

BLUE BELLS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

MODEL UN 2025

BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNCSW

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United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Agenda: Combating Gender-Based and Honour Killings Among Indigenous

Populations and Ensuring Inclusive Cultural Policies

Table of Contents

<i>1. Introduction</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. Context and Background</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>3. Understanding Indigenous Vulnerabilities.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>4. Root Causes of Gender-Based and Honour Killings.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>5. Cultural Dimensions.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>6. Legal and Institutional Gaps</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7. International Human Rights Framework.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>8. Strategies to Combat Gender-Based and Honour Killings</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>9. Ensuring Inclusive Cultural Policies.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>10. Case Studies and Best Practices.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>11. Challenges Ahead.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>12. Conclusion</i>	<i>14</i>

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to BBI Model United Nations. As your Executive Board, we're incredibly excited to guide you through this journey and witness the ideas, diplomacy, and leadership each of you will bring to the table.

This background guide has been carefully put together to give you a strong starting point—it outlines the core issues, gives context, and offers direction. But it is just that: a starting point. The real depth of this committee will come from your research, your curiosity, and the unique perspectives that you bring into the room.

MUN isn't just about facts and figures; it's about understanding complexities, building arguments, listening to others, and adapting your stance with diplomacy and conviction. The more time and effort you invest in understanding your country's position and the nuances of the agenda, the more confidently you'll engage in debate—and the more memorable your experience will be.

We encourage you to go beyond this guide. Explore news articles, journals, speeches, and even interviews—any credible source that helps you look at the issue from different angles. Creativity and initiative in research will never go unnoticed, and we value delegates who come prepared not just to speak, but to listen, learn, and lead.

We're looking forward to seeing this committee come alive through your words and actions. Here's to an exciting few days of learning, challenge, and change.

Warm regards,

Wania Hussain (Chairperson)

Parth Narula (Vice-Chairperson)

Anyia Kapur (Rapporteur)

Be Honest, Be Brave

1. Introduction

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Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations across the globe, transcending borders, cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. Among the many forms of GBV, honour killings represent one of the most extreme manifestations, wherein women and girls – and occasionally men – are murdered by family or community members under the pretext of restoring honour. Such acts are often justified by invoking cultural, patriarchal, or traditional values, yet they stand in stark violation of international human rights standards. The problem becomes particularly severe when examined through the lens of indigenous populations, who face unique vulnerabilities due to historical marginalization, geographical isolation, and the lack of effective state protection.

At its core, gender-based violence refers to any harmful act directed against an individual based on their gender. This encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, as well as harmful cultural practices. Honour killings, while varying in justification across contexts, are almost always gendered in nature, disproportionately targeting women who are perceived to have transgressed socially constructed codes of honour. Common triggers include marrying against family wishes, seeking divorce, dressing in ways deemed “inappropriate,” being survivors of sexual assault, or even forming friendships with individuals outside of prescribed boundaries. These killings are rarely spontaneous acts; they are rooted in entrenched systems of control, patriarchy, and collective enforcement of gender norms.

For indigenous populations, the issue assumes a multi-layered complexity. Indigenous groups worldwide have historically been subjected to colonization, forced assimilation, displacement, and systemic discrimination. These historical injustices continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to justice. In many cases, indigenous women

and girls are caught at the intersection of ethnic, cultural, gender, and socio-economic marginalization. The silence around their suffering is often compounded by the lack of recognition of indigenous justice systems by state authorities, underreporting of crimes due to fear of stigma, and the perception that such violence is a “cultural matter” best left unaddressed by outsiders.

It is also critical to highlight that culture is often misinterpreted to justify violence. Indigenous traditions, which are rich in diversity, resilience, and knowledge, are too frequently conflated with harmful practices. In reality, indigenous communities have long upheld values of respect, communal harmony, and balance. The misuse of cultural narratives to perpetuate honour killings

not only harms women but also damages the very fabric of indigenous identity. The challenge, therefore, lies in differentiating between cultural preservation and the perpetuation of violence, ensuring that interventions respect indigenous self-determination while upholding universal human rights.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), as the principal global intergovernmental body dedicated to gender equality, plays a crucial role in addressing these issues. Its mandate to promote women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields makes it a key platform for developing strategies that target the eradication of gender-based and honour killings. In this context, indigenous women’s struggles must not remain peripheral but rather central to global discourse, as their realities shed light on the broader systemic gaps in achieving gender justice.

Another dimension to consider is the concept of inclusive cultural policies. Addressing honour killings among indigenous groups cannot be reduced to legal or punitive measures alone. Solutions must also involve culturally inclusive frameworks that empower indigenous voices, preserve positive traditions, and engage local leadership in rejecting harmful practices. Such policies require a balance: safeguarding the richness of indigenous heritage while unequivocally rejecting violence committed in its name. In this way, inclusive cultural policies become both a tool of empowerment and a safeguard against cultural stereotyping or erasure.

