THAILAND UPR IV
2026

Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Thailand



Joint UPR Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

53rd Session of the UPR Working Group



Joint UPR Submission: Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Thailand
April 2026

Submission by

Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (CIPT), Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), Indigenous Women's Association for Development (IWAD), Manushya Foundation and the Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms

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CITATION

Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (CIPT), Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), Indigenous Women's Association for Development (IWAD), Manushya Foundation and the Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms, (April 2026), *Joint UPR Submission: Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Thailand*, for the UN Universal Periodic Review of Thailand (4th UPR Cycle), 53rd Session of the UPR Working Group

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1. Introduction

1.1. This submission by the *Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (CIPT)*, the *Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT)*, the *Indigenous Women's Association for Development (IWAD)*, *Manushya Foundation*, and the *Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR* examines Thailand's persistent failure to recognize and fully protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in light of recommendations accepted during the third UPR cycle (2021), the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2022)[1], and the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2025).[2]

1.2. During the third UPR cycle, Thailand supported multiple recommendations on Indigenous Peoples' rights, including legal recognition, land and resource governance, participation, education, and access to justice. While the *2025 Ethnic Way of Life Protection and Promotion Act* was adopted, it fails to recognise Indigenous Peoples or fully align with international human rights standards. Despite commitments to enhance community participation, Indigenous Peoples remain excluded from land governance and environmental decision-making, and conflicts over land and resources persist. Structural barriers also continue to limit access to education, justice, and basic services, particularly for Indigenous women and communities in remote areas. Overall, implementation remains limited, reflecting a persistent gap between Thailand's international commitments and domestic laws and policies.

1.3. Indigenous Peoples in Thailand number approximately 6.1 million people, or 9.7% of the population, yet they remain unrecognised in Thai law as Indigenous Peoples.[3] This legal invisibility is not merely symbolic; it is the foundation of systemic exclusion, shaping access to land, citizenship, justice, public services, education, participation, and effective remedies. Despite their long-standing role as custodians of ecosystems on ancestral lands they have inhabited and cultivated for generations, Indigenous Peoples are routinely portrayed as "forest encroachers," blamed for environmental degradation, and targeted through criminalisation and eviction. Rather than being recognised as stewards of forests and biodiversity, they are excluded from decision-making processes, dispossessed in the name of conservation and development, and subjected to discriminatory narratives that recast them as threats to the very environments they sustain.[4]

1.4. This submission demonstrates that the violations faced by Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are not isolated incidents, but part of a systemic pattern driven by legal non-recognition, structural exclusion, racial discrimination, and the prioritisation of State and corporate interests over Indigenous lands, territories, and resources.

1.5. This submission is organised as follows:

- Section 2 addresses structural non-recognition and denial of Indigenous identity;
- Section 3 addresses denial of citizenship and structural exclusion from basic services;
- Section 4 addresses racial discrimination and stigmatisation of Indigenous Peoples;
- Section 5 addresses exclusion from decision-making and self-determination;
- Section 6 addresses land dispossession and development-driven violations;
- Section 7 addresses forced evictions and housing insecurity;

- Section 8 addresses criminalisation through State policies and false climate solutions;
- Section 9 addresses corporate abuse, SLAPPs, and violence against Indigenous defenders;
- Section 10 addresses barriers to education and child protection risks;
- Section 11 addresses intersectional discrimination and violence against Indigenous women; and
- Section 12 provides recommendations.

2. Structural Non-Recognition and Denial of Indigenous Identity

2.1. Indigenous communities living in different regions of Thailand[5], including those in Northern[6], Northeast[7], and Southern coastal areas[8], continue to face challenges related to the recognition of their identity. Thailand continues to deny formal recognition of Indigenous Peoples, despite having supported the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. Thailand has also not ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989),[9] which represents the only legally binding international instrument specifically protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights. This failure, combined with the lack of comprehensive domestic legislation, creates significant gaps in legal protection.[10]

2.2. The ***2025 Ethnic Way of Life Protection and Promotion Act***[11] similarly omits recognition of Indigenous Peoples, reflecting political resistance to acknowledging Indigenous identity as a legal category. Although Thailand adopted the Act, the law uses the broader term "ethnic groups", after parliamentary debate framed recognition as a threat to national security. This refusal entrenches a legal framework in which Indigenous communities remain visible enough to be regulated and criminalised, but not recognised enough to claim their rights.

