

**Statement by Community Action and Research for Development (CARD)
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Agenda Item 4(B) Environment

Presented by Ms.Sumshot Khular¹, CARD, Manipur, India

Greetings from Manipur, India.

Respected Madam Chairperson, Indigenous Sister and Brothers!

The national governments of most Asian countries have not recognised the rights of indigenous peoples on their ancestral lands and have ignored indigenous people's customary land tenure systems. The territories and resources of indigenous peoples are being exploited at an increasing rate leading to destructions of the environment, marginalisation of indigenous peoples, and denial of their basic means of subsistence and sustenance as distinct peoples and cultures. The draft Scheduled Tribes(Recognition of Forest Rights Bill 2005) is an effort by the Government of India to impose standard land ownership regulation, revenue and territorial sovereignty laws in areas that have typically resisted these paradigms in the interest of indigenous control over and management systems.²

The Tipaimukh project was handed over to the North-eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) who gave a bid for global tender and it received responses from Japan, Iran, China and seven Indian companies responded to the global tender. A 1500 MW project is one of the biggest/largest in the region it is to generate power from the Barak river, the second largest river in the region. The site of the dam is almost on the state border with Mizoram, Assam and Manipur and close to the international border with Bangladesh. The 164 m rock filled dam will come up to 500 metres downstream of the confluence of the Barak and Tuivai rivers.

The project will submerge lands in two districts, Tamenglong and Churachandpur the Nagas in Tamenglong have not let go of a single opportunity to protest against the dam which brings them nothing but loss of land, culture, livelihood and destitution. A partial support in the initial stage in Churachandpur district where the dam will be located. The final clearance given by the government the will have to consider the resettlement and rehabilitation process. In Manipur, the public hearings(mandatory under the Indian law to clear a project had been held under the careful siege of the armed forces managed to secure on paper the verdict that the state had already decided upon that the dam had to be built at all costs. Security forces are being deployed to protect construction sites for mega projects that failed to adhere to existing social, environmental standards, example the Mapithel dam (Assam rifles and Border security forces) deployed. This also led to massive agricultural land being taken over by the armies.

Land, water, air and natural resources that Special Economic Zones are likely to exploit and gain control over and the use of which is directly linked to environmental impacts of SEZs. The change of land use of an area for industrial purpose is bound to change the ecosystems and ecological health of any area. The examples from China indicate the extent of environmental losses involved. India already having a great water scarcity as well as lost of forest and biodiversity, it is required that India should comply with the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification that lays down procedures for seeking an environment clearance for range of development and industrial activities before starting constructions/so called 'development process'.

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² [www.tribal.nic.in/tribal context pdf](http://www.tribal.nic.in/tribal%20context.pdf)

The GOI plan to construct 256³ dams in the Northeast, out of which 100 in Sikkim, the rest in other NE states and numbers of trans-national highway passing through the Northeast and the plan for the railway line through the northeast till Manipur be scrap as it will only bring in more outsiders and poverty.

The impact of market driven economy have heavily marginalised the small scale farming systems, harvesting activities/patterns fishing, pastoralism, and local markets, this has resulted in several hunger deaths and suicides of farmers in thousands in India. In June 2006 as stated by the Agricultural Minister in Parliament 100,000 farmers had committed suicide since 1998- 2003 and the death toll keeps rising daily. The high and increasing use of chemical fertilizers and high yielding crops and mono crops had led to land degradation and loss in the state creating more food insecurity than food sovereignty and security for the indigenous peoples.

Recommendation:

- ☞ ensure the free and prior informed consent in all the proposed development programmes affecting the indigenous people territories and land in the region,
- ☞ Affirming our inalienable rights of the indigenous peoples of Manipur for permanent sovereignty and control, to own and manage our lands, forest, and water resources and for the right to free and prior informed consent to any development projects.
- ☞ Review existing dams in Manipur including the Lokatk Hydro Electric Project, Mapithel Dam, (Thoubal Multipurpose Project), Khuopum Dam, Khuga Dam etc by a panel of experts in accordance with the guidelines and recommendations of the World Commission on Dams to suggest alternatives, including the de-commissioning of dams. Inclusion of the indigenous members in the panel to be chosen in consultation with the people of Manipur.
- ☞ Indigenous peoples and states should ensure that Article 8J of the Convention on Biological Diversity which deals with protection of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples in conservation of biological diversity is implemented. Full and prior informed consent of indigenous peoples should be obtained before any bio-prospecting takes place in their territories
- ☞ Scrap all the SEZs plan in the Northeast region for the survival of the indigenous peoples,

Thank you, Chairperson, for your kind attention.

³ On 23rd March 2003, the then Prime Minister A.B Vajpayee launched the 50,000 MW hydro-power initiatives for NE to turn it into the powerhouse for India and South Asia (Telegraph 25th May 2003) Former Minister of Arunachal Pradesh signed MoU with the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) to construct series of dams, out of the 48 dams being planned five are in Siang basin to generate 6,000 MW