The urgency of this agenda is evident in data and lived realities. According to global reports, thousands of women are killed annually in the name of honour, though the true figures are believed to be much higher due to underreporting. Indigenous women are disproportionately affected by femicide and violence in several regions, including South Asia, Latin America, North America, and parts of Africa. Yet their voices are often muted in national policy debates, where their experiences are either invisibilized or oversimplified. Combating this injustice requires a holistic, multi-pronged approach that integrates law, education, community dialogue, international human rights frameworks, and cultural inclusivity.

This background guide will therefore explore the issue systematically: beginning with the global and local contexts of gender-based and honour killings, unpacking the unique vulnerabilities of indigenous populations, analyzing root causes and cultural dimensions, and identifying the gaps in legal and institutional mechanisms. It will also highlight relevant international frameworks, propose strategies for combating such violence, and suggest ways to design inclusive cultural policies that ensure respect for human dignity while preserving indigenous identity. Finally, case studies and best practices will be reviewed to identify pathways that can inspire global action.



Ultimately, the struggle against gender-based and honour killings among indigenous populations is not simply a women's rights issue; it is a human rights issue, a question of cultural justice, and a moral imperative for the global community. The solutions must not only prevent violence but also create enabling environments where indigenous women can live free from fear, exercise agency over their lives, and contribute fully to the preservation and flourishing of their cultural heritage. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, by placing this agenda at the forefront, seeks to reaffirm that the dignity and rights of women everywhere, especially those most marginalized, are non-negotiable and must be protected at all costs.

2. Context and Background

Globally, gender-based and honour killings are recognized as significant human rights violations. According to UN data, more than 80,000 women are killed each year worldwide, with thousands of these deaths classified as honour-related killings. The actual numbers may be higher, given underreporting, silence, and lack of proper documentation.

In indigenous contexts, such violence is not an isolated phenomenon but is deeply embedded in historical and structural inequalities. Indigenous communities have faced centuries of marginalization, colonization, and systemic exclusion from political and economic development. They often reside in remote or resource-deprived areas where government presence is minimal, law enforcement is weak, and social services are absent.

Indigenous women face compounded discrimination. They are disproportionately denied education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, reinforcing their dependence on patriarchal community structures. When gender-based violence occurs, survivors face significant barriers to reporting and justice, including stigma, cultural pressure, and distrust of state institutions.

Historical colonization also plays a crucial role in shaping these dynamics. Colonial administrations often undermined or reshaped indigenous governance systems, replacing women's leadership roles with male-dominated hierarchies. The resulting patriarchal institutions amplified women's exclusion. At the same time, colonial narratives stigmatized indigenous cultures as "primitive" or "violent," a perception that continues to marginalize indigenous communities today.

As a result, addressing gender-based and honour killings in indigenous populations is a uniquely complex task. It requires navigating the tensions between cultural preservation and human rights, understanding the socio-economic roots of violence, and recognizing the legacy of colonialism. Solutions must acknowledge indigenous agency while ensuring the protection of women's rights.

3. Understanding Indigenous Vulnerabilities



Indigenous women live at the intersection of multiple structural vulnerabilities. The challenges they face are shaped not only by gender but also by ethnicity, socio-economic status, geography, and cultural marginalization. Understanding these vulnerabilities is key to comprehensively addressing honour killings.

a) Intersectionality: Gender, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Status

Intersectionality refers to how different forms of oppression overlap. For indigenous women, gender discrimination converges with racism and class inequalities. They are often stereotyped as “backward” or “uncivilized,” excluded from mainstream economic and educational opportunities, and silenced in political spaces. Poverty exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them dependent on male-dominated family structures and less able to challenge abusive practices.

b) Geographical Isolation and Lack of Services

Indigenous communities are often located in remote areas where legal institutions, healthcare services, and support systems are sparse. This isolation emboldens perpetrators, who can act with impunity. Survivors of violence must travel long distances to reach police or courts, and many lack the financial means or knowledge to do so. The absence of culturally sensitive service providers further discourages reporting.

c) Patriarchal Traditions and Control of Women

Indigenous women are frequently seen as custodians of cultural values. Their actions, dress, and relationships are closely scrutinized. In such contexts, honour killings are framed as necessary to preserve community integrity. Patriarchal traditions assign women a subordinate status, equating their autonomy with dishonour. Girls may be denied education, forced into early marriages, or punished for exercising independence.

d) Customary Justice Systems

Customary laws, while integral to cultural preservation, may fail to protect women’s rights. Community elders or male leaders often prioritize reconciliation or family unity over accountability. Honour killings may be dismissed as “domestic matters,” or perpetrators may be absolved through informal settlements. This undermines women’s access to formal justice systems, creating a duality where violence remains unchecked.

e) Exclusion from Policymaking

Indigenous women are significantly underrepresented in both state-level policymaking and traditional leadership structures. Their exclusion means that laws, policies, and cultural norms are shaped without their input, perpetuating cycles of violence. Lack of political voice also diminishes their ability to advocate for rights and protections.

f) Social Stigma and Fear

Women who challenge traditional norms face ostracism. Fear of “bringing shame” on the family discourages them from reporting violence. Survivors are often blamed rather than supported, reinforcing silence.