2.3. Similarly, the 2017 Constitution[12] protects "ethnic groups" but does not recognise Indigenous Peoples as distinct rights-holders with collective rights to self-identification, self-determination, ancestral lands, customary tenure, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).[13] This lack of recognition limits the ability of Indigenous communities to claim and protect their rights in relation to their cultural identity and their relationship with natural resources.[14] In its 2022 Concluding Observations, the CERD Committee urged Thailand to uphold the right of individuals and communities to determine their identity, to recognise and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights over lands, territories and resources.[15]

3. Denial of Citizenship and Structural Exclusion from Basic Services

3.1. **Indigenous communities without legal status are denied effective access to nationality,** and this denial functions as a gateway violation that restricts access to healthcare, education, employment, social protection, public utilities, and inclusion in public data and development planning.[16] [17]

3.2. This problem is especially acute for **sea Indigenous communities** in Koh Chang, Koh Lao, Koh Phayam, and the Surin Islands,[18] where many persons remain without recognised legal status. The consequences are profound: inability to access social protection and health systems, exclusion from development surveys and programmes,[19] lack of infrastructure, and limited economic options.

Some communities lack electricity or face exorbitant costs;[20] access to clean water and sanitation remains inadequate.[21] [22] Health services are often geographically distant and insufficiently equipped, as highlighted by Noraeri Thungmuangthong, a Karen woman indigenous leader: "***facilities are often located far from villages, and many lack basic equipment or transportation to reach remote communities.***"[23] Children in some communities remain without birth certificates, vaccinations, or support for disabilities and chronic conditions[24] [25]

3.3. Lack of legal status also **intensifies livelihood precarity.** In some sea Indigenous communities, men must travel far from home to work at sea for boat owners, where they face wage suppression and unsafe working conditions. As a result, communities are often composed primarily of women, children, youth, and older persons with limited sources of income. Hazardous conditions at sea have also led to disability and death, leaving many widows within communities. These realities show that denial of citizenship is closely tied to economic exploitation, gendered insecurity, and intergenerational poverty.[26] [27]

3.4. Indigenous communities in remote areas in Northern Thailand continue to face serious obstacles in birth registration, nationality procedures, and access to documentation.[28] According to **Noraeri Thungmuangthong**: "*many women don't know where to register a birth or who to contact. Most have never left their village and are unfamiliar with government offices. In areas like Omkoi, where statelessness is widespread, there is no outreach or public information on how to access basic rights*."[29] In this sense, exclusion from citizenship is not simply a legal gap; it is reproduced through inaccessible procedures, weak outreach, and the absence of culturally and linguistically appropriate engagement. However, in August 2022, following advocacy by IWNT and Manushya Foundation, 227 Indigenous persons obtained legal status.[30] This case shows that statelessness results from administrative obstacles, lack of political will, and limited outreach, rather than inevitability, while also highlighting the systemic exclusion faced by Indigenous Peoples in remote areas. In 2025, the CEDAW Committee raised concerns about lack of birth registration among Indigenous women and girls, leading to statelessness and restricted access to rights, and urged Thailand to ensure access to nationality.[31]

4. Racial Discrimination and Stigmatisation of Indigenous Peoples

4.1. Indigenous Peoples in Thailand face systemic racial discrimination that helps justify their exclusion and criminalisation. They are repeatedly portrayed by State agencies, public discourse, and dominant development narratives as "illegal settlers", "forest destroyers", "backward communities", or "obstacles to conservation and progress".[32] [33] Such stereotypes are not incidental: they are part of the ideological machinery that normalises dispossession. **Pornchita Fahpratanprai,** a young indigenous woman human rights defender, relates: "*At hospitals and district offices, Indigenous women frequently face poor treatment from public service personnel, largely due to language barriers. Some community members report being scolded or shouted at, with derogatory comments such as "You, Karen! Why don't you speak Thai?"* [34]

4.2. **One persistent and particularly harmful stereotype is the accusation that Indigenous communities are responsible for forest fires and PM2.5 air pollution because of traditional burning and rotational farming practices.**[35] This narrative scapegoats Indigenous communities while obscuring

the roles of commercial agriculture, industrial burning, extractive projects, and larger structural drivers of environmental harm.[36] It also misrepresents rotational farming, which many Indigenous communities have long practised as a sustainable, cyclical land management system that supports biodiversity and food security. The continued criminalisation of these practices reflects a failure to recognise Indigenous knowledge systems and reinforces discriminatory policy approaches.

