

AUGUST 2022 | ISSUE 9

# GFOD MATTERS



## Major Highlights:

[CDWD Peoples Assembly, New York.](#)

[GFoD UN Strategy Workshop 1-3 July, New York.](#)

[United Nations High Level Political Forum](#)



## CDWD PEOPLES ASSEMBLY 30 JUNE 2022, NEW YORK.



The in-person People's Assembly discussed achievements and obstacles regarding the rights of CDWD on June 30, 2022. The round table aimed to create a space for dialogue and exchange, bringing CDWD rights experts, activists, and other country representatives to the UN in New York.

Envisioned objectives:

1. To recognize the numerical strength and geographical spread of the CDWD communities to understand the gravity of discrimination and violence they undergo presently and for centuries;
2. To assess the level of response from individual and collective States Parties in eradicating such discrimination and violence, thereby restoring the rights of the CDWD communities to enjoy the resources and entitlements due to them;
3. To explore how the CDWD communities can be formally brought within the ambit of the UN Charter Bodies – UN Declaration on CDWD Communities, etc.
4. To explore ways and means of generating support from the Foreign Missions towards making UN Body respond formally to the concerns and aspirations of the CDWD communities.

**GFOD UN STRATEGY WORKSHOP 1-3 JULY, NEW YORK  
REPORT PREPARED BY MR. GERONIMO OWENS**



From July 1 st to July 3 rd , representatives from communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD) from every continent met in New York City to forge the strategy that will guide our movement for the next five years and beyond. The chief priority of this conference was to craft an action plan that will lead us to an eventual United Nations declaration of the rights of CDWD people, with inspiration drawn from the successful struggle of the indigenous peoples movement to do the same. Within the clear-eyed destination of a UN declaration, however, were tied other essential questions and purposes: to affirm our shared commitment and solidarity to one another, and to continue to establish the bonds of kinship and friendship across our cultures and languages that will allow us to find strength and joy in a shared sense of identity as CDWD people. While the immediate goal of our conference was to commit to a plan for the next five years, we are guided by the necessity of building a movement that can sustain our people for generations to come.



## GFOD UN STRATEGY WORKSHOP 1-3 JULY, NEW YORK



### July 1st – “Shared Goals”

The first day of our conference, entitled “Shared Goals,” was opened by the convener of GFoD, Paul Divakar Namala, with a speech addressing the hopes, challenges, and mission of the conference. Divakar’s speech followed to streams of thought: the first was on the necessity of stating clearly the specific steps that must be taken to achieve the goals of CDWD people and to establish the commitments that the representatives in that room would make to carry out those steps. CDWDs need an institutional space within the UN that is recognized by all and from which we can ensure that we will always have a seat at the table. The second purpose was to begin discussions surrounding the question of identity formation. We need a name – he declared – beyond the technical language used by the UN that would state clearly for ourselves and others who we are, and that we can identify with and find essential meaning in. We need a slogan, a cry to action, that would reflect the diversity of this global movement. An essential aspect of being CDWD, he argued, is that we exist in a state of dismemberment; the dominant communities have divided us from one another both globally and within our nations, and building a movement that achieves effective, practical outcomes is not possible until we undo that dismemberment and find ourselves whole once again.



Following Divakar’s speech, one of the facilitators of the workshop, Corinne Lennox, guided the participants in a round table discussion in which each participant shared who they are, which community they come from, and what they hoped to achieve by the weekend’s end. These intentions ranged from hoping to find a shared sense of connection with others in the room, hoping to learn more about the structures and mechanisms of the UN, and hoping to ensure that intersectional thinking on issues such as gender and disability are embedded within the CDWD movement. On the final day, Lennox returned to these stated goals and found that each member’s goal had been addressed in the course of the conference.

