



United Confederation of Taíno People

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

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Opia Taíno, St. Thomas

28 March 2025

To: hrc-sr-indigenous@un.org

Re: Submission for 60th Session Human Rights Council Report

Submission on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples by the United Confederation of Taíno People

Key questions and types of input/comments sought

1. What are the distinguishing characteristics of those recognized as Indigenous Peoples in your country, jurisdiction or sector of work?

The Taíno are an Indigenous Peoples whose traditional homelands extend throughout the Caribbean Island chain, primarily in the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas, as well as the Southern area of Florida in what is now known as the United States. The Taíno were the first Indigenous Peoples in the Western Hemisphere to be called Indians. While official census records do not exist for the entire Caribbean population, in 2022, 50,114 individuals identified themselves as Taíno in the United States Census. Bureau recorded the Taíno population in Borikén (Puerto Rico) to be 50,114. This means that according to the U.S. Census, the Taino are the 10th largest American Indian population of all the recorded American Indian groups.

2. What are the constitutional and legal provisions regulating the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in your country, jurisdictions or sector of work?

In Borikén, the United Confederation of Taíno (UCTP), an Indigenous representative institution is currently recognized at the municipal level by the town of Utuado and by the Puerto Rican House of Representatives.ⁱ In addition, the UCTP was recognized in the via the U.S. Congressional record and via the State Assembly in New York and the City and County of Los Angeles. In 2021, the Guainía Taíno Tribe was recognized via Proclamation of the Hon. Albert Bryan Jr, Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands.ⁱⁱ Opia Taíno and the UCTP were acknowledged via proclamation of the Hon. Gov. John P, de Jongh, Jr. The UCTP is also acknowledged as a Tribal Organization by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The issue with these forms of recognition is that they are not codified at the U.S. Federal level in the same manner that Federally recognized American Indian Tribal Nations are categorized. This status or lack thereof has legal implications that effect the affirmation of basic human rights such as self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent, among others. This effects the ability of Taíno peoples in Borikén to properly engage issues around sacred sites and the proper maintenance and stewardship of ancestral remains. It is only recently, however, with the recognition of the Guainía Taíno Tribe of the U.S. Virgin Islands that federal agencies have been contacting Tribal leadership for consultation.

While there are no constitutional provisions regulating the recognition of Taíno Peoples, there are legal provisions that could be engaged, but which require significant political will.ⁱⁱⁱ



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3. What are the practices and processes followed by Indigenous Peoples and/or State authorities to identify Indigenous Peoples in your country, jurisdiction or area of work?

The Guainía Taíno Tribe, like the United Confederation of Taíno, maintains their own procedures and protocols for citizenship or affiliation.^{iv} As we have noted, in some forms (i.e. proclamations), State authorities, at the federal, national, and territorial levels, do recognize the right to self-determination.

4. Are there Indigenous Peoples in your country that are negatively viewed as culturally backwards and whose way of life is considered by the majority society as inappropriate in current times?

Unfortunately, Indigenous Taíno Peoples in Borikén and throughout the Caribbean are often viewed in a past sense or as illegitimate by much of the larger populace. Mixed heritage is one reason cited for this view. Yet while many federally recognized American Indians are also of mixed heritage, it seems they are not subject to the same level of discriminatory scrutiny. In addition, many misconceptions and stereotypes about Taíno people persist into the present time, including negative views on Taíno spirituality. Religious intolerance is an issue that continued to affect Taíno People in a negative way for example we have cases where our spirituality is described as witchcraft or diabolical.

5. What are the main challenges facing Indigenous Peoples to achieve recognition from State authorities in your country, jurisdiction or sector of work?

In our view, one for the main challenges facing Indigenous Taíno Peoples in Borikén and beyond is the lack of political will to respect the rights affirmed in the United Nations and the OAS Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It seems that the term Indigenous does cause some fear or concerns by State authorities especially when discussion turns to land rights, reparations, management of sacred sites that have now under State control as tourism destinations, and stewardship of ancestral remains now under the control of institutions such as museums or universities.

6. What are the main challenges facing Indigenous Peoples to achieve recognition from State authorities in your country, jurisdiction or sector of work?

One of the main challenges for Taíno Peoples to achieve recognition from State authorities is the lack of political will especially from more conservative leaning governments.

7. What are the positive and/or negative results and practices associated with the current framework for recognition of Indigenous Peoples in your country, jurisdiction or sector of work?

The U.S. federal path for recognition is arduous and bias against Indigenous Peoples from the territories. While other forms of recognition (i.e. proclamations) are positive, it remains to be seen how far the judiciary will be supportive of the affirmation of the rights affirmed in the Indigenous Declarations.

8. What initiatives have been undertaken to raise awareness about the recognition of Indigenous Peoples within society and governmental institutions?

Awareness raising is undertaken mostly by the Taíno Peoples themselves, except in the form of the proclamations and occasional partnerships such as the UCTP's long collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau.



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9. What initiatives and mechanisms are needed for Indigenous Peoples to further promote adequate recognition? Please provide examples of good practices if available.

It seems capacity building for State officials is needed to help build awareness and compassion. It may also take judicial intervention to help move the call for assistance forward. However, recently more federal agencies have been reaching out to the UCTP and the Guainía Taíno Tribe for consultation on issues that may be of interest to Taíno Peoples.

10. Are there examples from your country, jurisdiction or area of work, of conflation of Indigenous Peoples and other groups, such as minorities, local communities, vulnerable groups, among other? If yes, what are the lessons learned in that regard.

Generally, in Borikén the government does not see a difference between Indigenous Peoples and other groups. This view is changing, however, at least in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

11. Are there examples from your country, jurisdiction or area or work of alliances between Indigenous Peoples and other groups, such as minorities, local communities, vulnerable groups, among other? If yes, what are the lessons learned in that regard.

Example of alliances usually occur when there are environmental issues affecting multiple sectors.

ⁱ Proclamations are archived publicly at the website of the United Confederation of Taíno Peoples at <https://www.uctp.org/taino-history>

ⁱⁱ The UCTP was acknowledged in the recognition for the Guainía Taíno Tribe of the Virgin Islands. See https://www.guainia-taino-tribe.net/_files/ugd/2b292f_01257e7f0f9c4ecd910d8e7c1219784e.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://case.house.gov/issues/issue/?IssueID=14929#:~:text=For%20well%20over%20a%20century,of%20over%20150%20Federal%20statutes>.

^{iv} See <https://www.uctp.org/tribal-registry-taino-people>