

Submitted by Mr. Om Gurung



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**Statement of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)
Under Agenda Item 3 (B)
Special Theme: The Millennium Development Goal and Indigenous Peoples
Goal 2: “Achieve Universal Primary Education”**

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of Permanent Forum, friends from various indigenous peoples organizations, ladies and gentlemen:

I speak to the Permanent Forum today on behalf of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), the national umbrella organization that represents 10 million indigenous peoples of Nepal. My name is Dr. Om Gurung and I am the General Secretary of NEFIN. Distributed throughout the mountains, hills and lowlands, indigenous peoples of Nepal constitute about 40 percent of the total population of the country. Following the long and sustained political movement led by NEFIN, the government of Nepal today recognizes 59 distinct indigenous peoples in Nepal. During the last 15 years, indigenous peoples of Nepal, organized under the aegis of NEFIN, have also been demanding, full recognition of their socio-political, cultural and economic rights. NEFIN would like to acknowledge the ILO for opening dialogue with the Government of Nepal for the ratification of ILO Convention 169 and the financial support from UK-Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and other donors for NEFIN supported projects.

Let me draw your attention to the fact that NEFIN is represented for the first time to the Permanent forum in this 4th session. This is truly historical for the indigenous peoples of Nepal. We want to thank the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples and ICCO for sponsoring me and my colleagues from NEFIN to participate in the 4th session of the Permanent Forum.

I would also like to congratulate Victoria Tauli-Corpuz for being elected as the chair of the 4th session of the Permanent Forum.

Education is the fundamental rights of all citizens. Due to discriminatory education policies and practices, education has not been accessible to all citizens of Nepal. The statistics of the Ministry of Education of His Majesty's Government of Nepal reports that more than 5 hundred thousands school going age children do not have access to the basic education and the majority of them come from the indigenous communities. At present, the Government of Nepal has started school enrolment campaign throughout the country under the “Education for All” program of MDG. But the indigenous children cannot go to school because of poverty, language problem and physical inaccessibility of the school. Moreover, indigenous children are victims of ongoing armed conflict in the country. The abduction of students and school teachers by Moist in the name of orientation/training for “democratic education (*janabadi shitsya*)” and the military occupation of school buildings and school areas have greatly disrupted the educational environment and thereby threatened the education opportunities of indigenous children.

Education system is also very dangerous to indigenous peoples. It tries to assimilate indigenous peoples forcefully in the main stream society dominated by the Hindu caste society despite the fact that Nepal is a diverse society in terms of ethnicity, cultures, languages and religious practices. The education plan is to promote nationality through the imposition of one language, (i. e., Nepali *Khasa* Language) and promotion of mono-culture ideology. The education environment in the school is also discriminatory. Indigenous children are socially alienated in the school due to lack of multi-cultural curriculum. Although the government of Nepal pretends to be more positive towards promoting multi-lingual education at the primary level, it does not allocate any budget and other resources to promote education in mother languages. In stead it is the official policy of the government that gives much more priority to protect and promote *sanskrit* language. It constituted several High Level Education Commissions to improve the education policies and programs, but the recommendations of the commissions with regard to multi-lingual education policy have never been implemented. With regard to the “Education For All” programs of MDG, NEFIN therefore strongly recommends that:

- The government should adopt multilingual educational policy (at least up to the high school level) and implement them with full participation of the indigenous peoples.
- Education has direct relations with poverty. The government should ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the PRSP policy formulation and program implementation.
- The school curriculum should be developed in mother languages, and such curriculum should promote the indigenous cultural values, identities, history and knowledge.
- The indigenous people should have full participation in the school management and the school teachers should be appointed from the indigenous communities
- The government should provide adequate financial resources and technical support to promote education in mother languages.
- There should be a transparent mechanism to monitor and evaluate the proper use of the intentional funds provided by the donors for the basic primary education.
- Education for indigenous peoples should be the cross-cutting issues of all education policies adopted by the state and the donor agencies.
- The on-going armed conflict should be resolved peacefully involving indigenous peoples and their organizations in a effective way.

Thank you.