

EXILE

They called us **exiles** again yesterday.

Russian government spokesperson delivered it through the microphone at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the same way they have done **for years**. *“Do not listen to those who left Russia long ago,”* he said. *“They no longer know what is happening here. They are outsiders.”*

And we felt it—the old familiar sting, the momentary doubt that maybe the distance has blurred something essential. Then we realized: exile does not erase our difference; it clarifies it. Because distance sharpens vision — of our lands in their full magnitude, and the people who live on them.

Inside Russia, the state has rebuilt RAIPON into a **controlled** mechanism of representation. Once an independent Indigenous voice formed in 1990, the organisation was forcibly re-registered after 2013. Its leadership was replaced with **loyalists**. Its funding now flows through state channels and extractive corporations. Its function is to occupy the Permanent Participant seat at the Arctic Council and ECOSOC consultative status at the United Nations while ensuring that **no** independent **challenge** reaches the international stage.

We are the outsiders they warn against.

Exile did not make us irrelevant. We carry the voices they try to bury. Exile is **resistance** —one **unavailable** to institutions whose survival depends on compliance. It has always been the sharpest edge of Indigenous movements worldwide.

From exile we can say what they cannot.

Inside Russia, every public statement, every reindeer brigade meeting, every cultural initiative operates under FSB oversight and the threat of administrative or criminal reprisal. RAIPON will never say their names. RAIPON will never demand Free, Prior and Informed Consent. RAIPON smiles for the cameras while the Arctic is carved up for the *“special military operation”* and the next five-year plan.

RAIPON analysis stops at the border because their funding, their passports, their very existence depend on staying inside the system they claim to critique. Its leaders **cannot** cross the red lines that separate permitted petitioning from genuine confrontation. Their interventions are structurally limited by the requirement to maintain access and operational legality.

In December 2025, Russian authorities arrested at least seventeen Indigenous human rights defenders, including former RAIPON staff and members. For over a month RAIPON issued no statement, no demand for due process, no expression of concern. When President Alexander Novyukhov finally spoke in late January 2026, he stated that RAIPON has *“no moral right”* to stand with them and framed their work as extremist. He invoked the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, not to defend Indigenous activists, but to **discipline** them. An international instrument **created to shield** Indigenous Peoples from state power was used to justify distance from Indigenous Peoples targeted by that power.

RAIPON chose to speak the language of the state prosecutor against its own people.

From exile we can document violations—license numbers, extraction sites, amendments to the laws. We can link them directly to breaches of UNDRIP Articles 8, 26 and 32 (protection against forced assimilation, land rights, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent). We can stand in Geneva, in New York, in Tromsø, in Ottawa, and name the companies, the officials that are violating our right to self-determination. We can connect our struggle to every Indigenous nation that has ever been told *“you are too far away to matter.”*

The North—**our North**—has always been bigger than the borders drawn by **empires**. It does not ask for your affiliation. It asks whether you will stand with the pastures fragmented by Gazprom and Rosneft pipelines, with the rivers contaminated by heavy metals from Nor Nickel, with the permafrost collapsing under oil and gas infrastructure, and with entire communities displaced into sacrifice zones— because of decisions made in offices we are no longer allowed to enter.

Exile.

We wear the label with precision—because it means we carry something they cannot control: an unfiltered, uncompromising memory of what our Peoples were promised under international law and what is being **stolen** from them.

It means we are **free** to speak the truth that the controlled organizations inside Russia have been **trained** to forget. It means the containment strategy has failed. It means the record of what is happening—to the nature and the people—remains public and verifiable.

The Arctic belongs neither to RAIPON nor to the Russian authorities. It belongs to the Peoples who have lived here for millennia.

And it will be defended by **every mechanism available**—including the borderless resistance that exile makes possible.

*Your comrades, still fighting for every reindeer, every salmon,
every community who deserves to speak without fear.*

Exile — and proud of it.