## GFOD UN STRATEGY WORKSHOP 1-3 JULY, NEW YORK



The second session of the day was facilitated by Rita Iszak, a prominent human rights defender from the Roma community with decades of experience working within the UN system to achieve concrete results. When introducing her, Divakar noted that Iszak's passionate advocacy for CDWD has led to India frequently objecting whenever she speaks at official UN events. In her talk, delivered virtually, Iszak presented a paper she has written entitled "Strengthening DWD Advocacy at the United Nations," which lays out in detail the complex mechanisms of the UN and makes clear how these mechanisms can be effectively lobbied in order to eventually produce a UN Declaration on the Rights of DWD Communities. Iszak acknowledged that advocacy at the UN level can often feel frustrating and alienating, due to its at-times slow-moving nature and the hostility that advocates can face from member-states who are threatened by calls for equality and justice. However, she noted that this is why movements such as GFoD are so essential – by bringing together activists with a wide range of experiences from regions all across the world, not only do we find strength in numbers, but we are also able to transcend the feeling of loneliness that advocacy can produce. Iszak reflected on the fact that each advocate in the room had a wealth of personal experience that would be of benefit to the group, and this it is this diversity of experience that is one of our movement's greatest strengths. However, she also stressed that it was equally vital that, in order for us to be an effective global movement, that we no longer see ourselves as acting as individually, and begin to see ourselves as acting collectively towards one shared purpose.



In the floor discussion, many participants expressed two anxieties concerning UN advocacy: the first is the opposition from member-states that is bound to arise when the rights of CDWD communities are brought up, and the second is the slow-moving nature of the UN and concerns that even if progress is made in establishing a declaration, that implementation of programs protecting CDWD people would not be effectively enforced. These comments often spoke to each speaker's personal experience from their decades of work at the local and global level, and the challenges and opposition that they have faced in fighting for the rights of their people. Iszak noted that these comments revealed the need to work cohesively at multiple levels – locally, regionally, and globally – and that it is by coordinating action at all three levels that lasting and significant results can be achieved. It is necessary to advocate at the UN level, so that pressure is applied to member-states who are oppositional to our cause, but it is equally necessary to agitate and organize at the local level, to ensure that fact-finding missions are carried out that gives advocates the knowledge and data they need to be effective, and that there is accountability from the nation-states once progress is made globally. It is by viewing ourselves as acting within part of a larger process, of ensuring that we are coordinating across regional and national lines, that lasting progress can be made.



In the third session, entitled “Strategizing for the UN and Regional Road Maps,” the participants split into groups based on region to begin the process of collectively imagining the work our movement will do for the next several years in order to achieve our goal of a UN declaration. Working with a timeline that asked the participants to set goals for one, three, and five years into the future, and to divide those goals into the local, regional, and global levels. On the second day of the conference, each group presented their road map, highlighting both the unity in vision demonstrated throughout the conference, but also the creativity that can come about by working cross-regionally. Each group stressed the need to work at the regional level to identify partners – whether they be member-states, NGOs, or other stakeholders – who could serve as allies to our movement. Nearly group also spoke to the need to identify which resolutions and declarations are already in place – whether they be from the UN or from regional bodies such as the African Charter of the Human Rights – and to begin to coordinate action to advocate for our rights through these bodies. Yet were also unique concerns and goals raised based on specific regions. The diaspora group spoke of the need to develop an effective and engaging social media campaign to raise awareness of our cause, and of the necessity of finding ways to get young people involved and motivated, so as to ensure this movement will be effective for decades to come. The Europe and Latin-America group wanted to ensure that there will be coordination at the regional and global levels to produce in-depth research to ensure that we can effectively educate the public on the discrimination our communities have faced. The African group, meanwhile, spoke to the challenges that fragile states present to effective organizing, and also to the need to ensure that we are working at the parliamentary level within our individual nations to ensure there is movement at the local level as well as at the regional and global levels.





The final session of the day was a presentation by Kenneth Deer, a renowned activist from the Mohawk Nation who has been a leader of the Indigenous Peoples Movement for decades. Deer spoke of his experiences advocating for the creation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was passed by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and the challenges and rewards of such a process. One of the first thoughts Deer shared addressed an essential question that faces the CDWD movement: namely, that when the Indigenous Peoples Movement first came together in the 1970s, there were those both from within Indigenous communities and from outsiders that questioned whether the name “indigenous” captured a true identity. Indigenous people came from every continent of the world, spoke countless languages, had unique and diverse histories. They were seen as a collection of different peoples within nations, rather than as one, cohesive group. Yet, each across these groups there was a common history of being dispossessed and disempowered, and Deer spoke to how the Indigenous Peoples Movement found connection through this shared history and used it to develop a powerful and unbreakable sense of solidarity. They ensured that their movement was intersectional: that people from a variety of religions and races were all included, that gender equality was made a priority within the movement, and that issues that were fundamental to Indigenous concerns, such as care for the Earth, were fully incorporated into the movement’s platform. This ensured that Indigenous Peoples would not be set against one another, that they operated from a place of consensus, and that they were united in message, strategy, and spirit, leading to the passage of a declaration that had not been watered down or compromised. Deer also responded to one of the main questions participants had, which was how to navigate advocating at the UN when faced with hostile member-states, and how to identify member-states that might be sympathetic to our cause. In response, Deer spoke to the long- running nature of UN advocacy, that, as global and national politics shifted some states became friendly while others became hostile, and vice versa. It was necessary to be attuned to these changes, to ensure that those within hostile nations still had their voices heard and accounted for, that advocacy at the local level was constant, and also to find member-states who served as powerful allies in creating as much pressure on hostile member-states as possible.

