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DRUK INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS ORGANISATION

Thimphu, Bhutan

WGIP 98/SAS, BTN/1

Draft Speech

Respected Chairperson, Honoured Delegates
and Distinguished Guest.

✓ On this happy occasion of the 16th session of the Working Group on indigenous Populations, I, on behalf of the people of Bhutan and on my own behalf, wish to extend my warm greetings to all the participants of the Working Group. I also would like to thank, specially the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations for making it possible for me to attend this session on behalf of the repressed people of Bhutan.

✓ It is a great honour for me to be here today among the distinguished delegates from the global family. It is for the first time in the history of Bhutan that the oppressed Bhutanese people have had the opportunity to participate in the grand UN sponsored session to discuss about "Indigenous Peoples: Education and Language".

Bhutan, is a small landlocked kingdom nestling in between two Asian Giants, India and China. It has an approximate land area of 48,000 square kilometers. Its population stands at about 6,00,000 (0.6 Million). The country remained in isolation until 1960's and is still considered as one of the least developed and remotest country in the world.

Bhutan consist of three major ethnic Groups. The Ngalongs of Tibetan Mongoloid origin inhabit north-western part of the Country. They speak Dzongkha, an offshoot of Tibetan, and constitute about 16-20% of Population. The Tshangla speaking Sharchhop of Indo-Burmese ethnic group (The Indigenous People of Bhutan) constitute about 45-50% of the population and are the largest ethnic group who live in eastern part of the country. The Lhotshampa – Nepali-speaking people of indo-Aryan origin who constitute about 30-35% live in the southen part of the country.

✓ I presume that you are aware of the current situation prevailing in the tiny kingdom of Bhutan. In today's modern world, when more an more nations around the globe are strengthening their commitment towards the United Nations, joining hands to make progress and to create a new world order for the betterment of mankind. Bhutan, the tiny Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom, even as a member of the United Nations, has been blatantly violating the very purposes and principles of the august body. Even though Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971, and doing so had accepted the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, the regime has made no efforts to educate the population on the purposes and the principles of the United Nations.

✓ Bhutan, the kingdom known to the world as the Last Shangri-la, has become a nation of oppressed people who live in servitude and terror. Cheated of their basic rights,

✓ bereft of that basic human dignity, and yet unable to express their suffering and pain fearful of dire consequences. Voices raised in protest, or just to beg for a better life is stifled so ruthlessly and murdered, even their families, next of kin and friend are victimized in similar fashion. And, as the regime takes every precaution in such manner, to ensure that there is a show of outward calm. The opinions critical of it cannot find their way out from the country. Thus, the world outside hears and sees nothing untoward happening in Bhutan.

Bhutan is multi-lingual country. The national Language of Bhutan was made Dzongkha, an offshoot of Tibetan, spoken by Ngalong community, which is less than 16% population, disregarding Tshangla, spoken by nearly 50% population of the country. Similarly, Nepali, which is spoken in southern Bhutan, and had been in the school curriculum for more than three decades, was discontinued in 1998. Government created a special Cell to create vocabulary and to promote Dzongkha as national language, where as Tshangla has been relegated to a daily half-hour radio broadcast. No books, posters, newsletters or any other items are printed whose language is spoken by nearly 50% population of the country have to depend on either English or Dzongkha to disseminate any written information.

Similarly, in education, the Government in the pretext of extending quality education has created a system of checks on the students. State sponsored Board Examinations are conducted in Class six and then again in class Eight. For most of the students from the farming and the village community has an obstacle and difficult to hurdle. However, the children of the influential people, civil servants and the relations of the Royal family some how manage to secure the best results, thus ensuing continued educational advancement. Those who cannot get through the Board Exams will have to opt for service in the lower cadre of the bureaucracy, army and the police. The eighties and the nineties has been even more stringent. On completion of the studies, the Government conducts a Civil service Examination for induction to Government service. It has been noticed that, inspite of Dzongkha being compulsory, candidates from the influential family background who have never studied the national language, have almost always topped it. Thus, Bhutan has furthered education not for quality learning and promotion but has used it as a tool to create a semi-literate subservient work force, and a population which cannot be influenced and corrupted by the print media. In Bhutan, this government imposed education and language has made our people the most oppressed lot even at the end of the second millenium.

✓ The state of our villages and the interiors is still the same as it was centuries ago. And, those few who have been able to visit the villages of Bhutan might have seen with their own eyes. Hardly any development has taken place on the ground inspite the input made. Public fund are being used to suppressed the same people who were to benefit and provide relief. Compulsory conscription of forced labour still continues. Even children are not spared and defaulters are fined or imprisoned. Unbearable rural taxes are imposed on the poor population. It is difficult for the common people to compete in business, jobs, services, facilities etc. and as a result there is a complete disparity in the living conditions. There is rampant forced labour; suppression and fear; torture and death for all those who try and defy the Royalty and the government. The list of suffering and misery is endless. The regime has totally oppressed the peoples' the right to live in human dignity and the freedom of opinion and expression, which the basic aspiration of any human being.

✓ The present Bhutanese crisis has developed because the people are now unable to bear the heavy yoke of repressive policies. The exodus of Bhutanese of all ethnicity, fleeing their country for the last half a century or so to different parts of India, like Arunachal Pradesh and others to Nepal, has reached startling proportions over the last few years. This is the testimony to the alarming fact that something is seriously wrong. Few outsider can comprehend the pain of those who silently suffer within the country.

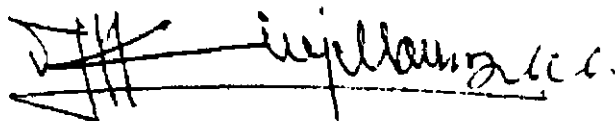
✓ The government has always hyped itself as the protector of Buddhism. But, last October, when the Buddhist Monks protested, demanding the rights to practice the religion of their own thoughts were arrested, de-robed and made to wear black dress. The Chief Abbot Khenpo Thinley Woezer along with 132 other sharchhops were imprisoned and still remain in jail. Gomchhen Karma, a young monk was shot dead in cold blood by the District Administrator and he was rewarded and set free. Similar, inhuman tactic were used by the government to drive out nearly one sixth of its population out of the country, who now live as refugee in Nepal.

✓ I on behalf of the oppressed ^{indigenous} people of Bhutan, appeal to our global family the advocates of justice and champions of human rights-to urge the government of Bhutan to uphold the principles and purposes of the United Nations in the true spirit of a Member Nation. I strongly believe that it is through you, the world at large will come forward to support the call to bring about respect of human rights in Bhutan. I earnestly believe that all Delegates present will help us in making Bhutan a nation of peace and prosperity, and have a place of respect amongst the comity of the Nations. I am sure that, we will get all the understanding and support for our cause and assist at all times to ensure the full blessings of peace, freedom, happiness, progress and prosperity in Bhutan.

✓ I pray and wish for the great success and fruitful session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. May the triple Gem bless our efforts for peace and stability for all living beings.

Tashi-Delek.

Thank You.



Kesang Kinlay Namgyel
General Secretary,
Druk Indigenous People's Rights Organisation (Bhutan)