



**Open Statement of Concern  
to the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)  
from  
the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)**

*10 July 2025*

**To: Chair and members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**Cc: Albert Barume, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**Ambassador Jürg Lauber, President of the UN Human Rights Council**

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

We, the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR), submit this statement with urgency and alarm: the credibility of EMRIP and the integrity of Indigenous representation face a grave threat.

Global Indigenous representation mechanisms—EMRIP included—are now being systematically infiltrated by actors who no longer represent the will, rights, values of Indigenous Peoples. As you are aware, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), long co-opted by state and corporate interests, has dramatically increased its efforts to enter and influence Indigenous global governance mechanisms.

We, Indigenous representatives of Russia, write to you not only as critics—but as witnesses. We remember what RAIPON once was. *We were RAIPON too.* And because we lived through its capture—we know exactly how dangerous this is.

In our earlier lives, many of us helped build the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North. It was once an authentic, grassroots Indigenous platform—born in the 1990s during a period of hope and political openness. It shaped federal Indigenous legislation. It gave us voice in the Arctic Council and the United Nations. It connected our communities to the world.

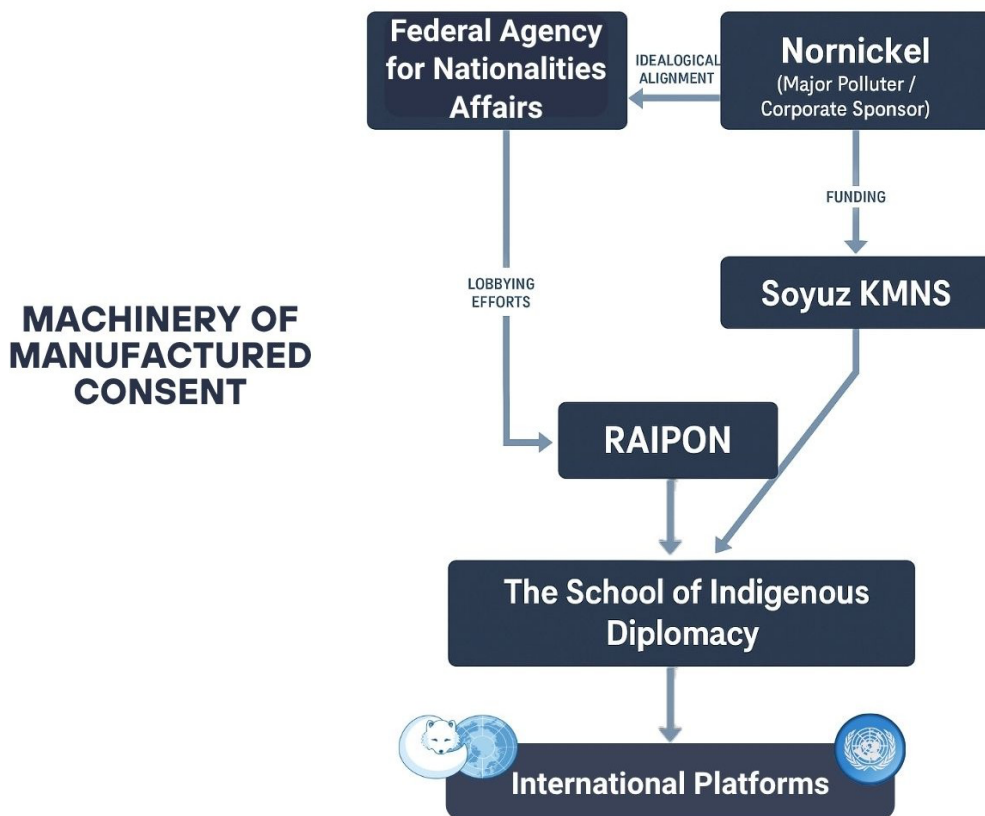
We built RAIPON with the intention of forging a national Indigenous movement grounded in resistance, dignity, and self-determination. But over time, we watched RAIPON fall. In 2013, it was forcibly overtaken by state-aligned actors. Today, that organization is no longer ours. It has been captured, repurposed, and weaponized by the Russian state.

Paradoxically, while the domestic space for Indigenous expression and resistance continues to collapse, RAIPON is increasingly showcased abroad as a symbol of Russia's supposed commitment to Indigenous rights. The movement we helped build has been turned into an instrument to suppress the very voices it was meant to uplift. And now, the mechanisms of the United Nations risk becoming its next stage.

