

NEPAL

23/05/08, 189

Fourth Session of the
UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES
UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK
MAY 16 – 27

Statement by Bal Krishna Mabuhang
Under Agenda Item 4 (b)

Data Collection and the Disaggregation of Data on Indigenous Peoples
(Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal)

Madam Chair:

I would like to congratulate you for being elected as the Chair for the 4th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I would also to thank you for giving me this historical opportunity to speak on the agenda Item 4 (b) in reference to the specific situation of Nepal.

The architect of the modern Nepal, King Prithivinarayan Shaha, recognized Nepal is a garden of "36 different flowers." The process of nation building that has been on going for over the last two centuries has however been emphasizing on the homogeneity. It has not adequately emphasized the diversity of indigenous nationalities of Nepal. Since the 1991 democratic constitution recognized that Nepal is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country, the indigenous nationalities have begun to re-establish their own distinct identity. Nepal has been since trying to evolve as a prosperous and modern nation by nurturing diversities.

Groups of Indigenous Nationalities (INs) have been active in protecting and promoting their identity. The 1990 restoration of multiparty democracy gave an impetus for the Ins' efforts to organize themselves as distinct groups. Following the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Year in 1993, the National Consultation was organized for the first time in 1994 to agree on the definition of the indigenous peoples as those who "...possess their own distinct and original lingual and cultural traditions and whose religious faith is based on ancient animism (worshipper of ancestors, land, season, nature), or who do not claim 'Hinduism' as their traditional and original religion."

Since then, the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has been working to address the issues of INs in Nepal. As a result of the continuous efforts by the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities for their recognition, representation and participation in the mainstream policies and programs, the Government of Nepal promulgated the Act of National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) in 2002. Following this Act, NFDIN recognized 59 ethnic groups of Nepal as indigenous nationalities. NFDIN today is a common platform of representatives of 59 INs (48 Indigenous Nationalities Organizations (INOs), associated Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and 11 INs not affiliated with NEFIN). These include the Indigenous Women, INs Parliamentarians, Secretaries of Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission, and so forth.

For the first time, the 1991 census enumerated 26 INs and 2001 census, 43 INs. Together, they constitutes over 37 percent of the population. Though, the Statistics Bureau is compiling the data statistics by ethnicity, religion, language, and so forth, it still lacks disaggregated data on INs. Attitudes towards building database on ethnicity related socioeconomic, demographic and other variables need to be updated. The lack of explicit policy on requirement of disaggregated database has to be redressed among the planners, administrators, and academia.

The first UN decade of Indigenous Peoples (1994-2004) fostered international cooperation of indigenous peoples in the areas of human rights, culture, the environment, development, education and health. Implicitly the decade helped to bring issues in the light of planners, administrators, academia and so forth. The donors meeting along with Government of Nepal held in London in June 2002 concluded with consensus to support the poorest and most excluded groups/areas bring light on INs sector. This activity was led by British Government which materialized in the design of empowerment and capacity building of INs.

The failure of the past development approaches could also be attributed to the prescribed macro economic development models copied from the West that did not learn to respect the knowledge of local people acquired from generations to generations including of those of the INs. In the same stream the Millennium Development Goal is yet another design which should not overlook knowledge, concerns, and needs including their time- tested approaches of IPs in meeting the goals. I fully agree with the arguments of Indigenous Experts that a systematic change in the principles, implementing methods, monitoring mechanisms and evaluating verifiable indicators of MDGs need to be devised, which ensure full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the implementation, follow-up work and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals.

Madam Chair,

In this line Governments of Nepal needs to align their respective PRSP that involves INs at all levels in meeting MDGs. NFDIN has made its efforts in the process of PRSP in getting full and effective participation of INs. It provides space for the right- based development approach and also complies with human rights of INs.

Finally, I would like to make the following general recommendations to incorporate Indigenous Peoples in the data collection and disaggregating of issues in the item 4.

As IPs constitutes significant percent of Nepal's population, their visibility is necessary. Disaggregated database is essential in order to adopt the policies, design the project activities, monitor the projects and measure the impact evaluation of development efforts including MDGs reaching to the intended groups.

Involvement of IPs expertise in data collection, analysis and interpretation should be encouraged in all kind of data collection including national censuses.

Mechanisms need to be strengthened and necessary institutions have to be urgently developed for representation, consultation and full and effective participation of indigenous peoples.

Non-democratic process within the IPs needs to be curtailed to stop some IP elites from taking advantages while implementing MDGs.

Governments need to adopt human rights approach in general and PRSP strategies in particular to ensure the meaningful and effective participation of IPs, while implementing and monitoring MDGs.

Prior informed consent must be taken into account while projects implementing in the areas of IPs which affect their life.

Thank you very much.