4.3. The CEDAW Committee expressed concern in 2025 about persistent stereotypes affecting Indigenous and ethnic minority women and girls and called on Thailand to eliminate such discriminatory stereotypes through targeted legislative and policy measures.[37] These stereotypes not only distort reality but also serve as justifications for restrictive policies, surveillance, and criminalisation, erasing the role of Indigenous Peoples as custodians of ecosystems.[38]

5. Exclusion from Decision-Making and Self-Determination

5.1. Indigenous communities consistently report that they do not meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their territories, livelihoods, and futures.[39] This exclusion concerns conservation policies, forest zoning, infrastructure projects, tourism development, mining operations, and national policy processes such as the *National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights*, and the *Draft Act on Responsible Business Conduct*.[40] Communities are often consulted late, inadequately, or not at all. When consultations do occur, they are frequently procedural exercises rather than genuine rights-based processes aimed at securing FPIC.[41] This exclusion is a critical mechanism through which violations are produced: decisions are made about Indigenous lands without Indigenous Peoples.

5.2. This exclusion violates accepted UPR recommendations calling on Thailand to enhance the participation of local communities in land conservation and forest management and to adopt a rights-based approach to climate policies.[42] It also conflicts with the 2022 CERD Committee's call to consult Indigenous Peoples on legislative and administrative measures affecting the lands and resources they traditionally own or use, with a view to obtaining their FPIC.[43] The CEDAW Committee in 2025 likewise called for an intersectional approach to public policy and for the meaningful participation of Indigenous and ethnic minority women in equality bodies and decision-making.[44]

6. Land Dispossession and Development-Driven Violations

6.1. The core of the violations faced by Indigenous Peoples in Thailand lies in the dispossession of their lands, territories, and resources, which is enabled by legal non-recognition, exclusion from decision-making, and discriminatory narratives.[45]

6.2. Indigenous communities face not only conservation-driven exclusion but also land grabbing and resource dispossession linked to development projects, tourism, extractive industries, and infrastructure.[46] This dual pressure, conservation on one side, development on the other, shrinks the space for Indigenous life and self-determination. **Indigenous Peoples are thus placed in a structurally impossible position: criminalised for remaining on their ancestral lands under**

conservation laws, while those same lands and resources are opened to business activity, infrastructure, and profit-oriented development.

6.3. **In the South, coastal Indigenous Peoples, the Chao Lay peoples, including Moken, Moklen, and Urak Lawoi communities, have seen ancestral coastal and marine areas fragmented by tourism, hotels, shrimp farms, housing projects, and infrastructure.**[47] Privatisation of coastal land has prevented the Moken from using beaches for temporary camps, while development projects such as the Land Bridge threaten coastal ways of life.[48] Indigenous communities reported the lack of meaningful public participation, including the late disclosure of a 1,000-page EHIA only eighteen days before a public hearing.[49] This illustrates how procedural exclusion works alongside territorial dispossession: projects advance quickly and opaquely, while Indigenous communities are expected to react under impossible timelines and without effective influence.

6.4. **Moklen communities** have been pushed inland through the expansion of shrimp farms, rubber plantations, housing developments, restaurants, and resorts. **Urak Lawoi communities**, especially in tourist areas such as Koh Lipe, have similarly faced displacement from beachfront areas and loss of access to spaces necessary for fishing, ceremony, subsistence, and cultural continuity.[50] Although there have been some court victories concerning land titles in Rawai beach in Phuket,[51] these decisions did not recognise the underlying legitimacy of Chao Lay peoples' collective right to live and work on ancestral land. As a result, the rulings have not resolved the structural insecurity faced by other Chao Lay communities.[52]

6.5. **Similar development-driven harms affect Indigenous communities in the North.** Mining projects in Omkoi and Mae La Noi threaten **Indigenous Karen and Lua** lands, water sources, agriculture, and community cohesion, yet proceed or attempt to proceed without FPIC.[53] These projects show how Indigenous territories continue to be treated as available spaces for extraction and economic gain, even where communities have long-standing relationships with the land and clear evidence of likely harm.