RAIPON is gaining ground in UN forums, Arctic governance spaces, and global civil society venues. RAIPON-linked individuals not only speak at these forums, they help run them. They occupy prestigious seats – enjoying consultative status at the UN and a Permanent Participant

seat at the Arctic Council. On the surface, their approach is careful, diplomatic, and seemingly aligned with Indigenous priorities. Their representatives speak the right language, engage with protocols, and present themselves as natural allies. But it is a calculated and effective campaign, backed by state propaganda diplomacy, vast extractive capital, and a growing apparatus of trained Indigenous spokespersons who echo government lines.

We urge EMRIP to critically assess the appointment of Antonina Gorbunova, whose inclusion on the Mechanism as an “independent expert” is deeply troubling. She is openly affiliated with RAIPON and receives funding and institutional support from Norilsk Nickel (Nornickel)—the world’s biggest polluter on Indigenous homelands. The mining company funnels funding into RAIPON and parallel groups (i.e. “KMNS Soyuz”, a union for Indigenous Peoples of the North created with Nornickel’s backing). This is not independence—it is extractive complicity. How can an “independent” expert, elevated not by Indigenous communities, but by state-linked platforms and extractive capital be tasked with defending the rights of Indigenous Peoples to land and self-government?



We also raise concerns about Mr. Alexey Tsykarev, a former EMRIP member who now heads Russia’s School of Indigenous Diplomacy—a joint venture of state agencies, state-aligned businesses, and RAIPON. Tsykarev is not Indigenous himself, but a government-aligned staff member hired by the Russian state and its corporate partners to train and position so-called Indigenous diplomats.

Notably, he has been declared persona non grata in several Baltic and Nordic countries due to his assessed threat to national security—underscoring how closely his activities align with Kremlin soft power strategies. His continued role in Indigenous diplomacy undermines both the credibility and the safety of international Indigenous platforms.



**PROMOTIONAL  
MATERIALS FROM  
THE "SCHOOL OF  
INDIGENOUS  
DIPLOMACY"  
WITH ITS LIST OF  
SPONSORS**

The school explicitly aims to train and place Indigenous diplomats into global forums. This manufactured class of Indigenous envoys is being inserted into international institutions - a strategic manipulation of identity and narrative. This school does not cultivate Indigenous agency—it manufactures compliance. It trains Indigenous delegates not to question power, but to perform loyalty. Funded by the Russian state and private business (Nornickel) endorsed by RAIPON, it is part of a wider strategy of Indigenous disempowerment disguised as inclusion. And while RAIPON has leveraged its influence to position its people in key roles, independent voices are denied travel, funding, or accreditation.

This is not Indigenous diplomacy. This is Indigenous-washing.

We name it for what it is: a sophisticated strategy by authoritarian regimes to decorate repression with the faces of those they silence at home. Indigenous- washing manipulates identity to hide harm. It is a brutal new chapter of colonialism—where the colonized are used to colonize further, weaponizing representation itself.

This is not a future threat—it is happening now.

Across the world, governments increasingly seek to instrumentalize Indigenous platforms to serve state agendas. States are learning that the best way to silence Indigenous Peoples is not through force—but through appointment. They manufacture loyalty, promote obedient leaders, and fund state-aligned NGOs, all while criminalizing or exiling true Indigenous independent leaders and institutions.

Indigenous movements must remain accountable to the peoples, not to authoritarian agendas or corporate interests. It is a betrayal of our collective struggle when the voices of Indigenous resistance are replaced by performers of diplomacy, selected for their obedience rather than their truth.

Indigenous Rights Mechanisms were not built to stage state narratives. They were built to challenge them, to be a force for legislative change and a shield for vulnerable communities. If we do not act now, we risk losing not only credibility—but entire communities who will no longer see the UN as a place for justice.

We refer EMRIP to two key investigations:

- “RAIPON: From Nation-Based Change Agent to a Weapon of State-Controlled Propaganda” (ICIPR, 2024)  
<https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/38572>
- “They work for the benefit of those at the top.” How the Association of Indigenous Peoples became an enrichment and lobbying tool” (Arctida, 2024)  
<https://arctida.io/en/investigations/oni-rabotayut-na-bлаго-verhushki>

These reports provide detailed evidence of how the Russian government and extractive companies like Nor Nickel strategically fund and influence so-called Indigenous organizations to serve their agenda—both domestically and internationally.

We must not allow this model to globalize. If the international Indigenous platform does not draw a line now, the machinery of manipulation will replace the movement entirely.

We call on EMRIP to ensure that those who betrayed Indigenous Peoples do not define Indigenous Futures.

We ask you to act with the clarity, independence, and moral courage that this moment demands.

In resistance and solidarity,

International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)

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