

STATEMENT

13th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues



International
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STATEMENT BY

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Agenda Item 5: Half day discussion on the Asian region

Chairperson,

Asia has the highest concentration of indigenous and tribal peoples in the world. More than 150 million indigenous peoples live in this region and many of them are facing rapid and far-reaching changes in their societies and livelihood strategies, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty, marginalisation and unacceptable forms of work, including hazardous work, child labour and forced labour and human trafficking. Widespread poverty and unemployment, compounded by lack of consultation and participation of indigenous peoples, have been underlying causes for social tensions and sometimes even conflict.

Nepal was the first Asian country to ratify the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), in 2007. For several countries in the region, including Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107) remains in force. The ILO has invited these countries to consider ratifying Convention No. 169. Complementary to the on-going supervision of application of relevant ratified Conventions, the ILO is implementing several technical cooperation projects on indigenous peoples' issues in Asia that address some of the key challenges that indigenous peoples and governments are facing in the region. As a contribution to the Forum's half-day discussion on Asia, we would like to highlight our activities in three countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal.

The ILO's project in **Bangladesh** was established in 2009 and has by now run in two phases mainly funded by the Government of Denmark and UNDP. The project provides assistance to ensure the integration of indigenous peoples' rights in the national legal and policy environment, in line with the relevant national and international standards. In doing so, the project seeks to strengthen coordination among the stakeholders involved in implementing indigenous peoples' rights in Bangladesh. The project's key partners include the main stakeholders on indigenous peoples in the country including the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission, UNDP CHT Facility as well as the main national level indigenous organizations.

The ILO project in Bangladesh provided technical and financial support to the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Issues which drafted an Indigenous Peoples' Rights Bill based on a country-wide consultation process. The Bill is now expected to be presented to Parliament. The ILO project has trained several hundred government officials, indigenous representatives, traditional leaders, indigenous women, youth, journalists, lawyers and NGOs on Convention No. 169 and other UN mechanisms on indigenous peoples' rights. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the project recently conducted human rights training for police and border guards, and also conducted extensive training for traditional indigenous leaders with a special focus on land rights and gender equality. In 2013, bringing together representatives of the government and workers' and employers' organizations and indigenous peoples, the ILO facilitated a meeting on employment and indigenous peoples which generated important recommendations for improving access of indigenous women and men to decent work and employment.

The ILO's work in **Cambodia**, is another example from the Asian region on how technical cooperation can make concrete contributions to supporting the realization of indigenous peoples' rights. In Cambodia, the ILO has implemented since 2005, with the support of the Governments of Denmark and Germany, activities focussed on promoting and facilitating the registration of indigenous communities' land rights within the framework of the 2001 Land Law of Cambodia, capacity building on the rights of indigenous peoples for national and provincial government officials, indigenous peoples' organizations and NGOs and research on indigenous peoples' priorities for poverty reduction. To date, it has supported 148 indigenous communities through the different stages of the process leading to land titling. Our work in Cambodia has shown the importance of land tenure security of indigenous communities, as the basis for their traditional livelihoods and social and cultural life. Access to land and resources is important not only to secure an economic income, poverty reduction and rural development but also to maintain and nourish the culture and the development and social cohesion of the community.

Finally, in **Nepal**, the ILO's work is accompanying stakeholder in country towards the effective implementation of Convention No. 169. In the process of Nepal's political transformation, ratification of the Convention provided an opportunity for the Government and the national indigenous peoples' movement to enter into a dialogue to address the legitimate concerns of indigenous peoples as members of the State of Nepal, such as their participation in the Constituent Assembly process and the reform of state structures and policies.

Relying on funding received through United Nations Indigenous Peoples' Partnerships since, the project continues to support the state reform process, including through capacity-building and awareness-raising. In 2013, outreach or communication materials on indigenous peoples' rights were prepared, with a view to deepen the understanding of Convention No. 169. This included a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) developed on the basis of an extensive country-wide consultation process with representatives from indigenous communities, civil society organizations, government officials and local level authorities.