

23rd Session of United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Geneva

18 – 22 July, 2005

Agenda item no 4 (a)

Joint statement by member organizations of the Indian Confederation of Indigenous & Tribal Peoples (ICITP), Jharkhandis Organisation for Human Rights (JOHAR) and World Adivasi Council (WAC).

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Working Group
Honourable Representatives of the observer States
UN specialised agencies
Fellow Indigenous Brothers & Sisters from around the World
Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring cordial greetings to you from our people. Sir, I wish to speak in general. Firstly, we have been raising on this platform several issues affecting our people. We wish to report that some of the issues have been attended to and some progress has been made.

- Two of our languages Santali and Bodo have been included in the 8th schedule of the Constitution which entitles them for State encouragement for their growth including their usage as medium of instruction for primary and secondary education as well as for higher education. This should also lead to further inclusion of other tribal/indigenous languages of the country in the list.
- The government of India has come up with a forest bill which promises ownership rights to the forest areas which has been used as common lands. The law also discourages eviction of the forest dwellers instead it promises recognition of the forest villages as revenue villages and encourages development activities to be taken up.
- A beginning has also been made towards making of a National Tribal Policy in India long overdue. With the completion of this exercise we can hope for a genuine participation of the tribal people in the development process which was not happening so far. Fortunately a law (Panchyat Extension to Schedule Areas- PESA 1996) has already been passed, that ensures the tribal communities control over resources and virtually everything (education, health & others) that affect their lives. With the new national tribal policy in place we can hope that tribal development is to be taken very seriously by the bureaucracy.
- Issues of population influx in to Indigenous/Tribal areas have been raised seriously in this forum frequently. We are happy to inform that a beginning has been made recently to address this issue by scrapping down of Illegal Migrant Determination Tribunal (IMDT) Act by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. We hope that the Indigenous People concern behind the demand of restraining the external population increase in Indigenous/Tribal areas would be appreciated and appropriate measures would be taken to mitigate the situation.

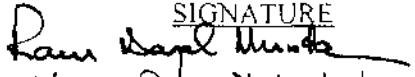
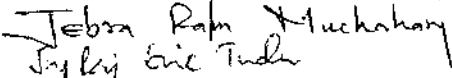
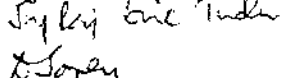
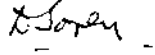
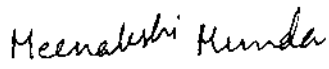
However there are other issues some of which are not only continuing but with globalization intensifying.

- Anomalies of scheduling continue particularly in the State of Assam where around six million people of central India origin residing in Assam are not recognized as scheduled tribes. Recommendations have been made for their recognition as being called as 'Tea Tribes', which is not accepted by the Indigenous Peoples and they prefer to be recognized by their original community names.
- Displacement of the local people in the name of public interest and national development.

- In the name of eco-development and forest regeneration huge areas are being set aside, and in the name of medicinal plant cultivation contracts are being issued to multinationals depriving the local medicine practitioners.
- Globalisation has also led to mushrooming of English medium schools which are open only for the highly affluent people. This eventually will divide the population on urban rural lines which also includes the indigenous peoples and will leave behind the rural lot in the job market.
- Multinational investors are contaminating the local legislatures and bureaucracy to the extent that the local customary laws are being disregarded as in proposed Pachuara coal mining in the Santal Pargana (Jharkhand), Steel mill in Nagarnar(Chattisgarh), Bauxite mining in Netarhat(Jharkhand), Uranium in Meghalaya,
- There have been cease fire agreements as in Nagaland & Assam between the government and concerned Indigenous peoples, however the last end solution will come only when the issues are solved politically which does not seem to be taking place currently and only adds to frustration. Similarly promises have been made to give relief to the affected people as in Manipur by abolishing/amending the Special Arm Forces Act enforced in that region, but no steps have been taken to indicate that the government was about it.

While we appreciate and thank the government of India on the issues where progress has been made, we also call upon them to attend to the issues mentioned above. We call upon through your office Mr. Chairman to take immediate steps facilitating restoration of peace in the concerned areas.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, for your kind attention.

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