a foundational principle governing the operation of the body, the use of Indigenous knowledge, or decisions affecting Indigenous Peoples.

6. Insufficient Protection of Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty

The draft contains no meaningful safeguards concerning Indigenous data sovereignty, collective intellectual property rights, traditional knowledge protection, or the prevention of misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge systems.

7. Amendment Authority Retained by Parties

The proposal would allow amendments to the Terms of Reference through decisions of the Parties. The UCTP believes that Indigenous Peoples must have the authority to approve any changes affecting Indigenous governance structures and representation.

8. Lack of Clarity Regarding Representation and Decision-Making Authority

The draft fails to clearly identify who ultimately controls representation, who accepts or rejects input, determines legitimacy, resolves disputes, and exercises decision-making authority within the proposed structure. Such ambiguity creates the risk of future conflicts and external interference in Indigenous self-governance.

Recommendation Regarding Terminology

The UCTP further recommends that Indigenous Peoples collectively discuss whether the term "Caucus" is appropriate for the proposed mechanism. The current proposal describes a body that includes State Parties within its governance structure. As such, the use of the term "Indigenous Peoples Caucus" may create confusion and may not accurately reflect the nature of the proposed entity. Indigenous Peoples should determine for themselves how any future mechanism should be identified within the UNCCD system.

Call to Indigenous Peoples

The UCTP respectfully calls upon Indigenous Peoples from all seven socio-cultural regions participating in the UNCCD to support a temporary suspension of the current ToR process until COP17.

This pause would allow Indigenous Peoples to:

- Conduct regional consultations;
- Review the proposed Terms of Reference in their entirety;
- Discuss alternative governance models;
- Determine whether the proposed structure reflects Indigenous Peoples' aspirations and rights;
- Develop collective recommendations regarding representation, governance, FPIC, and the protection of Indigenous knowledge;
- Determine how any future body should be identified within the UNCCD.

The UCTP believes that decisions concerning Indigenous representation must be made by Indigenous Peoples themselves through processes grounded in self-determination, consensus, and respect for Indigenous governance systems in accordance with UNDRIP and other international instruments.

Nothing about us, without us.

Respectfully,

United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP)

Provisionally Accredited Indigenous Peoples Organization to the UNCCD