Finally, Deer spoke to the utility of the UN Declaration – to whether or not the decades of work that it took to produce it was worth the time and energy. He stressed that there is no such thing as a silver bullet for human rights, that the passage of the Declaration in-and-of itself does not ensure the rights of indigenous people. Instead, he stated, the Declaration must be seen as a tool that can be used to strengthen advocacy at every level. Since its passage, several states have incorporated the Declaration into their constitutions, it has been used in courts to advocate for land rights and other essential causes, and it has given Indigenous people a means to define themselves at the international level and create a space for them institutionally at the UN. Overall, Deer’s talk and the interactive period that followed was an important step in building solidarity between CDWD and Indigenous People, and in giving the CDWD movement a powerful inspiration as we move forward in this process.



## July 2 nd – “Key Strategies”

The second day of the conference, “Key Strategies,” focused on taking the lessons learned from the previous day and apply them in order to craft an action plan for our movement to commit to over the next five years. Before this could be done, however, it was essential to address the question of identity – what it means to be CDWD, and what this global community we are building means for our specific local and regional communities and identities. Divakar, facilitating, opened the session with a talk that addressed two key themes: the first was on how defining our identity at a global level can strengthen our movement internally, and how it is essential in advocating for our rights to external forces.

Divakar acknowledged that each member in the room came to the conference representing a distinct identity, one shaped by centuries of history. Some take pride in this identity, while others, perhaps, wish to discard an identity that has been enslaved and degraded and wish to craft a new one for themselves. However, despite the immense diversity of these identities, Divakar stressed the commonalities shared by everyone in the room: that they come from communities that have been invisibilized, whose contributions to the village, the state, the world have been denied, who have been segregated away from the community at large and denied essential resources, whose land has been destroyed, who are seen as polluted and forced into menial labor. These shared experiences give us a shared identity, and it is necessary to come together and take pride in our shared identity. While we will still maintain our individual identities, we will also find solidarity through this shared identity. Throughout history, he said, it is the predator, the oppressor, who has been valorized. The oppressor has separated us from one another, dismembered us, and in so doing has weakened us. We must come together as one and find strength in this unity, and in so doing, cease to be defined by the eyes of the predator and instead define ourselves.

This is essential not just for the strength it will give us, but also for our ability to advocate for ourselves. People are uneducated on our people and on our cause, and by clearly defining ourselves and giving ourselves a name which is clear and identifiable, we can more easily establish ourselves within the global conversation. As of right now, many are unable to see what distinguishes us from racial minorities or indigenous groups, and thus a clearly defined identity is necessary to make clear the uniqueness and specificity of our cause. Until something is named, he stated, it is not recognized.

The discussion that followed affirmed much of what Divakar stated, and it was clear that by coming together and by seeing in one another shared experiences of discrimination and oppression that people in the room were beginning to develop this sense of shared identity. One participant, Walleet Raichatou of Mali, asked an essential question of those from the Dalit movement in South Asia – “How do you transform humiliation into strength?” Some spoke to how this process of identity formation was, in some ways, a method of decolonization. CDWD people are those who have been internally colonized, and even in those places where caste or slavery or discrimination have been officially outlawed, this colonization is maintained within the culture and within people’s minds. By crafting this identity, we can begin to undo these mental and cultural systems, and overcome the subgroups and subcastes created by the dominant communities to keep our people divided amongst ourselves. Crafting this identity and solidarity was also essential, one participant stated, because we are living in the 21 st century in a time where there is an increasing tolerance of injustice and authoritarian forces, a valorization of evil systems, and thus this unity is necessary to have the strength to stand against such forces.



The second session of the day, facilitated by Meena Varma of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, and Ibrahima Kane a lawyer from Senegal and renowned human rights activist, focused on the meat and potatoes of crafting an advocacy strategy. Varma spoke on the topic of international advocacy, and which UN mechanisms should be targeted to further our cause. She highlighted ensuring that our cause is accounted for within Universal Periodic Reviews, and also spoke to the need to look at financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and corporations that have a tremendous amount of institutional power globally and within nations. By naming and shaming those who abuse the human rights of CDWD, we can use the power of these institutions to create pressure on these abusers.

