

**Statement by South Asia Indigenous Women Forum, SAIWF
4th Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
United Nations Headquarter, New York,
May 16th till 27th, 2005**

**Item 3 (b)
Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals: “Achieve Universal
Primary Education”**

Presented by Sumshot Khular

Madam chair,

Members of the Permanent Forum, indigenous sisters and brothers!

Illiteracy is the clear evidence of human right violation. Education is not a privilege. It is the right of every child and is the responsibility of every person. There is no need to debate about the importance of education but there is urgent need to debate on:

What kind of education is that?

Is that accessible?

Who control?

Who own?

Who define and who design?

Madam chair, if we must be honest to our future generation then we must admit that the present mainstream education and education system is not based on realities. It is not responding to actual need of the child and the community and it is not child's right sensitive? In such a situation, we can imagine the situation of the indigenous children.

Most of the countries in South Asia are the countries of villages and majority of the population are engaged in agriculture related work. But education is neither village oriented nor agro-based. Many children do not speak mainstream language but education is given in mainstream languages. Country having provision for mother tongue education, the Government does not take any responsibility and therefore the implementation is very weak. In the name of education, child rights are violated in schools and educational institution.

South Asia has still high percentage of child labour and it is obvious that the indigenous children constitute high percentage. In a community where there is poverty and hunger, the question arises:

Food for the brain or food for the stomach?

Nicholas Bennette has rightly said:

Crops cannot be grown on the blackboard,
And certificate cannot be eaten.

The failure of free and compulsory education is the high drop out rate. In male dominated patriarchal society, where name and fame are to be brought only by men, girls suffer the most. They are the least of the priority.

If we are serious in achieving education for all and the universal primary education, the present mainstream education needs to be redefined and transformed for indigenous peoples since the present mainstream education system has been a mean to assimilate and destroy our language, knowledge, culture and values.

Apart from this, Indigenous peoples in South Asia are going through terrible situation due to ongoing protracted conflicts. The school buildings in many parts of the region are under military occupation and the schools have become their camps. In many of the villages the physical existence of schools building is only in the record and in many cases if there are schools, there will not be any teacher to take class. In most cases the teachers comes from high caste or from non-indigenous communities who are not aware of the indigenous peoples ways of life or their knowledge. The teachers as they come from different communities who do not understand the indigenous peoples, they are having biased attitudes towards the indigenous children. Another alarming situation is the mass kidnapping of children from schools and train them to use arms in the name of self defense.

We are also frustrated to see the role and attitudes of UNICEF, UNESCO and UNHCR at the national offices. They are run according to the Government policy which contradicts with the objectives and programs of UN Agencies as presented here in UN Headquarter in New York. We strongly believe that if all the UN Agencies specially, UNICEF and UNESCO implement the programs as it is now, it will resolve at least half of the problems our children are facing.

We therefore we recommend the followings to the Permanent Forum for the consideration:

- Urge UNICEF and UNESCO to develop policy for the education of indigenous children.
- Mainstream indigenous pedagogy and education in all the UN bodies and agencies, specially UNICEF, UNESCO and UN Human Rights Commission
- Urge UNICEF and UNESCO to develop policy for the education of indigenous children.
- Urge the state parties to the ICESR to work towards fulfilling their obligations in achieving the universal primary education for all girls and boys in all the remote rural areas where the Indigenous peoples live.
- Facilitate and coordinate with other UN Agencies and Govt in making education sensitive to indigenous world view, language and culture.
- Facilitate to avail education in their own mother tongue,
- Producing teaching materials and other infrastructures that suit the cultural aspects of the indigenous peoples and incorporate the traditional knowledge of the indigenous peoples as part of the curriculum.
- Declare children as zone of peace,
- Stop and reduce the fund for military aids and weapons and increase fund for the education.

Thank you Madam Chair.