

4<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
United Nations Headquarters, New York  
16-27 May, 2005

Agenda Item 3(b) (and 3(a)):  
Achieving Universal Primary Education (MDG Goal 2)  
Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger (MDG Goal 1)

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on behalf of

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Jhu! Greetings to all on behalf of all indigenous delegations from Bangladesh, and warm congratulations to Victorial Tauli Corpuz, and to the other members of the Forum.

We associate ourselves with the Asian Indigenous Caucus, which (i) urges necessary and immediate steps for implementation by governments and UN agencies of the recommendations adopted at the Third Session of this Forum, and (ii) supports the recommendations of the recent Expert Seminar on Indigenous Peoples and Education organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO (E/EN.4/2005/88/Add.5)

We wish, however, to emphasize the importance of some factors, which, amongst others, are crucial for serious consideration, if we are to achieve substantial progressive on the issue and in a truly inclusive and equitable manner. We will refer to the situation of swidden-cultivating and forest-dependent communities living in remote areas of Bangladesh as examples of the excluded.

FIRSTLY, the heterogeneity of, and the relative degrees of disadvantage suffered by, different indigenous communities even within the same people or region need to be accounted for. For example, the National Education Policy of Bangladesh requires state-subsidized schools to have at least 100 students and a minimum number of teachers and registered land title for the schoolhouse. This is not possible for swidden cultivators or forest-dwellers. Thus a big challenge here is for us to bring forth amendments to the National Education Policy, something we have been unable to do so far, on account of discriminatory attitudes of policy-makers.

SECONDLY, the content, format, setting and language of education must be appropriate, some of which were noted in the Education Seminar. This morning, the representative of UNICEF noted the special situation of nomadic communities. Thus, changes may be required to not only incorporate elements of indigenous knowledge and

cultural traditions into the school curriculum, but to be aware that the setting of the school may well be a drinking water hut near a swidden farm or a shady place within a forest, and not a classroom in the mainstream sense.

THIRDLY, our concern is regarding the process to bring about the desired policy-changes. In our recent dialogues with the Government of Bangladesh regarding the National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, we reiterated the importance of necessary *Sector Policy* changes on Education, Health, etc., which was at best implicitly acknowledged in the document, but totally missing in the Implementation-oriented *Policy Themes and Matrices* section of the document.

Because of widespread discrimination by policy-makers, we cannot realistically expect most of our basic rights to be respected in the very near-future despite all-out efforts at advocacy. Therefore, in the early and/or intermediate phases of a rights-based approach to Education, the essential needs of services delivery is absolutely essential. Recently, an international NGO-supported Primary Education programme in my home region of Chittagong Hill Tracts was wound up as donors did not continue its support, despite the project's admitted success. The community is now quite aware about its basic rights to Education, but is at a loss to how they can contribute enough from their hard-earned cash for the teachers' salaries!

In our dialogues with the Government of Bangladesh on the PRSP, we stressed upon the related importance of honouring our land and self-government rights, as recognized in international treaties, including the ILO Convention No. 107, and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts "Peace" Accord of 1997, the provisions of both of which remain very largely unimplemented. This also highlights the defects within the ILO system of monitoring (where indigenous peoples have no formal participation) and the absence of any international or UN mechanism to deal with treaties and agreements between indigenous peoples and states.

Finally, with the indulgence of the chairperson, I would like to very briefly mention a matter on the Agenda Item on Poverty Eradication (agenda 3(a)), on which we did not get an opportunity to speak. In Bangladesh, we asked all to consider not just our "poverty", at what we do not have, but to remind ourselves of what we do have; including our rich and continuing livelihood practices based upon traditional knowledge. These include practices on forestry, agro-forestry, agriculture, livestock, etc., which are still viable in today's market-oriented societies. And let me remind ourselves that Agenda 21 (adopted at Rio in 1992), recognized indigenous peoples' knowledge as "traditional scientific knowledge". We also cautioned against the introduction of untested and inappropriate livelihood strategies introduced from outside without our consent, regarding both plantation forestry and micro-credit systems (like the Grameen Bank model of micro-credit). THANK YOU.