

PACIP 13 <sup>5-8 minutes</sup> indigenous People from the Pacific and Asia

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Madame Chairwomen & Members of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations:

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Representatives of various indigenous peoples from the Pacific and Asia have asked to obtain the floor in an unbroken sequence in order to assist the working group in understanding these particular regions as you accomplish your mandate of reviewing the developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations giving special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations.

For many of these representatives, this is their first opportunity to address this U.N. working group and we believe it would benefit the working group to be exposed to Asia and the Pacific by such a concerted presentation.

As you hear these interventions, I believe you will note some common themes in Asia and in the Pacific.

In Asia, one <sup>common</sup> theme is the denial of the very existence of indigenous peoples by nation states. By such denials, nationstates are able to more easily proceed with programs of "transmigration" over "unoccupied territories" where no civilized peoples exist or to institute other programs for other interests. A second theme is the extreme

atrocities leveled against the indigenous peoples, as you will hear from the indigenous peoples of territories now controlled by Burma and Bangladesh, as well as those islands of East Timor, West Papua and the South Mollucas. The third theme is the ethnocide or cultural genocide visited upon indigenous peoples.

Major parts of south and south-east Asia are mountain or hill areas ~~and~~ with indigenous tribal populations. It is sometimes said that there is a "tribal belt" stretching through India, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China. It does not look much like a belt on the map, for there are three great arms ~~which~~ extending south ~~and~~ from the major mountain area. It is a belt in that the hill and mountain areas are connected from India through to China. Perhaps it should be recognized as the indigenous heartland of south and south-east Asia. All state boundaries in the region cut through mountain and hill areas and divide tribes. Three of the tribal groups have received international attention and are represented this year at this session of the Working Group - The Naga, who are largely in India and partly in Burma - the Chakmas, who are the largest of the tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh - ~~and~~ and the Karen, who are partly in Burma, but also in Thailand. These three tribes are relatively well-known, but their situation should be understood in regional terms. They are part of one major indigenous heartland, now divided among eight nation states.

State policies in the region vary. The Constitution of India has special provisions for scheduled ~~and~~ tribes which allow a degree of political autonomy, particularly in the areas of tribal majority populations in the hill areas of the North-East. Recent developments, such as the ~~Mizoram~~ Mizoram Accord, show that Indian government policy is moving towards greater autonomy, not less. While there are many problems in India, State policy involves affirmative action programs in education and government employment, special tribal representation in State and national legislatures and a degree of political autonomy in tribal areas.

~~At the~~ At the other end of the indigenous heartland, the Constitution of China has special provisions for autonomous regions for minority national peoples. Again the basic principle of some degree of tribal ~~and~~ autonomy is recognized as fundamental state policy.

The major problems in the region are the two national governments which refuse to recognize any degree of tribal autonomy. Bangladesh is determined not to recognize the distinctive culture of the Chittagong Hill Tribes and has sponsored the migration of Bengali settlers onto their lands. Government policy in the Hill Tracts is in the hands of the military. The government recently refused Mr. Lee Swepston of the International Labour Office access to the tribal areas or to private contact with tribal leaders. He was only able to visit Rangamati, where any tourist can go. The rest of the Chittagong Hill ~~and~~ Tracts are closed to all outsiders by the military.

In Burma the National Democratic Front represents ten tribal groups seeking a federal union in which they would have autonomy as constituent states. They cite the federal constitutions of West Germany, Switzerland and Yugoslavia as models. The government of Burma rejects any policy autonomy, and is intent on imposing Burman language and culture.

The result in both Burma and Bangladesh has been warfare, as indigenous peoples defend their right to cultural survival and political autonomy.

A second great area in Asia consists of the islands that are in the nation states of Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and the Philippines. Throughout these ~~islands~~ islands there are distinctive local indigenous peoples, who, as a result of colonially established borders, are minorities within nation states. In many cases the integrity of their lands and cultures is being violated by state programs of cultural assimilation, militarization and transmigration. The cases of the East Timorese, the South Moluccans and the West Papuans are now well known.

While Indonesia refuses to recognize the integrity or autonomy of its indigenous peoples, the new constitution of the Philippines has specific provisions for political autonomy in the Cordillera tribal region in northern Luzon. But ~~such~~ the constitutional provision does not cover all indigenous populations in the Philippines and the government has initiated negotiations only with one local leader, not with the representatives of the various indigenous peoples in the Cordillera. Meanwhile attacks by government sponsored vigilantes have increased in recent months.

Further north, the Ainu are another distinct indigenous people, still living in their homeland in Hokkaido, an area taken over by Japan at the end of the 19th century. They have been subject to intense pressure to abandon their traditional language and culture. As Prime ~~Minister Nakasone~~ Minister Nakasone's recent statements show, Japan has repeatedly denied the existence or survival of the Ainu people.

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There is no clear division, either geographically or thematically between Asia and the Pacific. Ethnocide, for example, is common in places considered to be in Asia as well as in the Pacific.

As we move more fully into those areas surrounded by the Pacific waters, we find another common concern, the devastation of modern technological experimentation and disposal. (Because of the inability of many of the Pacific peoples to present themselves to this Working Group, I will give a bit more detail to their situation in this summary.)

Let us first consider that vast area of the Pacific called Micronesia which includes the island groups of Belau, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas and the more recently termed "Federated States of Micronesia" consisting of Yap, Truk, Ponape and Kosrae. These Micronesian islands, except Guam, are held by the United States under a United Nations Trusteeship Agreement. Indeed, it is the only area designated a "strategic" trust territory under articles 82 and 83 of the United Nations Charter, thus allowing the U.S. to bypass the General Assembly

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and report directly to the Security Council where the U.S. retains a veto power. (Guam is not under a trusteeship arrangement having been occupied as a U.S. territory since 1898 following a war between the U.S. and another notorious colonizer of indigenous peoples, Spain.)

