

Manipur, India

Second Session Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Agenda 4(d)

Human Rights

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Centre for Organization Research and Education (CORE) I would like to thank all my indigenous elders for special recognition of indigenous children and youths in this second session of the Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues. My name is Jiten Yumnam, belonging to the Meitei people of Manipur.

Recommendations

1. Mr Chairman, I would like to draw your attention to the recommendations of the first session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2002, especially urging states to initiate consultations with indigenous peoples for policy changes towards improving and realizing the human rights situation of indigenous peoples. However, the worsening human rights violations in North East region of India as in many other parts of the world where indigenous peoples live, would inform us that many of the recommendations have yet to be realized.

2. I would like to request the Permanent Forum to urge the Special Rapporteur conduct a study on the conflict resolution and peace building efforts involving indigenous peoples and States exploring the various facets of such initiatives. There should be specific recommendations for countries to become more transparent in such peace building initiatives and to respect the need for inclusion of all indigenous peoples to be affected by such peace initiatives.
3. I am requesting all members of Permanent Forum to urge all member states to implement the recommendations of all United Nations Human Rights treaty monitoring bodies in considering country reports. In particular, the observation of UN Human Rights Committee in 1997, in considering India's third periodic report, to adopt political means for solving political problem in India's North East will contribute to the recognition and respect of the rights of indigenous peoples of Manipur.
4. All States must also be urged to endorse the United Nations draft Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in its original text

The indigenous peoples in North East region are subjected to consistent denial of justice for human rights violations. Impunity has been institutionalized in North East Region of India, increasingly so in Manipur. Concepts like national security, State sovereignty has been used to curtail political and democratic rights of indigenous peoples in the region. This is despite the Vienna Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights, 1993 urging governments to combat impunity as a crime against humanity.

The government of India's rejection of the usage of the term 'indigenous peoples' is supported with arguments that the age old history of migration, exchange and mixing of cultural and physical traits cannot distinguish any group as 'indigenous' in relation to other groups and claimed everyone in India has to be considered as indigenous. Indigenous peoples demand for greater autonomy, civil and democratic rights is treated as a law and order problem and resorted

to heavy militarization and imposition of special legislations, empowering armed forces to operate in a climate of impunity.

The prevalence of impunity in indigenous peoples' land in India's North East causes immense suffering, hindering efforts for peace and recognition as peoples and has worsened the survival issues of indigenous peoples in the region. Operations by International humanitarian agencies are denied permission in Manipur and other conflict areas of the North East region.

The effort of the government in North East region for resolving the problems confronted by indigenous peoples is often characterized by lack of transparency and failure to include indigenous peoples to be affected by the process. Several ceasefires arranged by the government with the indigenous peoples have been a prime source of conflicts among indigenous peoples, the latest being the conflict between the Hmar and the Dimasa indigenous peoples. A section of the Dimasa had been holding ceasefire and talks with the government from 1st January 2003, but this has quickly led to massacres and large-scale displacement of the Hmar since March. There is, therefore, much suspicion among Hmar people due to lack of transparency and inclusiveness.

Thank you