6.6. The continued dispossession of Indigenous communities is reinforced by the conflict between the *2025 Ethnic Way of Life Protection and Promotion Act* and existing forest conservation laws. While the Act provides limited recognition of rights relating to land, natural resources, and the environment, it fails to recognise Indigenous Peoples or the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). It does not resolve legal conflicts with conservation laws, and conditions protection on State agreement. In practice, these reforms remain partial and fragile, leaving the dominant legal framework of exclusion intact.[54]

7. Forced Evictions and Housing Rights

7.1. **Forced evictions and housing insecurity remain acute for Indigenous communities, especially where land claims overlap with conservation zones, tourism interests, or private title assertions.**

7.2. **In Koh Lipe, Tarutao National Park authorities have filed criminal charges and eviction lawsuits against six Chao Lay community members in three cases**, accusing them of trespassing and ordering the demolition of their houses and homestays. Although the National Park had previously

conducted a survey,[55] the process was never completed. Despite this unfinished process, authorities proceeded with criminal prosecution and eviction actions against the affected villagers.[56] [57]

7.3. **Indigenous peoples have also faced legal reprisals for raising concerns over land donated by their community for public use.**[58] [59] In 1958, the Urak Lawoi community on Koh Lipe donated 6 rai and 3 ngan of privately held land for the construction of Ban Koh Lipe School, which was used continuously for this purpose until 2025. However, following the appointment of a new school director, villagers were informed that a land title deed would be processed. A subsequent survey reduced the recorded land area to 5 rai and 3 ngan, leaving 1 rai unaccounted for. When villagers and members of the school committee sought clarification regarding the missing land, they were instead met with criminal charges, including defamation, and court summons. Two committee members who filed complaints were removed from their positions. At present, three villagers, among five defendants (four women and one man), are facing proceedings before the Court of First Instance, scheduled for May 2026. In addition, over 300 villagers and students have reportedly been charged in connection with the case.[60] [61]

7.4. **Private actors have also filed eviction cases against Chao Lay households and continue to assert land claims.** Several eviction cases have been initiated by private actors against Chao Lay residents.[62] [63] In one case, the home of Rampueng Hantalay and her family was ordered by the court to be demolished. The cases of Ms. Renu Talemon and Mr. Surat Hantalay are currently pending before the Supreme Court. In other cases, including those involving Ms. Saena and five others, and Ms. Sutit Hantalay and fifteen others, the Chao Lay communities won their cases. However, despite these court victories, private actors continue to claim ownership over the same areas using land documents such as Nor Sor 3 and Sor Kor 1 that overlap with Chao Lay land.[64] [65]

7.5. **Private actors have closed two public roads that the Chao Lay community has long used for daily activities.** The first road, which provides access to the sea for fishing, has been blocked. The second road leading to the local school and to the ceremonial area used for the traditional floating boat ritual has also been closed, preventing community members from accessing these important spaces.[66] [67] [68]

7.6. **Local authorities have filed legal action against community members under the Building Control Act B.E. 2522 (1979)[69].** In one case, the Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO) filed charges against Ms. Saijai Hantalay under the Building Control Act. Although the building permit had initially been issued incorrectly by the local authority itself, the SAO later pursued legal action against Ms. Saijai for alleged violations related to the construction.[70] [71]

7.7. **Public areas traditionally used by the community have been occupied and developed by investors.** Several public areas used by the Chao Lay community, including beaches, cemeteries, monastic sites, stone wells, and watershed forests, have been occupied by investors. In some cases, investors have excavated land, cut down trees, destroyed natural areas, and constructed buildings over these public spaces. At the same time, authorities such as the National Park, the Marine Department, and district authorities have not effectively protected these public areas, resulting in serious impacts on the community's living conditions and restricting their access to shared spaces.[7273]

8. Criminalisation through State Policies and False Climate Solutions

8.1. **Indigenous Peoples living in forest and coastal areas are systematically criminalised under Thailand's land, forest, and environmental governance framework.** Communities who have lived in close relationship with these ecosystems for generations face arrest, prosecution, and legal restrictions when defending their lands, housing areas, and livelihoods from State policies and large-scale development projects.[74] This criminalisation is driven by policies framed as environmental protection and climate action. So-called "forest reclamation" and conservation measures are implemented through forced evictions, destruction of homes, and restrictions on land use, treating Indigenous Peoples as "encroachers" on their own ancestral lands.[75] At the core is a legal framework that allows the State to designate ancestral territories as protected areas without recognising customary land tenure or obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).[76] Recent regulatory developments further entrench this pattern: a 2024 Cabinet resolution enabling decrees under the National Parks Act and Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act restricts land use to a maximum of 20 rai for no more than 20 years, while granting officials broad powers to evict and impose penalties without judicial oversight, effectively reducing Indigenous presence on ancestral lands to a temporary and conditional status.[77]

8.2. **These patterns of criminalisation are rooted in a longer history of centralised forest governance influenced by colonial models of control and extraction**.[78] These models prioritise State authority over land and resources while excluding Indigenous systems of land management and governance. As a result, Indigenous presence is treated as incompatible with conservation, rather than as integral to it.

