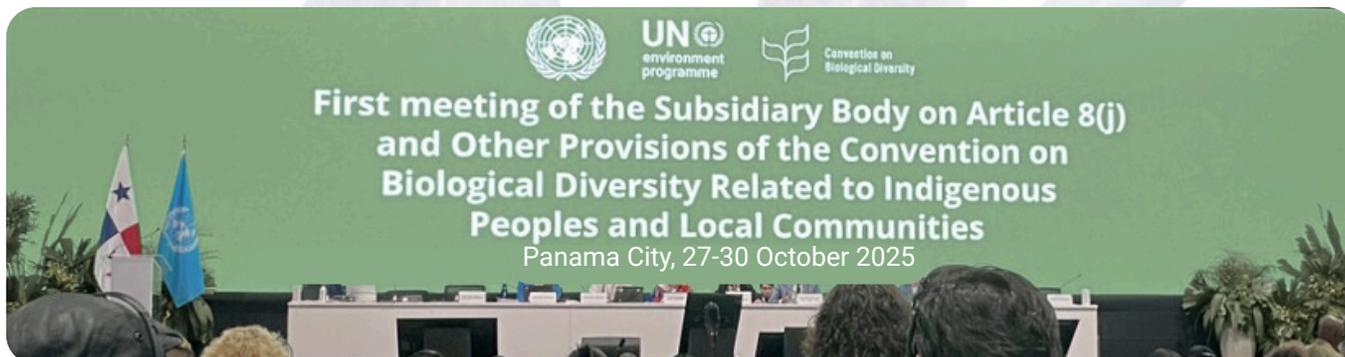


March 2026

ENVIRONMENT NEWSLETTER



Advocating for Indigenous Women's voices in global Biodiversity Decision-Making



NWAC's Participation at the First Permanent Advisory Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

In late October 2025, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) participated in the first-ever meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8J and Other Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in Panama City, Panama. This landmark gathering marked the first permanent advisory group under any international environmental agreement focused on Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Traditional Knowledge. Of the 196 member nations of the CBD, 52 countries attended, representing the seven socio-cultural regions recognized by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Two staff from NWAC's Environment Department attended as part of the 11-member Canadian delegation through its Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) funded project (Supporting Capacity of National Indigenous Representatives to Engage in Conservation, 2021–2026). NWAC brought the voices and perspectives of Indigenous women from ten provinces and territories that partner with the organization. Guided by a gender-responsive and biocultural framework, NWAC advanced biodiversity protection and conservation while ensuring Indigenous women had a strong voice in global policy discussions.

This newsletter provides an overview of the global biodiversity conference, highlights NWAC's contributions, and emphasizes the importance of Indigenous women's participation in decisions affecting lands, waters, and communities.

On the Ground: Key Issues and Discussions

Since it was the first meeting of the advisory body, the discussions centred on establishing the group's structure, leadership roles, decision-making processes, budget, and representation. The four-day meeting had two parallel streams. One stream consisted of Party-led plenaries and contact groups for official negotiations. The other featured side events primarily led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Although Indigenous leaders could attend the plenary sessions, most could only observe, which limited their ability to provide direct feedback.

Key topics included addressing barriers to incorporating Traditional Knowledge in CBD reports, such as respecting free, prior, and informed consent; recognizing the link between biological and cultural diversity and integrating gender and human rights considerations into the glossary of biodiversity terms; and meeting urgent technical, financial, and capacity-building needs, with funding delivered directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. A new concept regarding the voluntary isolation of some Indigenous communities was also introduced, with some Parties expressing concern. Despite these discussions, a few Indigenous women reported feeling excluded from Party-led negotiations. Issues not resolved during the four-day meeting will be addressed at COP17 in Armenia in October 2026.

Amplifying Voices: NWAC's Role and Reflections

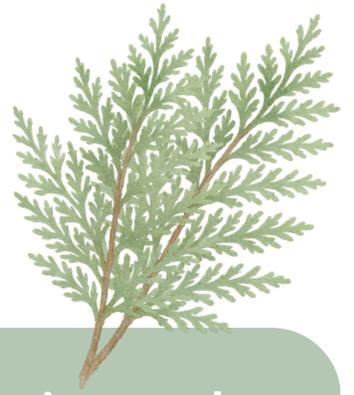


As the only organization within the Canadian delegation focused specifically on Indigenous women in all their diversity, NWAC brought a distinct and critical perspective to the discussions. NWAC staff attended plenaries and side events, networked with other Canadian and global Indigenous and grassroots organizations, and shared an Indigenous woman-centred approach. This allowed NWAC to disseminate its work, advocate for Indigenous women's perspectives, promote their inclusion in decision-making processes, and strengthen relationships supporting ongoing biodiversity work.

NWAC also relayed insights from Party-led and Indigenous-led sessions back to the Canadian delegation, stressing that Indigenous women should have opportunities to provide input in plenaries, not only during side events. This participation strengthened NWAC's approach, expanded its global networks, and reaffirmed its leadership on Indigenous women's environmental rights from coast to coast to coast. Invitations to engage further with the CBD Women's Caucus and other organizations reflect growing recognition of NWAC's work.

However, structural barriers remain, particularly around self-determination, access to resources, and recognition of Indigenous women's leadership. Discussions often focused on process rather than substance, highlighting the risk that Indigenous participation could become symbolic unless perspectives are meaningfully included in decisions affecting lands, waters, and communities.





Looking Ahead: Recommendations and Next Steps

At this important global biodiversity event, NWAC identified several priorities to strengthen the participation and leadership of Indigenous women: creating clear rules and structures that give Indigenous Peoples and local communities real influence; implementing Indigenous-led nomination processes that respect self-determination and regional diversity; and providing dedicated resources for sustained participation, especially for grassroots women. NWAC also emphasizes the importance of explicitly recognizing the rights, knowledge, and leadership of Indigenous women in the advisory body's mandate, as well as ensuring accountability so that Article 8(j) is applied in practice.

Moving forward, NWAC will continue to engage in national and global biodiversity processes, share information with communities, and advocate for spaces that centre Indigenous women's perspectives, rights, and leadership. Continued participation will help ensure that future biodiversity decisions honour relationships with land, water, and all living beings while advancing equity, cultural knowledge, and environmental protection.



NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

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Visit our website at Nwac.ca