

**Comment by M. Hassani, Member of UNPFII
at the half day Asia Dialogue 15May2014**

All peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind. Asia's exceptional cultural and linguistic diversity gives it an outstanding position in this context. Asia can easily be called the most diverse region of the world.

Though a clear impact of colonialism on the social, cultural and legal fabric of the countries in Asia is evident, it should however be noted that situation in this part of the world sometimes is not as straightforward as is the case in the Western hemisphere. Some common features as invasion of foreign occupiers, systemic expulsion or imposition of false superiority doctrines such as doctrine of discovery are not in many cases easily applicable to parts of the region. As a result of this situation, which calls for further dialogue among governments and communities to arrive to a better understanding and common grounds, the term "indigenous peoples" has not been an easy one in Asia.

Regardless of this fact, it is incumbent on all governments in Asia and elsewhere to ensure elimination of all forms and manifestations of racial or other forms of discrimination against any individual. People that historically inhabited in a particular territory, regardless of what we call them, are entitled to free, prior and informed consent and full compensation and redress concerning economic activities conducted in their lands. Such activities should first and foremost protect the interest of these people. Economic growth should bear direct dividend for them and help them out of poverty. Their exclusion and marginalization run contrary to moral and international obligations of the governments.

The cultural diversity as a beauty and strength point of Asia can not be taken as granted. Linguistic heritage, spiritual traditions, philosophical convictions, traditional knowledge, cultures and practices of the peoples and communities in the region require not only be respected but also protected and safeguarded against mainstream or alien cultural values.

Governments need to ensure the right of their peoples to participate fully and freely in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State, while distinct institutions of local communities are maintained and strengthened. Existing local juridical systems or customs that are in conformity with international human rights standards can be fully utilized in the respective regions.

Despite positive achievements during recent years, one pressing continuous challenge in the region that I like to highlight and bring to the attention of the Forum has been the absence of well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems, including birth and death registrations in many parts of Asia particularly in rural and remote areas. This is a crucial barrier for inclusive development in the region. Millions and millions of people are born and living without any official certificate and recognition. As a matter of fact, respecting and protecting peoples' rights can be initiated only after their very existence is documented somehow. This is a particular point of concern that needs immediate and full attention of the governments in Asia.