Kane spoke to the necessity of advocating at the regional level, and identifying key institutions and programs that can be utilized to further the rights of CDWD. At the same time as we advocate at the UN, we must also advocate at institutions such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. This is essential because some regions, such as Latin America, often are more receptive to human rights concerns than others. Similarly to advocating at the UN level, Kane also emphasized the value of targeting financial and development organizations such as the African Development Bank. Following Kane's talk, the representatives of the Roma shared their experiences advocating at the European level, where they have made considerable progress over recent years. They stressed that the regional level is in many ways the most effective space to do the work of capacitating civil society actors to advocate for their cause, as well as the space where evidence and data can most effectively be gathered.



The final session of the day was, in many ways, what everything that came before had been building towards. The participants once again broke into regional groups, but this time each group was given a specific theme to develop and think through at all levels: local, regional, and global. Each group developed a draft of what actions and goals they hope to see accomplished one year from now, three years from now, and five years from now, and it is these drafts that were collated by the GFoD Secretariat into the final action plan that will guide our movement towards our collective aspirations.

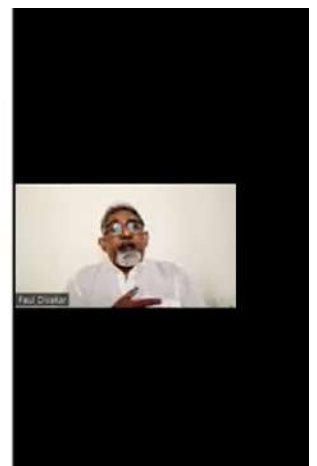
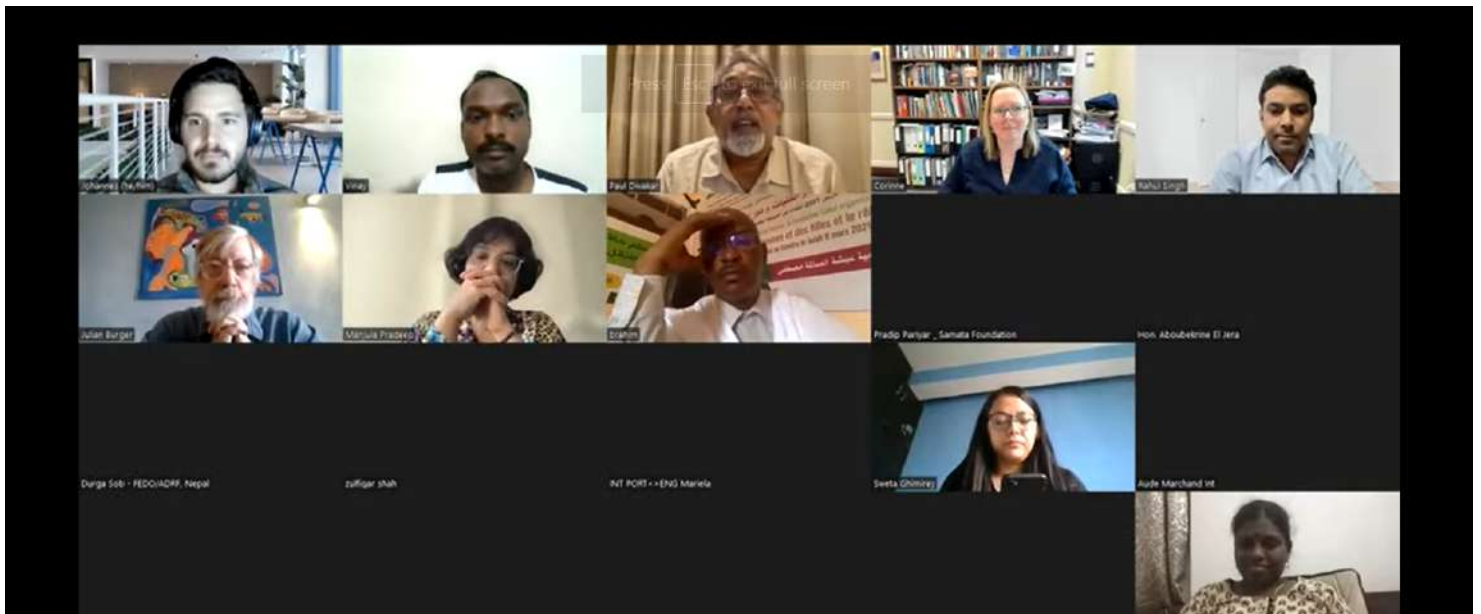
### July 3rd – “Workplan for Roadmap”