8.3. **Traditional practices such as rotational farming, which are ecologically sustainable and support biodiversity, are often criminalised under conservation laws**. This reflects a fundamental disconnect between State policy and Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as a failure to recognise the contributions of Indigenous communities to climate resilience and environmental protection.[79]

8.4. More than **48,000 cases** have been brought against Indigenous and forest-dependent communities under forest-related laws, reflecting a widespread and systemic pattern of prosecution and legal harassment.[80]

8.5. **The Bangkloi case epitomises this pattern.** The Indigenous Karen community of Bangkloi has lived in the Kaeng Krachan forest for over a century, long before its designation as a protected area. Despite this, the community has faced repeated forced evictions, including the burning of homes and rice barns, displacement, and arrests for attempting to return to ancestral land. In 2021, more than 100 Indigenous persons were forcibly removed and at least 22 villagers were arrested. These actions occurred even as Kaeng Krachan was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, exposing the contradiction between conservation recognition and the systematic violation of Indigenous rights. The Bangkloi case further illustrates how criminalisation is sustained over time.[81] [82] Despite sustained advocacy, protest, and engagement with State mechanisms, including the establishment of committees and the submission of proposals by Indigenous communities, the situation remains

unresolved.[83] This demonstrates a structural failure to implement CERD recommendations, which had already called on Thailand to respect Indigenous land rights and ensure FPIC in the adoption and implementation of conservation-related measures.[84]

8.6. **Indigenous communities have mobilised extensively against these harmful measures.** In 2025 and 2026, more than 10,000 Indigenous people gathered in Chiang Mai, with further mobilisation in Chiang Dao involving thousands more, to oppose these decrees and demand recognition of their land rights. These protests highlight both the scale of the impact and the absence of meaningful participation in policy-making processes.[85] [86] [87]

8.7. **Criminalisation also extends beyond rural territories into urban and political spaces.** In Bangkok and other cities, Indigenous and environmental defenders participating in peaceful assemblies, protests, and advocacy efforts have been subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and legal risks under public order and security laws.[88] This demonstrates that repression is not confined to land-based conflicts but affects Indigenous Peoples' ability to engage in civic and political life more broadly.

9. Corporate Abuse, SLAPPs, and Violence Against Indigenous Defenders

9.1. When Indigenous communities resist dispossession, they increasingly face corporate abuse, judicial harassment, and violence.[89] This pattern is especially visible where private actors, developers, tourism interests, or extractive companies operate in or near Indigenous territories, often in collusion with State authorities or under the protection of discriminatory legal frameworks. Rather than protecting Indigenous communities from business-related harm, State institutions often facilitate or tolerate abuses by private actors, while communities defending their lands, resources, and livelihoods are treated as obstacles to development.

9.2. **In Koh Lipe,** Chao Lay communities have faced multiple forms of legal and territorial pressure.[90] Private actors have brought eviction cases, asserted overlapping land claims, blocked traditional public roads used to access the sea, school, and ritual sites, and occupied public areas such as beaches, cemeteries, monastic sites, wells, and watershed forests (see 7.2). Community members who challenged land grabs linked to school land and public routes were met not with protection, but with defamation cases and retaliation (see 7.3).[91] Corporate actors use both property claims and legal intimidation to wear down Indigenous communities and normalise the erosion of their rights.

9.3. **In Omkoi district,** the **Plong Karen community** in Kaboe Din village learned only after approval that a coal mine would occupy large parts of their farmland and divert two streams essential for irrigation.[92] As **Pornchita Fahpratanprai** reports: *"the community fears that the mine would not only degrade the environment but also undermine traditional ways of life and women's well-being, with long-term impacts that would be difficult to reverse."*[93] The project was approved without their FPIC.[94] Although the National Human Rights Commission later found irregularities in the approval process,[95] and subsequent litigation led to a temporary injunction preventing further action pending judgment[96], the company has continued efforts to advance the project, including by sowing division within the community. The case illustrates how extractive interests continue to move forward even

after serious procedural concerns have been established, reflecting the structural weakness of safeguards available to Indigenous communities.[97]

9.4. Similar pressure is visible in Mae Hong Son Province, where **Indigenous Karen and Lua communities** have opposed the planned reopening of fluorite mining in a watershed area near the La River.[98] The mine previously caused water contamination, health impacts, and loss of livelihood, yet nearly thirty years later the company has sought to resume operations without FPIC. The proposed reopening threatens hundreds of residents across several villages and shows how business actors can attempt to revive harmful projects despite a legacy of unresolved harm and the absence of meaningful remedy.

