Sovereignty:
Authority and Rights of the World's Peoples

There are 370 million Indigenous people in the world.

These groups are very diverse but there are common issues that affect indigenous people globally.

These issues center upon the idea of "sovereignty".
What IS "*sovereignty*"?

Why is it important to ALL people?
Why are indigenous peoples
at risk of losing their natural rights
to "sovereignty"?

Sovereignty:

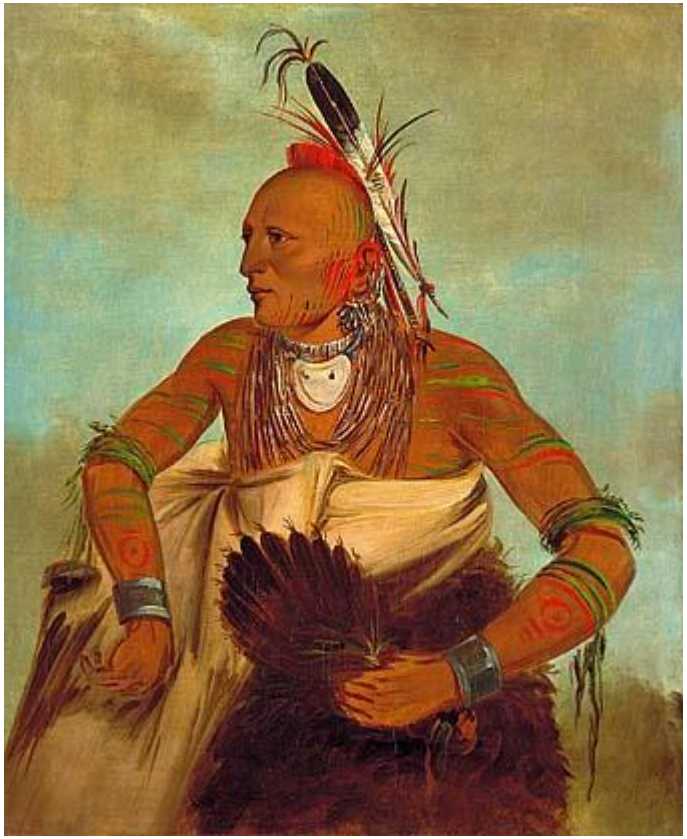
the power or right
of a group of people
to govern themselves,
to make decisions about their own future,
to determine how to use their homelands and the resources on them.

The guarantee and protection of indigenous people's rights help ensure that their culture will exist into the future.

This includes their right to speak and teach their native language, to practice their native customs, to live on the land of their ancestors, and to preserve their sacred sites.

In the United States,
American Indian tribes have been recognized as *sovereign* political entities.

In the early 19th century, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall declared that Indian nations be recognized as "distinct, independent, political communities."



They are able to exercise powers of self- government, according to their original tribal sovereignty.

In New Zealand, sovereignty for the indigenous Maori peoples is national law.

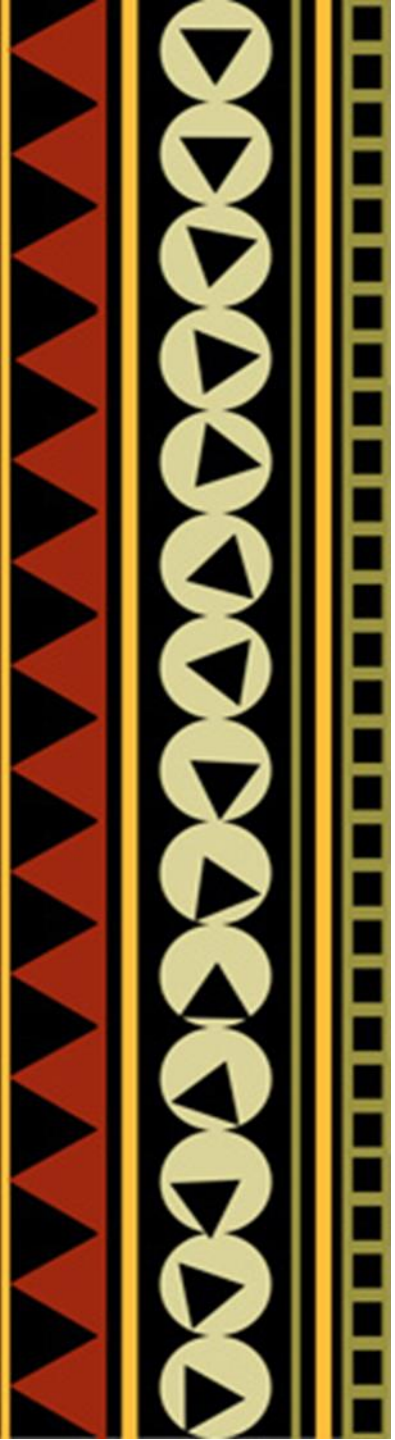
Treaties between the British Crown and the Maori long ago established their sovereignty.

In Canada, indigenous self-government is protected by acts of Parliament, including limited control over natural resources.

Recently, Canada's First Nations, the Inuit and the Métis peoples are involved in movements to protect the environment and assert indigenous sovereignty.

The United Nations has been an international forum to discuss and attempt to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

Resolutions were first adopted by the U.N. General Assembly over seventy years ago…



The United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was adopted in 2007.

Today this declaration is the strongest statement on the rights of indigenous peoples.

It establishes minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.

Excerpts from the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

“Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different…”

“Reaffirming that indigenous peoples, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from discrimination of any kind…”

“Concerned that indigenous peoples have suffered from colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from… development [for] their own needs and interests…”

“Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditional practices contributes to sustainable development and proper management of the environment…”

"Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination… They freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." (Article 3)

"Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs…"

(Article 4)

"Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture…"

(Article 8)

"Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories… without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples…"

(Article 10)

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures and traditions…”

(Article 15)

"Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop, and control the lands and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or use…"

(Article 26)

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands and resources.”

(Article 29)

Although the majority of the member nations to the United Nations signed this declaration, struggles for sovereignty around the globe continue today…

For example, the Sami people are indigenous to northern territories of Scandinavia and Russia.

The Sami have occupied and used lands in modern-day Norway for thousands of years.

Norway's constitution supposedly protects the Sami language and culture. But the government denies Sami claims to lands and resources.

The many indigenous peoples of Australia
(some known as “aborigines”) have called the Australian continent home for more than 60,000 years.

They are some of the world's longest-standing cultural groups still living on their ancestral lands.

There were approximately 250 Australian Indigenous languages spoken at the time of British colonization.

But in Australia treaties were never signed between First Nations and the British Crown or Australian government.

Instead, the British considered Aboriginal peoples as nomads who did not deserve ownership to their homelands.

The entire continent was taken and opened to European settlement.

Aborigines were not granted citizenship or the right to vote until 1967.

Recently, individual aboriginal groups in Australia have successfully regained portions of their original homelands in the Northern Territory.

However, aboriginal sovereignty is still not recognized by the Australian legal system.

What do you think?

Roles and Responsibilities?

What responsibility do governments have to ensure the sovereignty of indigenous people?

How do indigenous ways of life impact the environment?

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Sources:
Australian Human Rights Commission
Smithsonian Magazine. June 30, 2017
The Guardian, May 30, 2017

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