

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Second Session  
Agenda Item 4(a): Economic and Social Development  
New York, 12-23 May 2003**

**Joint Oral Intervention of Mr Suhas Chakma, on behalf of Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network, Kabager Te Ked-Inged (Lumad Peoples Movement for Peace) and Hill Watch Human Rights Forum**

Thank you Mr Chairperson,

Across the world, Mr Chair, as you have stated in your opening remarks, indigenous peoples are poorest of the poor in the society. The denial of the right to ancestral lands and other natural resources, among others, is one of the main causes of poverty among indigenous peoples.

The question is how could indigenous peoples' priorities be reflected in the poverty reduction strategies of the UN and other multilateral agencies. In 1997, Secretary General Kofi Annan introduced reform programmes for mainstreaming human rights under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. Five years after the introduction of the reform programme and the programme on mainstreaming human rights in 34 countries, the relevant UN agencies are still unclear as to what constitutes mainstreaming of human rights. As the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in its Annual Appeal 2002 succinctly put it: "The eradication of poverty is both a development goal and an implicit aspect of many human rights norms; yet it remains unclear how best to apply these norms to poverty-reduction strategies."

Mr Chair, the poor are not a monolithic group of people; ethnic origin and stereo-typing associated with certain communities such as indigenous peoples puts them in a more disadvantageous position. In our view without expressed inclusion of the indigenous peoples in policies and programmes of the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, it is often left to the predilections of individuals. It is precisely for these reasons; I referred to development of Principles on Integration of Indigenous Peoples Issues in the United Nations system.

Mr Chair, I would like to draw attention of the Forum to the devastating effects of state sponsored population transfer of persons belonging to majority community on indigenous communities including their economic development. The United Nations regularly debates and adopts resolutions to stop Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and withdraw the settlers. Such resolutions are often sponsored or supported by, among others, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam etc. Yet at national level, these countries have been practicing what they oppose at international level.

According to the World Bank, sponsored settlements of the majority Kinh have radically transformed the human composition of the Highlands population in Vietnam. As the new arrivals have a more dynamic nature than the native populations and often have some

starting capital, they have rapidly imposed their social, economic and cultural superiority in the most accessible and most fertile areas of the region. The World Bank further states "the greater and constant pressure exerted on the land by the migrants makes the production systems of the ethnic groups increasingly impracticable. The poorly educated indigenous populations, who in the main do not speak Kinh, are poorly placed to defend themselves and risk not benefiting fully from the national policy to develop the Highlands. By 1997, in Dak Lak province, in a population of 1.2 million inhabitants, 900,000 are migrants, i.e. 75%, and the flow is still continuing today at an annual rate of 6 to 15%".<sup>1</sup> Such population transfers led to increasing conflict between the authorities and indigenous peoples and consistent influx of indigenous refugees from Vietnam to Cambodia since February 2001.

Because of sponsored population transfer over 5,00,000 illegal plain settlers, indigenous Jumma peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh have been reduced to below 50%, thereby rendering autonomy granted pursuant to the 1997 CHTs Peace Accord meaningless. The government of Bangladesh sustains the conflict in the CHTs by providing free rations only to the illegal settlers under various food security schemes supported by international donors. Many illegal settlers have been getting free rations for the last two decades. New settlers, who have been trickling into the CHTs in large numbers since the signing of the Accord, are also provided free rations. On the other hand, indigenous Jummās are uprooted from their homes under various programmes such as re-forestation. The denial of rations to the indigenous Jumma peoples including the refugees who returned prior to the 1997 Peace Accord and the Jumma IDPs - who are vulnerable and amongst the poorest solely on the basis of their ethnic origin, is a racist act of the Government of Bangladesh.

Mr Chair, institutionalised discrimination can only be addressed through development of binding principles and policies to ensure that indigenous peoples, the poorest of the poor who are often discriminated by their governments, are given adequate attention by the UN and other multilateral agencies.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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1. World Bank, VIETNAM: AGRICULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION PROJECT, DRAFT. ETHNIC MINORITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN, Working Document, 10 November 1997.