9.5. In Southern Thailand, the community draft also documents exploitation of the **Mani community** by business actors operating without their FPIC.[99] Attempts to secure land for the Mani have been obstructed by local officials and tourism operators whose economic interests depend on preventing recognition of Mani land rights.[100] Community members have faced fabricated allegations, intimidation, and pressure to withdraw from land designated for them, while private businesses continue to profit from the commodification of Mani culture and territory without consent, transparency, or equitable benefit-sharing.

9.6. **Violence against Indigenous land defenders remains a grave concern.** The enforced disappearance of Porlajee **"Billy" Rakchongcharoen**, a Karen land defender and key witness in a case against the Department of National Parks, remains emblematic of impunity.[101] Billy had played a central role in defending his community's rights and was due to testify in litigation concerning the burning of Karen homes and property.[102] His disappearance, and the continuing lack of justice, sends a chilling message to Indigenous communities defending ancestral lands. UN Special Procedures raised concerns not only over the failure to fully investigate and prosecute those responsible, but also over broader attacks and harassment against Indigenous Karen communities.[103]

9.7. **SLAPPs are a central instrument of intimidation.** Indigenous defenders, including women defenders, face defamation and other abusive proceedings for speaking out against land grabs, environmental harm, and violations of community rights. These cases often do not aim to win on the merits; instead, they drain time, resources, and emotional resilience, while creating fear and discouraging further advocacy. For indigenous peoples, legal harassment is a recurring strategy used against Indigenous and community defenders challenging corporate and State-backed encroachment.[104]

10. Barriers to Education and Child Protection Risks

10.1. **Indigenous children and youth in remote communities face severe barriers to education.** Small community schools have been closed, forcing children to travel long distances or leave home to attend under-resourced schools outside their communities. In many cases, this means separation from family at a young age and the loss of access to culturally familiar environments and support structures.[105] These barriers are compounded by poverty, legal insecurity, language obstacles, and weak public investment in remote education.

10.2. 80% of poor and disadvantaged children from Indigenous communities dropped out of school between the COVID period and 2026, entering labour markets early to support their families. In many villages, children older than fourteen are leaving school altogether. These figures are alarming and point to a structural collapse in educational inclusion for Indigenous children and youth, especially those living in remote and impoverished communities.[106]

10.3. **These barriers expose Indigenous children and youth to serious protection risks, including unsafe labour, night work in Thailand and abroad, violence, and death.** Indigenous leaders reported that six young people have died in connection with such circumstances and that, in some areas, one to two people die each year due to murder. These are not merely education access problems; they are child protection crises generated by structural neglect, poverty, and exclusion from safe, accessible schooling.[107]

10.4. **Educational exclusion also has long-term implications for political and social participation.** When Indigenous children are pushed out of education early, their future access to employment, justice, public life, and leadership is undermined. This reproduces cycles of marginalisation and weakens the ability of communities to defend their rights across generations.[108]

10.5. The CEDAW Committee expressed concern at limited access to education for girls facing intersecting discrimination, including Indigenous and ethnic minority girls, and recommended sufficient resources to ensure quality inclusive education in rural areas.[109]

11. Intersectional Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women

11.1. **Indigenous women face intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, legal status, geography, and poverty.** In some communities, customary or patriarchal norms continue to deprive women of property, leadership, and social protection.[110] These forms of discrimination are reinforced by the broader legal invisibility and land insecurity affecting Indigenous communities as a whole.[111]

11.2. In some **Hmong contexts**, women may leave divorce without any share of marital property and without the ability to return to parental homes, forcing them into survival migration and precarious labour.[112] Such practices leave women in conditions of acute social and economic vulnerability and demonstrate how gender discrimination is entrenched in both social norms and material structures.