Conclusion: These vulnerabilities highlight that honour killings among indigenous populations cannot be viewed in isolation. They are products of systemic inequalities, patriarchal traditions, and socio-economic exclusion. Solutions must be holistic, tackling both structural marginalization and intra-community practices.

4. Root Causes of Gender-Based and Honour Killings

a) Patriarchy and Control Over Women's Autonomy

Patriarchy lies at the heart of honour killings. Women are treated as bearers of family reputation, their choices policed by male relatives. Honour killings serve as extreme acts of control, reinforcing the idea that women's bodies and decisions belong to the community.

b) Misuse of Cultural Traditions

Some communities frame honour killings as “traditional,” but anthropological research shows that many such practices are not indigenous customs but distortions of patriarchal norms. The misuse of culture to justify violence creates a false dichotomy between cultural preservation and women's rights.

c) Poverty and Lack of Education

Poverty leaves indigenous families dependent on rigid social norms to preserve survival. Girls may be withdrawn from school, forced into early marriages, or punished for challenging authority. Education, which could empower women, is often inaccessible. Lack of economic independence keeps women vulnerable.

d) Weak State Protection

In many countries, indigenous areas are under-policed. Governments either neglect these regions or fail to establish culturally sensitive systems of justice. When crimes occur, perpetrators often go unpunished, reinforcing impunity. The absence of state protection perpetuates reliance on community-based systems, which may not protect women.

e) Political Underrepresentation

Indigenous women rarely have decision-making power. Without representation, their specific needs are overlooked in national policies on gender or indigenous rights. Political invisibility translates into weak legal protections and a lack of targeted programs.

f) Stigmatization and Fear of Cultural Erosion



Indigenous communities often perceive external efforts to address GBV as threats to cultural survival. Historical experiences of assimilation and cultural suppression foster suspicion of state or NGO interventions. In this environment, harmful practices may be defended as “authentic culture,” even if they perpetuate violence.

g) Intersectional Discrimination

Indigenous women face compounded oppression in broader society. When they experience violence, their cases may not be taken seriously by authorities. Systemic racism contributes to the neglect of indigenous victims.

5. Cultural Dimensions

a) Distinguishing Culture from Harmful Practices

Not all practices within indigenous communities are harmful, but some patriarchal customs are wrongly justified as “tradition.” It is critical to distinguish between authentic cultural heritage and harmful practices that undermine rights. Indigenous art, rituals, and social structures are invaluable cultural assets, but honour killings represent distortions of cultural values.

b) Balancing Cultural Respect with Human Rights

International actors must avoid framing indigenous cultures as inherently violent. The challenge is to respect indigenous autonomy while ensuring that harmful practices are not tolerated. Solutions should emerge through dialogue and collaboration rather than imposition.

c) Role of Elders and Leaders

Community elders wield significant authority. Involving them in promoting gender equality can help shift norms. Elders can reinterpret traditions to emphasize protection, dignity, and women’s leadership. Their endorsement is essential for community-wide change.

d) Dangers of Stereotyping Indigenous Communities

Portraying indigenous groups as “barbaric” reinforces colonial stereotypes. Such portrayals undermine trust and create resistance to external interventions. Efforts must focus on empowering indigenous voices rather than imposing outside narratives.

e) Cultural Revitalization as Resistance

Many indigenous women’s groups have revived pre-colonial traditions that empowered women. By reclaiming authentic cultural practices, communities can resist patriarchal distortions while preserving identity.



Conclusion: Culture should not be seen as an obstacle but as a potential tool for reform. By engaging with elders, traditions, and indigenous women leaders, cultural policies can eliminate harmful practices while safeguarding indigenous heritage.

6. Legal and Institutional Gaps

Indigenous women face significant barriers in accessing justice. Weak legal enforcement in remote areas means that crimes often go unpunished. In many countries, state law does not adequately recognize indigenous women's rights, creating legal ambiguity.

Customary law often conflicts with state law. While indigenous governance systems are vital to cultural identity, they may prioritize community reconciliation over justice for victims. Honour killings may be treated as private disputes rather than criminal acts, leaving women unprotected.

Data collection is another gap. Honour killings are underreported, especially in indigenous contexts. Without accurate data, governments cannot design effective interventions.

