



**The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII)
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**Oral Intervention by Mrs Atina Gangmei, Zeliangrong Women's Union,
On the Principle Theme: Indigenous Women**

Thank you Mr Chairman, on behalf of the Zeliangrong Women's Union, I extend respectful greetings to the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and to all of you who are participating in this session. I would like to extend my sincere thanks also to the Voluntary Fund for sponsoring my trip.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that since time immemorial **women** the world over, are considered second class citizens of a society. As the old popular sayings goes, "*women are seen but not heard*", holds true for many women even today. Violation of women rights still remain a wide spread phenomenon and almost all countries of the world, irrespective of their advance or backward socio-economic conditions have not been free from this crime. The case of Indigenous women is **no exception** to this phenomenon; as a matter of fact indigenous women have suffered the most. An outright violation of their rights beginning in their own family, in the society and in the state cannot be denied by any right thinking person.

I would like to speak on the situation of indigenous women in the Zeliangrong Naga society. Our society like many other indigenous societies is patriarchal and its traditional and customary practices overwhelmingly give more importance to males. Most of the indigenous Customary laws are not documented and are discriminatory to women, as proved by the conventional practices. For example, indigenous women are considered secondary citizen in the society. Head counts are made only on the male members, women are not allowed to speak out for herself in front of the male folks especially elders. They are not allowed to represent in the grassroots' administration, i.e village administration or in other levels. Women/daughters do not have the right to inherit parents' properties. In case of divorce, it is always the women who is victimised. Education and other privileges are always given secondary options for girls. The unwritten customary laws become a good tool to victimise a female by those male egoistic individuals without justification.

Secondly, the state policy towards women is but only in theory and less in practical. The government of India have enacted several Laws meant for the welfare of the women population but most of the laws still remain to be fully implemented. The Indian Constitution under Article 14 & 15 guaranteed the right to equality and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, however these sanction hardly materialised and position of women has not improved as expected. It is strongly felt that the state must act positively by proper implementation of the laws relating to women's welfare and also adopt appropriate legislatures and other measures of laws constructive to the development of indigenous women in order to bring about gender equality and social justice in the country.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum encourage the government of India to amend and adopt its policy to include these safeguarding necessities for the progress and development of indigenous women.

- 1) Recognised and **Codified** all the positive points of customary laws with **Modifications** of those which are biased and discriminatory to indigenous women
- 2) Ensure **legal protection** to all kinds of discriminations against indigenous women.
- 3) Ensure **full and equal participation** of indigenous women in the decision making bodies—at the grassroots, national and international level.
- 4) Develop education and training through the **UN specialised agencies** to increase indigenous women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership.
- 5) Encouraged establishment of **peoples institution of indigenous women** at the grass root level and **Strengthening** of the existing Institutions.

In conclusion, we urged our indigenous brothers to respect the rights of your sisters by encouraging and providing more space for active participation and modification of the customary laws wherever necessary.

Thank you, Mr Chairman for your kind attention.