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Agenda Item 5 (a) Half Day Discussion on Asia

Madame Chair, I am Jiten Yumnam presenting the statement of Land is Life, Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur, Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network, Human Rights Initiative, Committee on Human Rights and Life Watch. The indigenous peoples of Manipur, in India's North East India continues to experience unresolved armed conflict situation and military occupation to subdue their ongoing struggle for ultimate political rights, for rejecting forced merger of Manipur to India and for resisting unsustainable development processes that will undermine their political rights.

The Government of India's military response to subdue our peoples self determination efforts involve promulgation of emergency legislations derogating "right to life" and "right to justice remedy". The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA, 1958), the most contentious piece of legislation, continues to be enforced in Manipur and across India's North East States. The UN Human Rights Committee denounced the AFSPA, 1958 for its incompatibility with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Government of India refused to repeal the AFSPA, 1958 as recommended by several UN Special Rapporteurs, including Christoff Heyns, UN SR on Extra Judicial Executions and Ms. Rashida Manjoo, UN SR Violence against Women, who visited Manipur in 2012. Political killings under AFSPA, 1958 continues and the victims of violations continue to be denied justice as those state forces involved in violations continues to remain scot free. Human rights defenders and their organizations promoting repeal of AFSPA, 1958 and other draconian laws and respect indigenous peoples' right are subjected to rights violations.

Development processes, incompatible to the traditional values and wish of indigenous communities are introduced. A serious challenge with such developmental processes in Manipur is the failure to recognize their right to self determination over their land and resources. The Government of India has aggressively been trying to construct the 1500 MW Tipaimukh Multipurpose Hydroelectric Power Project without the free, prior and informed consent of affected communities. The Tipaimukh dam will submerge more than 27,000 hectares of forest land and will destroy the livelihood sources of several indigenous communities of Manipur. Another most controversial mega dam project in Manipur is the Mapithel Dam, where the Government of Manipur commenced construction of the dam in violation of all existing Indian and International laws. The Mapithel Dam construction commenced without taking free prior and informed consent of the affected villagers and today, Mapithel dam site is one of the most militarized regions of Manipur. The 105 MW Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Project submerged more than 80,000 hectares of prime agriculture land and loss of several indigenous fish varieties. There is an ongoing plan to build the Chakpi Dam over Chakpi River which will entail serious human rights violations.

The Manipur Hydroelectric Power Policy, 2012, has been formed to promote construction of mega dams all over the rivers and tributaries of Manipur and there is no reference to recognize indigenous peoples' rights over their land and territories or to take their free, prior and informed consent. The Manipur Tourism Policy, 2011, the Manipur Industrial Policy, 2013 etc are also formed as of late to promote corporatization and privatization of our land and resources.

Again, without the consent of all indigenous peoples of Manipur, the Government of India, through its Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, granted license to Jubilant Oil and Gas Private Limited, a company based in Netherlands, for exploration and drilling works² in two oil blocks in Manipur that are located in the Jiribam (Imphal East), Tamenglong, and Churachandpur districts. It is an irony that Indigenous peoples who own the land and resources are not even informed that their land has been transferred and resources gifted away to corporate bodies for exploitation.

The unprecedented involvement and role of the IFI in India's North East has seen unprecedented expropriation of land and brutal suppression of those who assert for land and other democratic rights. The infrastructure projects, such as the Trans Asian Highway, the Trans Asian Railways, road projects aimed at expanding neo-liberal trade system in Manipur and across India's North East region, would perpetuate further exposure of the region to the larger exploitative trade and economic regime. The IFI's funding creates enabling environment for the private sector and not so much for communities. The High Voltage transmission lines across India's North East to connect mainland India and Greater Mekong countries, funded by ADB and World Bank only encouraged mega dam constructions by private parties, which also fraudulently sought additional profits from CDM mechanism of UNFCCC mechanism without taking FPIC of affected indigenous communities.

Land grabbing is also carried out for militarization purposes in the region, where huge tract of prime agriculture land and forest are acquired for military and allied activities, to subdue indigenous peoples' political rights efforts and to protect corporate interest for large destructive projects¹.

In Manipur, efforts for protection of productive agricultural land, forest and rivers and to involve people in developmental decision making are met with brute use of State force. Three affected villagers of Khuga Dam were killed and 25 injured, including women and children by indiscriminate firing by the Border Security Force and the Indian Reserve Battalion in December 2005. Rather than pondering to legitimate concerns and alternatives addressed by the peoples, the typical responses of the State to peoples' resolve to defend their land, is the tacit non-recognition of their inherent rights over their land and suppression of their democratic efforts for human rights and survival.

Demands: The indigenous peoples of Manipur would like to urge the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to urge upon the Government of India to:

- Recognize the political rights to self determination of indigenous peoples of Manipur as outlined in UNDRIP and also the Article 1 of ICCPR and ICESCR.
- End all forms of Human Rights violations targeting indigenous peoples of Manipur
- Repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958
- Stop Oil Exploration and Drilling by Jubilant Energy. Stop the proposed 1500 MW Tipaimukh Dam, the proposed Chakpi HEP project and ongoing Mapithel dam construction
- Respect common Article 1 of the UN Geneva Conventions to stop targeting civilians.
- Enforce moratorium on all mega development projects which failed to take FPIC of indigenous communities.

Thank you very much, Madame Chair

¹ "Militarization: Impact on Indigenous Youths in Manipur" by Mr. Jiten Yumnam, published by the Orient Vision, Manipur, April-June 2006, Volume III issue II