

**14TH SESSION OF THE UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, 20
APRIL – 1 MAY 2015, UN HQ, NEW YORK**

Agenda Item 8: Intervention on Future Works of Permanent Forum

Madame Chair, I am Pushpa Koijam of the Meitei people of Manipur intervening on behalf of the Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur (CRAM), Land is Life (LIL), CSO Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur and at the UN (CSCHR) and Center for Organization Research and Education (CORE), Inter Tribal Committee,

Madame Chair, the provision on right to self determination, a fundamental right that transcends all provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other major International Human Rights agreements, is increasingly being arbitrated in indigenous peoples' territories. Indigenous peoples efforts for greater defense of their land, rights and future and self determination is also increasingly being responded with brute use of force and arbitrary use of power.

In Manipur in India's North East, the self determination efforts of indigenous peoples are responded militarily with brute forms of extensive militarization, with promulgation of emergency laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. Militarization processes in Manipur led to wide controversy in Manipur, ranging from direct civilian casualties to land grabbing to facilitating development onslaught in Manipur, all converging to reinforce undermining right to self determination of indigenous peoples. Several UN human rights bodies had urged upon the Government of India to repeal emergency laws and to stop all forms of human rights violations.

One of the most direct impacts of militarization is on women and children. The infamous rape and murder of Miss Thangjam Manorama on 11 July 2004 by personnel of the 17th Assam Rifles and the countless victims of rape and other forms of sexual harassment is an obvious reality in Manipur. There are countless victims of rapes and sexual harassment committed by Indian security forces. The denial of justice, failure to prosecute and punish armed forces personnel involved in violations led to impunity.

Militarization can also led to impact on peoples economic means as several times, villagers residing in and around the Loktak Lake complained of military restrictions on their normal daily fishing activities at Loktak Lake and also the destruction of their fishing gears during military operations and due to military deployment all around Loktak Lake. Indigenous communities protested the restrictions of movements in their village by Assam Rifles personnel in Tengoupal village in January 2015.

Militarization is also associated with introduction of unsustainable development projects, as evident by the militarization of Mapithel Dam site, Loktak Project site, Khuga Dam etc. Usually, any call for sustainable, participatory and human rights based development would immediately lead to militarization of those specific project sites. Indeed the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples Rights, Mr. James Anaya expressed strong condemnation with the Mapithel dam construction and the militarization process and application of emergency legislations in 2008.

The militarization process already hastened the fast worsening food sovereignty of Manipur as scores of acres of prime agricultural land, which community depend for growing food, is increasingly converted into non productive assets, including setting up military camps and firing ranges. Land grabbing is also

carried out for militarization purposes in the region, where huge tract of prime agriculture land and forest are acquired for military and allied activities, which are deployed to counter indigen

ous resistance groups, struggling for their for right to self determination, to protect mega development infrastructures¹.

Besides confiscation of ancestral land, the militarization process also targets educational complexes and historical sites. There has been a longstanding demand from the students of Manipur University to shift the Assam Rifles currently occupying the Langthabal Hills, an important historical and cultural heritage site, located within the university premises. The Chinga Hills and the Langjing Hills etc, where the Meitei people worship their ancestral deities, has been occupied by Assam Rifles and Central Reserve Police Force, representing a desecration of indigenous peoples cultural and sacred sites.

One may recall that the village authorities of Khunkhu village, located near Leimakhong Army base in Manipur, complained that the Army authorities continuously used the area in the vicinity of the village as a field firing range since 1938 without compensation for damages caused to the village, constituting a direct violation of the Maneuvers, Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act, 1938 and UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007.

Militarization and impacts on civilians in indigenous territories has for long been overlooked. It is increasing evident that militarization process has disturbed the profound relationships of Indigenous peoples in Manipur with their lands and territories. Confiscation of prime agricultural land and resources without the consent of the communities has led to considerable social and cultural impacts, and also posing a threat to the physical integrity and survival as peoples. Militarization in residential areas has far wider and serious implications with the local economy and livelihood and survival issues.

Recommendations: I would like to urge upon the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to kindly recommend to

- 1) Undertake a study on multifaceted and holistic impacts of militarization, such as physical and psychological impacts.
- 2) Consider the “Impacts of Militarization on Indigenous peoples land and territories”, as the special themes of the Fifteenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.
- 3) Urge upon Member States of the UN and especially the Government of India to end all forms of militarization in Indigenous Peoples territories and land and towards this,
- 4) To recognize the political rights and self determined rights of all indigenous peoples as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007.