11.3. Indigenous women also face severe psychological impacts, including suicide linked to divorce-related discrimination and social exclusion. They are further exposed to domestic violence driven by poverty, debt, and substance abuse, as documented in cases in Mae Win.[113] Women experiencing such violence may be reluctant to seek help because of stigma surrounding mental health and the absence of accessible support systems.[114]

11.4. Indigenous women also face barriers to participation in leadership roles within community and public structures. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to devalue women as leaders, with some communities recognising only men as heads of households and assigning all formal leadership positions to men.[115] According to Noraeri, "***women are expected to prioritize caregiving and***

household responsibilities, and those who pursue leadership roles may face criticism or rejection from their families or communities." [116] This reinforces women's exclusion from public decision-making and weakens their ability to influence responses to social problems, land disputes, violence, and community wellbeing.

11.5. These harms are inseparable from land and legal insecurity. Around 90% of Indigenous women live in protected forest areas where land ownership is not legally recognised, while the remainder often lack direct land rights because titles are typically registered in the names of male relatives.[117] This structure deepens women's dependency, weakens their bargaining power, and heightens exposure to violence, poverty, and exclusion from community decisions.

12. Recommendations

Thailand should:

12.1. **Structural Non-Recognition and Denial of Indigenous Identity**

- In line with the 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, ensure the legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples in national law and policy frameworks, including the recognition of their identity, culture, and collective rights, and adopt an intersectional approach to eliminate discrimination against Indigenous women and girls.
- In line with the 2022 CERD Concluding Observations, recognise Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands, territories, and resources, including customary land tenure systems, and ratify ILO Convention No. 169.

12.2. **Denial of Citizenship and Structural Exclusion from Basic Services**

- In line with the 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, ensure universal birth registration and access to nationality for Indigenous women and girls, including through proactive outreach in remote areas, mobile registration mechanisms, interpretation services, and simplified procedures.
- Ensure access to basic services, including healthcare, clean water, sanitation, electricity, and culturally appropriate services in Indigenous languages, particularly in remote and coastal communities.

12.3. **Racial Discrimination and Stigmatisation of Indigenous Peoples**

- In line with the 2022 CERD and 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, adopt targeted measures to eliminate racial discrimination and harmful stereotypes against Indigenous Peoples, including public awareness campaigns and training for State officials.

12.4. **Exclusion from Decision-Making and Self-Determination**

- Guarantee Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in all legislative, administrative, conservation, climate, infrastructure, tourism, mining, and other development measures affecting Indigenous lands, territories, and resources.
- Ensure the meaningful, effective, and continuous participation of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women, in all decision-making processes affecting them, including national policy frameworks such as the National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights, and the Draft Act on Responsible Business Conduct.

12.5. **Land Dispossession and Development-Driven Violations**

- Recognise and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands, territories, and resources, including through legal recognition of customary tenure.
- Prevent and remedy land grabbing and dispossession by private actors, including in coastal and island Indigenous territories, and ensure restitution of Indigenous lands wherever possible, or fair compensation and culturally appropriate relocation where restitution is not possible.

12.6. **Forced Evictions and Housing Insecurity**

- End forced evictions and demolitions of Indigenous homes and communal spaces.
- Ensure security of tenure for Indigenous communities, including recognition of residential, agricultural, cultural, spiritual, and livelihood-related land use.

12.7. **Criminalisation through State Policies and False Climate Solutions**

- Amend or repeal forest, wildlife, and conservation laws and policies that criminalise Indigenous Peoples, including the National Parks Act and Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act, to ensure recognition of customary land rights and prevent further criminalisation.
- End the criminalisation of Indigenous Peoples as "forest encroachers," including through the adoption of an amnesty law for communities affected by State land and natural resource policies, ensuring that such measures do not shield corporate actors from accountability.
- Legally recognise and protect Indigenous traditional practices, including rotational farming, as sustainable environmental management systems, and end the scapegoating of Indigenous communities for environmental degradation, including PM2.5 pollution.

12.8. **Corporate Abuse, SLAPPs, and Violence Against Indigenous Defenders**

- Ensure that corporate actors are held accountable for human rights violations, including through mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence frameworks aligned with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Adopt a standalone, effective, and gender-responsive anti-SLAPP law, including the decriminalisation of defamation, clear definitions of SLAPPs, early dismissal mechanisms, and protection of public participation.

