

14th Session of the United Nations of Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda Item-5: “Dialogue on an optional protocol to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”

Joint Statement

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Madam Chairperson, distinguished delegates, indigenous sisters and brothers,

We feel that a possible optional protocol to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a very urgent issue. A voluntary mechanism is needed to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to serve as a complaints body at the international level, in particular to deal with the violation of indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, self-government and autonomy and to lands, territories and resources.

Raising awareness about the UNDRIP among government actors, the United Nations system, indigenous peoples themselves and, more generally, society at large, is a continuing challenge. The creation of a complaint mechanism is one way to promote greater understanding and awareness about the contents of the UNDRIP. The failure of some States to take seriously the goals and rights contained within the UNDRIP is detrimental to indigenous peoples’ rights and well-being.

In Bangladesh, for example, there is no recognition of the basic rights of indigenous peoples, including their civil, political and economic rights, and their right to lands in the national constitution. On the contrary, through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 2011, the government has referred to the indigenous peoples as “tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities”, rather than as indigenous peoples, and imposed a mono-ethnic and unilingual identity of “Bangalee” too all citizens of Bangladesh, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The 15th Amendment refers to the “protection and development of the unique local culture and tradition...” of the concerned peoples but with no corresponding recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, to lands and to their languages. Thus the protective aim of the amendment is rendered partial, self-contradictory and ineffective.

The government is of the mistaken belief that if our peoples are recognised as ‘indigenous peoples’ it will adversely affect the sovereignty of the country. We believe, on the contrary, that by recognizing our right to self-determination, peace, harmony, stability and self-determined development will be promoted, thereby strengthening the sovereignty of the people, and of the country as a whole.

Against this backdrop, introduction of an effective monitoring mechanism on indigenous peoples' rights within the UN system is needed, to complement the work of this Forum and other indigenous-mandated bodies. This can be done, among others, through the development of an optional protocol to the UNDRIP.

I thank you Madam Chair.