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Development Agenda that Affects the Land of the Indigenous Peoples, but excludes Participation in the Programme.
Respected Chairperson,

First and foremost I would like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks for giving me the floor.

Encroachment of indigenous lands has been part of the tragic history of the indigenous peoples around the globe. In view of its importance, the United Nations WGIP 2002 put forth “Indigenous People and their rights to participate in the development agenda affecting them” as its main theme. Unfortunately though, denial of participation in developmental programs that affects the indigenous people and their land still remains a problem that confronted the indigenous people around the globe till today.

When the Kaptai Dam was constructed in Chittagong Hill Tract in 1964, with submerge area, 400 Sq. miles as reserved or catchment area evacuated more than ten thousand indigenous families (two hundred thousand individuals, including women and children) and thereby became refugees in the neighboring states like Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

Like wise, developmental projects in recent time are apparently aggressive to the indigenous people and their land. For instance, number eight of the agreement, signed on the 29th of May 1996 between the Government of Mizoram and the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd.(NEEPCO) regarding two hydel projects, viz. Tuirial and Tuivai in Zoram (Mizoram) clearly stated that...” the total land required for the construction and completion of the projects shall be acquired by the State Government and handed over to NEEPCO on payment of necessary fee to the state Government as assessed by the State Government”. , This definitely would affect large areas (i.e. 4721 Sq. km) of the Zo indigenous peoples’ land, and eventually would render the native not only homeless but landless as well.

Further, drilling for the extraction of natural gas in the Arakan areas of Southern Zoram, with a reserve of natural gas estimated at 13 trillion cubic feet, possibly the largest natural gas well in the Southeast Asia is now commencing. The Burmese Military Government and oil companies like Daewoo Integration, South Korea, Gas Authority of India Limited, etc, involved in the project are unwilling to release more information, nevertheless, there appear to be three possible pipeline routes to bring the gas from Arakan State into West Bengal State of India. The most likely option being the route overland through Arakan and Chin state in western Burma and then into India's Mizoram (Zoram) and Tripura states, possibly crossing through northern Bangladesh. The affected indigenous groups remain in the dark about the potentially devastating impacts of such projects.

Further, development of such nature, where the voices of the affected indigenous peoples are disregarded and suppressed, environmental and cultural destruction, increased human rights violation, forced labor, evacuation and relocation, increased sexual violation against local women, confiscation of indigenous land, so on and so forth, are inevitable.

Consequently, I would like to call upon and urge all concerned bodies of the world to reflect more intensely, reevaluate, and strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems. Moreover, I do hope and earnestly appeal, while considering the unfortunate plight of indigenous peoples, to review developmental projects, that would adversely affects indigenous people, socially, economically and environmentally as well, and further work for and advocate only projects that ultimately would bring forth sustainable development.

Once again, Thank you once again for giving me the floor.