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

Agenda Item: 3(a)

Statement of Suhas Chakma, representative of Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network

Thank you Madam Chair,

In our intervention on MDG I, we affirmed that the MDGs are the disconnect from the rights based approaches to development irrespective of what Mr Brown and many of the UN agency representatives have asserted as to how they consider the MDGs as rights.

Madam Chair, we have heard from UNESCO, UNICEF and others about the importance of mother tongue in education – a system denied to indigenous peoples. Yet, it may sound crude but MDG 2 gives the impression that children somehow will have to be herded to primary schools to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>1</sup> identified *availability, accessibility, acceptability* and *adaptability* as important factors for the exercise of the right to education<sup>2</sup>:

(a) *Availability* – The educational institutions and programmes must be functioning and available in sufficient quantity including provisions which are required for functioning of an institution such as: buildings or other protection from the elements, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water, trained teachers, competitive salaries, teaching materials, and so on; while some will also require facilities such as a library, computer facilities and information technology;

(b) *Accessibility* - educational institutions and programmes have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination. Accessibility has three overlapping dimensions:

- (i) Non-discrimination - education must be accessible to all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds;
- (ii) Physical accessibility – educational facilities have to be within safe physical reach;
- (iii) Economic accessibility - education has to be affordable by all;

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<sup>1</sup> . India has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1979.

<sup>2</sup> . General Comment No. 13 on the right to education (article 13) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

(c) *Acceptability* - the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and the tribal societies;

(d) *Adaptability* - education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.

Moreover, how would primary education be funded? Madam Chair, we listened to the distinguished representative of World Bank – he only reported about World Bank activities on indigenous peoples and failed to refer anything on the agenda item under discussion – achieving universal primary education. It shows how the World Bank views the right to education. Would the World Bank, IMF and others allocate separate resources to create a plan of action to achieve MDG II or continue to make part of failed poverty reduction strategy programmes? There is no guarantee that education should be free. If it is not free then it can't be compulsory. And if it is neither free nor compulsory, it is not all encompassing.

Education has become a traded service, and World Bank has played the pioneering role by introducing school fees in Africa in the 1980s with the disastrous effects. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, in 45 countries around the world, from pre-primary to university, education has been open to complete privatisation. Only people with adequate purchasing power can buy education for themselves and for their children, but poor people simply can't get any access to education. Indigenous peoples remain the poorest. Though the World Bank claims to be the "the single largest source of finance for education," it has failed to give due priority to primary education. The allocation for primary education from the World Bank is barely 30 per cent of education lending.

Finally, we have two questions for the World Bank – first, would support the rights based approaches to education including education in mother tongues. Second, whether achieving universal primary education be part of part of funding or lend?

The institutionalised discrimination against indigenous peoples and situations of conflicts, which deny the right to education, are irrelevant in this discussion, as the MDGs are not meant to address these situations.