Legal pluralism—where both customary and state laws coexist—creates confusion. Indigenous women may be caught between two systems, neither of which adequately safeguards their rights.

Conclusion: Legal and institutional gaps perpetuate impunity and silence. Addressing these requires integrating indigenous voices into legal reforms, strengthening enforcement in indigenous areas, and ensuring that human rights standards are upheld across all justice systems.

7. International Human Rights Framework

Several international frameworks address the rights of women and indigenous peoples.

- **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):** Recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination while affirming that women and men must enjoy equal rights. It emphasizes cultural preservation without condoning practices that violate human rights.
- **CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women):** Obliges states to eliminate discrimination against women in all forms, including cultural practices that perpetuate violence.

- **The Istanbul Convention:** A regional framework focusing on preventing and combating violence against women, including honour-related crimes.
- **Case Studies:** International pressure has driven reforms in countries like Jordan and Pakistan, where legal loopholes previously allowed honour killers to go unpunished.

Together, these frameworks provide a foundation for holding states accountable while promoting inclusive cultural policies that protect indigenous women.

8. Strategies to Combat Gender-Based and Honour Killings

a) Legal Reforms

Governments must criminalize honour killings explicitly, close legal loopholes, and strengthen enforcement in indigenous areas. Training law enforcement in cultural sensitivity is critical.

b) Community Engagement

Change must come from within communities. Partnering with elders, leaders, and women's groups can help reinterpret traditions in ways that promote equality.

c) Education and Awareness

Investing in education, especially for girls, empowers women and shifts community attitudes. Awareness campaigns should highlight that honour killings are not authentic cultural practices but violations of human dignity.

d) Empowering Indigenous Women

Promoting women's leadership within both state and indigenous governance structures is key.

Indigenous women should be supported in roles as political leaders, educators, and advocates.

e) Healthcare and Psychosocial Support

Survivors need access to healthcare, counseling, and safe shelters. Services must be culturally adapted to ensure accessibility.

Conclusion: Strategies must integrate legal, social, cultural, and health dimensions, ensuring solutions are both rights-based and culturally respectful.



9. Ensuring Inclusive Cultural Policies

Inclusive cultural policies safeguard traditions while rejecting violence.

- **Defining Inclusivity:** Policies must ensure that women's voices are central in defining cultural preservation.
- **Co-Creation with Communities:** Indigenous communities should co-develop policies to ensure legitimacy.
- **Promoting Positive Practices:** Rituals, storytelling, and women's councils can strengthen identity while advancing equality.
- **Integration into National Policies:** Indigenous knowledge must inform national gender frameworks.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Law enforcement and social services must respect cultural values while rejecting harmful practices.

Inclusive policies transform culture into a tool for empowerment rather than oppression.

10. Case Studies and Best Practices

- **Jordan:** Reforms removed legal loopholes that previously allowed honour killers to escape punishment.
- **Pakistan:** Civil society advocacy pushed for stricter laws on honour killings, though enforcement remains a challenge.
- **Canada:** Indigenous women's groups have led movements to end violence, emphasizing cultural revitalization.

- **NGOs:** Organizations such as UN Women and grassroots groups have successfully engaged elders to reinterpret traditions.

These examples show that reforms are most successful when legal change is combined with community-led initiatives.

11. Challenges Ahead

Several challenges remain. Balancing cultural sovereignty with universal human rights is delicate. Indigenous communities may resist reforms perceived as external interference. Conservative or patriarchal elements within communities may actively oppose women's empowerment.

States may also be reluctant to intervene in indigenous affairs, fearing accusations of cultural suppression. Tokenistic policies that claim to protect women without real enforcement further undermine progress.

Ultimately, the greatest challenge is ensuring that solutions are both effective and respectful—protecting women's rights without eroding indigenous identity.

12. Conclusion

Gender-based and honour killings among indigenous populations represent one of the gravest violations of human dignity. Rooted in patriarchy, cultural distortion, poverty, and systemic discrimination, these practices cannot be addressed through criminalization alone. They require holistic approaches that engage with history, culture, and indigenous agency.

Inclusive cultural policies provide a pathway forward. By co-creating solutions with indigenous communities, governments can preserve traditions while rejecting harmful practices. Empowering indigenous women as leaders and decision-makers ensures that reforms are not imposed but owned by the communities themselves.

International frameworks such as UNDRIP and CEDAW provide guiding principles, but their effectiveness depends on local implementation. Case studies show that reforms succeed when legal action is combined with grassroots engagement.

The path ahead demands persistence, sensitivity, and courage. Combating honour killings is not only about saving lives but about affirming that cultural identity and human rights are not incompatible. True empowerment lies in creating societies where indigenous women are free to live with dignity, safety, and autonomy—honoured not for their compliance but for their humanity.

