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UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination presses India on tiger reserve relocations and Indigenous Peoples' rights

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A new letter from the [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cerd) (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cerd>) puts a spotlight on a recurring rights crisis in conservation: when “protected areas” are implemented through relocation and restrictions that sideline the people who have lived on—and cared for—those lands for generations.

In its **19 January 2026** communication to India, CERD addresses the situation of **tribal and forest-dwelling Indigenous Peoples** in the context of tiger conservation, following an earlier [CERD letter](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-india-2.pdf) (<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cerd/earlywarning/letters/cerd-ewuap-letter-115-india-2.pdf>) of **12 May 2025**.

CERD notes India’s description of the legal and policy framework, including the role of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the claim that relocation is voluntary and based on informed consent of village councils.

CERD also highlights the scale of what is at stake: **as of August 2025**, there were **around 6,400 families and 590 villages** inside core areas of tiger reserves. The letter references an **NTCA order issued on 19 June 2024**, which prioritizes voluntary relocation after “informed consent” of village councils and asks State governments to inform the NTCA about their plans.

But CERD is clear that these broad assurances are not enough. It **regrets the lack of detailed information** addressing allegations and concerns, especially regarding:

- the **lack of effective and meaningful consultation** to obtain **free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)**;
- the **absence of impact assessment studies** tied to implementation of the 19 June 2024 order and its impacts;
- the risk of **displacement and eviction without adequate alternative housing and compensation**.

What CERD is asking India to do now

CERD “calls upon” India to **adopt all necessary measures** to protect Indigenous Peoples’ rights and requests **detailed and updated information** during India’s upcoming review (combined 20th and 21st periodic reports).

Specifically, CERD requests information on:

1. measures to ensure **effective consultation and FPIC**, particularly regarding implementation of the **19 June 2024 NTCA order**, where lands, territories, and resources may be affected;
2. the conduct of **impact assessment studies** on the order’s impacts on Indigenous Peoples’ rights;
3. safeguards to ensure any evictions comply with **international human rights standards**, including **adequate alternative housing, compensation, and effective remedies**.

Why this matters for protected areas

This intervention reinforces a basic principle: conservation cannot be pursued through rights-violating models of “fortress” conservation. Any conservation measure that affects Indigenous Peoples’ lands and livelihoods must be grounded in **FPIC**, transparent decision-making, and rigorous **social and human rights impact assessment** and must never result in forced evictions or impoverishment.

What should happen next (human rights approach):

- **Pause** any relocation processes where FPIC has not been demonstrably obtained through meaningful consultation.
- **Publish and scrutinize impact assessments** before implementing relocation plans.
- Guarantee **housing, compensation, and remedies** for anyone affected by evictions—and ensure independent access to complaint pathways.

Please read the full letter **here** (https://indigenous.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2026-02/INT_CERD_ALE_IND_11341_E.pdf).

To learn more about tiger reserves and Indigenous Peoples’ rights in India:

- **Read:** ***India: The State of Human Rights Violations In the Protected Areas With Special Focus On The Tiger Reserves*** (<https://indigenous.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2024-06/StateofHRsViolationsinProtectedAreas-INDIA.pdf>)
- **Watch:** ***The Contradiction of Conservation: Testimonies of the Human Cost of India’s Similipal Tiger Reserve***. (<https://indigenous.arizona.edu/news/contradiction-conservation-testimonies-human-cost-indias-similipal-tiger-reserve>)
- **Watch:** ***Video Testimony from Choudamma a Jenu Kuruba: How the WCS - India ends up being the government agent for forcible relocation in the name of voluntary relocation*** (<https://indigenous.arizona.edu/news/video-testimony-choudamma-jenu-kuruba-how-wcs-india-ends-being-government-agent-forcible>)