Since its occupation as a strategic trust, these indigenous peoples have witnessed the experimentation of up to 66 atomic and hydrogen bombs, finding six of their islands blown off the face of the earth while many more are left uninhabitable. Hundreds of people suffer the severe after effects of radiation exposure as well as contamination of their natural resources.

In Palau, one of those islands group under a U.N. strategic trust, the people have witnessed not only the destructiveness of nuclear weapons, but also recall the devastation caused by World War II. In the late 1930s, as Japan fortified their islands, Palauans were told that Japanese military installations would protect them. When war erupted, the Palaun bases were instead magnets for American attacks so that by 1945, the population of Palau was reduced to one-fifth of what it had been a century earlier. Since its constitutional adoption in 1979, Palauns have had to participate in eight referendums rejecting storage, testing and disposal of nuclear materials within its territory, the last referendum held in June, 1987. On August 4, 1987, another referendum to amend Palau's constitution lowering the present 75%

requirement for permitting such nuclear materials into its territories will be held. 17 days later, on August 21, the people will be asked to vote again on the compact allowing U.S. continued military use of Palau. Until Palau permits the "administrating authority" to continue providing military defense, Palau will not be released from this U.N. strategic trust yoke.

On the day of my departure from Hawaii to attend this working group meeting, I spoke with our Palau member of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and received an update on the conditions now in Palau. Following the recent defeat of the compact in June, the U.S. government has refused to provide necessary administrative funds to Palau, causing massive unemployment, lack of adequate medical supplies and emergency systems, breakdown of public services including the police force, and lack of utility services. Where previously, the Palauns were made dependent on U.S. economic aid, this timed termination has caused mass hysteria. Homes of those who have been leading the fight against the compact with the U.S. have seen their homes firebombed and their lives threatened. Gangs now walk the streets, there is no law and order today in Palau. High Chief Ibedul has appealed to the U.N. to furnish peace keeping forces as a result of their present condition. An appeal to the U.N. for an independent investigation to resolve the crime of the recent

assassination of Palau's President Remeliik followed by the asendency of ProAmerican and compact supporter Salii to the Presidency is also being requested.

Moving south east to another group of islands known variously as the "Society Islands," "Tahitians Islands," or "French occupied Polynesia," we see another country testing modern technology at the risk of indigenous peoples. Nuclear devices are being exploded in these islands by France, completely flouting the international and regional protest against such testing. France went so far as to invade the sovereign integrity of New Zealand by exploding the ship "Rainbow Warrior" and killing one person in an attempt to stop Greenpeace from protesting these nuclear tests.

The facts of radiation caused disease and pollution in this area somehow speaks louder and rings truer then the French sponsored scientific reports denying any adverse radioactive effects upon the Tahitian people.

Moing north towards the Hawaiian Islands, the island of Kalama has also felt the wrath of nuclear testing, destroying precious fishing grounds and polluting the sealife which migrate throughout the Pacific. While no weapons testing has occurred there in recent years, <sup>(as a child I witnessed the nuclear mushrooms from testing on that island)</sup> that

Kalama island is now designated as the receipt for storage and destruction of obsolete nerve gas through inceneration, allowing the smoke to escape into the atmosphere while the scrubber brine, the "ashes", are to be dumped into

the surrounding Pacific waters. The Micronesian islands are down wind and down current of this site.

Finally, moving to the island of Oahu, the most populated island in the Hawaiian chain, we see the storage of nuclear weapons, the transmission of extremely high powered radio waves by the U.S. military, and a bi-yearly exercise of bombing sacred sites of Hawaii's indigenous peoples.

*we find the US military claiming possession of 25% of the island while Hawaiian families are living in tent broken camp or in the high;*

Militarization and technological disruption to the Pacific region is a major concern to Pacific peoples.

Another common trend occurring in the Pacific is the movement for greater political self-determination. In the last few decades, the Pacific has been in the forefront of the decolonization struggle. The map of the Pacific will quickly reflect the recent history of independence, examples such as Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Free Samoa, Solomons, and Vanuatu. But these presently independent states do not reflect the fullness of the independent aspirations of the Pacific.

In Kanaky (New Caledonia), the Kanaks continue to struggle against French occupation and has, within the last 2 years, been placed by the U.N.'s General Assembly upon the list of nations to be decolonized. The Tahitians are also struggled to free themselves from the yoke of French occupation.

Hawaii, invaded and occupied by the U.S. since 1893, and Guam, claimed by the U.S. in 1898 following the war



with another great colonizer of indigenous peoples, Spain, with find a growing movement for self-determination by the indigenous peoples.

The continuing struggle by the indigenous peoples of East Timor, of West Papua and the South Mollucas islands are een further examples of the freedom movements occuring in this region.

Finally, the Pacific suffers a thrid common theme of ethnocide in which we find occupying powers of these islands have separated the indigenous peoples from their cultural roots. But in the more recent chapter to that story is the awakening of indigenous peoples in this region to the importance of cultural heritage. We find evidence of that awakening among the Ainu of Northern Japan, the Aborigines of Australia, and other indigenous peoples of Tahiti, of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Hawaii.

Among the Polynesians, the recent voyage of rediscovery of the canoe, Hokule'a, using no modern navigational instruments, criss-crossing the Pacific ocean, touching upon the shores of numerous islands has ignited a renewed feror for indigenous cultural pride, disproving the western teachings that we were an inferior people who could have only come upon our homelands by accident.

Thus, we have a sweeping reiew of the Asian and Pacific regions in which I haë tried to provide some depth to those places haing no representations at this working group. ~~and looking forward to hearing from those~~