The final day of the conference was the shortest and served as a celebration of what had been accomplished over the previous two days, and as an opportunity for each advocate in the room to affirm their commitment to the movement and to the action plan, with each organization represented pledging to undertake specific roles and responsibilities over the next year as we begin building towards a UN Declaration. It was a moment of joy – a joy found in the solidarity that had been strengthened throughout the course of the proceedings. Finally, Divakar asked the participants to share ideas for a slogan that could serve as our movements rallying cry. Suggestions included powerful statements such as “Action is freedom, inaction is slavery,” “Unity is power,” “Not one right less,” and “United for dignity.” While it was clear that there is a great amount of work ahead of us, the meeting ended with the advocates chanting each slogan in turn, their voices raised together in a collective call for equality, unity, and liberation.



## Pre-Workshop Preparation

The workshop was the culmination of months of effort by the GFoD secretariat as well as the many rights experts from across the world who participated. Essential to GFoD's mission is work focused on capacity-building and sharing of knowledge and experience across our transnational network. This has included workshops in which rights experts were guided through projects in which they produced original research papers on the topic of climate justice. The findings of this research were then used to produce a policy brief that GFoD presented at the UN's High Level Political Forum on the SDGs. GFoD also hosted two virtual preparatory seminars on May 18 th and June 8 th in anticipation of the workshop in New York City. These engaging and participatory seminars were led by Corinne Lennox, Julien Burger, and Paul Divakar Namala, who also served as the facilitators of the workshop in New York, and consisted of sessions which described the structure of the United Nations and the mechanisms that NGOs can utilize to intervene at the UN on behalf of human rights. These seminars were particularly valuable for the conversations they elicited, in which members shared on their experiences working at the UN level, making clear the immense breadth of knowledge held collectively by this movement. These seminars also featured presentations by Burger on the Indigenous Peoples' Movement and Movement of People of African Descent and the methods that they used to achieve their advocacy goals. Engaging with these relatively recent examples of success at the UN was inspiring and demonstrated that progress for our movement is eminently possible.



Listen to our participants about their experience of the workshop:



## MEETING TO DISCUSS DIASPORA COMMUNITIES – JULY 25, 2022 REPORT PREPARED BY MS. HARJINDER JASSAL

On July 25, 2022, GFoD – Tip organized a preliminary meeting in New York City to learn more about the CDWD Diaspora populations, where they are, how to get in touch with them and to encourage them to join the movement. This gathering served merely as an introduction; there will be many more like it. Nine people from various groups, including AIM, the Sahel Foundation, and the Abolition Institute, were there.

Some of the important topics that were covered were how to collaborate with various Diaspora groups and how to bring them all together to establish a foundation that could support events and education for the ensuing ten years and for future generations. The meeting also covered how to establish specific goals and rules for what CDWD Diaspora is and entails. One of the main goals that were discussed in this meeting is to do advocacy and give more visibility to this network and work toward a declaration. Additionally, learn about each Diaspora group and be able to take a few teachings and learnings and apply them to this group

The Diaspora represents diverse regions from different continents; thus, we need to build a platform for different groups to come together and demonstrate prejudice, which was another topic that was discussed at this gathering. One participant suggested that their organization is developing a helpline or portal that may assist anyone who is subjected to discrimination based on their work and descent and can call this helpline for guidance and counselling. For the CDWD Diaspora community, a similar helpline was discussed due to look at how it would be very helpful because research and data could be gathered from these phone calls and could demonstrate proof of the discrimination that is occurring. Furthermore, it was discussed that it would require reliable data that may be utilized to prove discrimination. A suggestion that was given was to partner with universities to be able to use their resources and expertise to execute research and data.

Overall, the big takeaways from this meeting were to work towards networking, advocating for CDWD Diasporas and working towards a declaration. In addition, be able to one day incorporate discrimination based on work and descent in the “Sustainable Development Goals” and also to be able to create a sense of family within this group that could bring families together and be able to form an emotional bond.



## UNITED NATIONS HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM - INTERVENTIONS

Listen to the interventions made by CDWD representatives at the UN HLPF 2022 session



Mr. Brahim Ramdhane, Mauritania



Mr. Paul Divakar, Convener, Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent