

Indigenous
Peoples
Survival
Foundation



The Kalash of the Himalayas

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Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me the opportunity to be witness to this great occasion. I congratulate you and your indigenous colleagues in the forum. I also thank the member-state delegates for being part of this historical forum. Greetings to my indigenous brothers and sisters.

Dear Mr. Chairman, member nations, and fellow brethren in the Northern Himalayan region of the HinduKush Mountains lives two tribes called the Khow and the Kalash. Despite the pattern of the ever-changing world, the Kalash tribe has sustained their more than 2000 year-old culture and traditions. The Kalash indigenous people have been portrayed as "Kafirs" or non-believers in Pakistan. This denigrating label also connotes pagan beliefs, impurity, and assumes promiscuity. It has degraded the status of the tribe to the lowest of the low among the people in their own society. The negative label on the Kalash tribe has made horrible impacts on their personal and social lives.

Dear Chairman, another major threat to the indigenous Kalash tribe comes from the influential private businessmen from the mainland of Pakistan, such as Peshawar and Punjab, who have built large hotels and motels on the sacred sites and landmarks of the Kalash people. The hotel owners are contaminating the potable water, polluting the Kalash valleys and streams with toxins, empty cans, bottles, broken glass, plastic waste and diesel residue left behind by the tourists staying at the hotels. Facilities needed to dispose of this waste are non-existent; so the hotels dump the garbage into the drinking water streams, which are the lifelines of the Kalash people and locals living in towns further down the river. The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) has also built a huge hotel structure in front of the traditional, communal, menstrual house, disregarding the Kalash women's privacy and honor.

Dear Mr. Chairman, the lives of the indigenous people depend on herding livestock, such as mountain goats, that directly rely on the forest. The Forest Corporation of Pakistan indiscriminately sold the timber trees of the indigenous people to the lumber companies who logged the forests mercilessly. There is no replenishment of these abused forests. The deforestation caused soil depletion, erosion, and mudslides that destroyed the small farming terraces on the mountainsides.

The following are some suggestions:

The Kalash indigenous people call for:

1. The label of “KAFIR” upon the Kalash tribe must be removed. It is inhumane and unjust. The severe humiliation has placed an irreversible psychological impact upon the Kalash tribe. The Kalash must be respected in accordance to the Human Rights granted to all human beings.
2. The Hotels and Motels of non-native civil businessmen from the mainland of Pakistan such as must be removed from the Kalash valleys immediately. Their toxic pollution of the Kalash valleys threatens the very existence of the Kalash people.
3. The Forest Corporation must return the remaining forests in the Kalash valleys to the indigenous people. They can well maintain their forests according to their ancestor’s traditions.
4. Restitutions and reparations must be paid for the damages done to the indigenous people’s natural resources in their territories.