- In line with the 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, ensure the protection of Indigenous women human rights defenders from judicial harassment, violence, and reprisals, and create a safe and enabling environment for their work.
- Ensure prompt, independent, and effective investigation and prosecution of all acts of violence, intimidation, enforced disappearance, and reprisals against Indigenous defenders.
- Ensure access to justice and effective remedies for Indigenous Peoples, including access to the Justice Fund, legal aid, interpretation in judicial proceedings, and effective implementation of decisions and recommendations issued by national and international human rights bodies.

12.9. **Barriers to Education and Child Protection Risks**

- In line with the 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, ensure equal access to quality, inclusive, and culturally appropriate education for Indigenous children and youth, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Prevent school closures without viable alternatives and adopt targeted measures to reduce school dropout rates, child labour, and exposure to violence and exploitation.

12.10. **Intersectional Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women**

- In line with the 2025 CEDAW Concluding Observations, adopt an intersectional approach to eliminate discrimination against Indigenous women and girls, including ensuring their access to land, justice, services, and participation in decision-making.
- Ensure effective prevention and response mechanisms to address gender-based violence against Indigenous women, including access to justice, shelters, and culturally appropriate support services.

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Submission by

Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (CIPT) was established in 2014 by Indigenous Peoples to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples in Thailand. To learn more about CIPT, please visit: https://cipt.thaiipportal.info/

Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT) was founded in 1996 as a part of the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT) to provide a gender perspective to development activities affecting indigenous peoples in Thailand. In 2011, IWNT was established as an independent organization to work towards improving the lives of indigenous women in Thailand, working with the following groups or "chon paos": Karen, Lisu, H'mong, Lahu, Akha, Dara'ang, Taiyai or Shan, Lua, Kachin, Mien, Moken, Urak Lawoi. IWNT aims at advancing indigenous women's rights as Women and as Indigenous Peoples, promoting national and international instruments for women's protection, strengthening indigenous women's participation in local government, natural resource management sector and other decision-making bodies, for them to acknowledge and support indigenous women's rights and traditional knowledge. Over time, the network has expanded to include members from more than 26 Indigenous communities/groups across all regions of the country.

Indigenous Women's Association for Development (IWAD) was previously named the Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT). It is a coalition of Indigenous women leaders from diverse ethnic groups across the country. Since its founding in 1996, the network has actively worked to promote human rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of Indigenous women in Thailand. In 2011, it became established as an independent organization working towards improving the lives of Indigenous women in the country. It has worked with groups or members from the Karen, Lisu, Hmong, Lahu, Akha, Dara'ang, Taiyai, Lua, Kachin, and Mien Indigenous groups. Over time, the network has expanded to include members from more than 26 Indigenous communities/groups across all regions of the country. In 2025, approaching the 30th anniversary of its work, the network officially registered as a legal entity in Thailand, under the name of the "Indigenous Women's Association for Development" (IWAD)". For more information, please visit: https://www.facebook.com/iwadthailand.

Manushya Foundation is a women-led, decolonial and intersectional feminist organisation building cross-border safety nets of protection, solidarity, and accountability across Asia. We strengthen the political power and decision-making leadership of feminists, youth movements, and frontline communities. Our work shifts power by bridging emergency protection for activists facing repression and transnational repression, movement lawyering to confront corporate abuse and false climate solutions, defense of digital rights and civic space in increasingly surveilled environments, and grassroots-led advocacy engaging international accountability systems to advance structural justice.
For more, see https://www.manushyafoundation.org/.

The **Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms (Universal Periodic Review)**, established during Thailand's Second UPR cycle, is a people-led, intersectional feminist movement bringing together local communities and national civil society organisations across all human rights sectors. As one of the largest intersectional grassroots-led movements in Thailand, it engages with the UPR and UN treaty bodies, connecting struggles from Indigenous Peoples' rights, land and environmental justice, and labour rights to digital rights, freedom of expression, transnational repression, and the protection of human rights defenders, migrants, political refugees, youth, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and communities facing systemic marginalization. It fosters solidarity among communities facing shared challenges and strengthens collective action to demand accountability from the state and companies for their international human rights obligations.



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Members of CIPT, IWNT and IWAD who contributed to the drafting of this Joint UPR Submission are:

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Methodology

This submission is based on qualitative, participatory research conducted by the Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT) and Manushya Foundation between 2019 and 2026. It draws on first-hand testimonies from Indigenous human rights defenders, focus group discussions, interviews, and case documentation gathered through field visits across various regions of Thailand. All testimonies are used with participants' informed consent and reflect the lived experiences of diverse Indigenous communities.



THAILAND UPR IV
2026

Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms

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