

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
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Agenda item No. 4

**STATEMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR ORGANISATION RESEARCH & EDUCATION
(CORE), MANIPUR, NORTH EASTERN REGION INDIA**

Thank you, Madam Chair

We congratulate you for your continued able, informed and sensitive role as Chairperson/Rapporteur of the distinguished Working Group on Indigenous Populations. We would also like to thank you for the very warm welcome extended to all representatives of the world's indigenous peoples, their organisations and supporters. While extending our whole-hearted support to you and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, we would particularly urge you to continue to provide the inspired and just leadership that has marked your presence here.

Madam Chair, we take this opportunity to summate the particularly pertinent developments in Manipur and indeed the larger sphere of the region I belong to, also known as the North Eastern India.

We wish to commend the continuing engagement and process to seek peace among my brother Naga peoples that has been initiated by the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muiva) since July last year. However, in Manipur, where over thirty indigenous peoples and nations find their homes, our peoples have found only reasons to shed their tears during this

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past year. Fifty years since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and incidentally of Independent India, the continuing oppression, severe and arbitrary derogation of civil liberties and fundamental freedoms of the indigenous peoples in Manipur are painful facts to report to the Working Group. Of particular grave concern is the escalating conflict between the Indian state and armed indigenous nationalists, which has especially affected women, children and youth. Custodial rape, enforced disappearance, civilian killing and torture are all too familiar events among our peoples today. An existing undeclared de facto state of emergency empowered by a special legislation of Indian parliament, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, continues and has been adjudicated as constitutional by the Supreme Court of India, in September 1997. Madam Chair, we wish to request the Working Group to refer two documents: the conclusions and recommendations of the Human Rights Committee July 1998 (CCPR/C/60/IND/3) and Amnesty International's report titled "INDIA, MANIPUR: The Silencing of Youth" (ASA/20/05/98) released during May 1998. Both these documents are available with the Secretariat.

We express grave concern regarding a number of large scale development and environment conservation programmes which are being discussed and even implemented without participation or informed consent of concerned indigenous peoples of our region. Prominent among these are a Wetlands International South Asia (WISA) project in collaboration with the India Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) to prolong the life span of the Loktak Hydroelectric Project in the Manipur valley. The project was launched in March this year. This hydroelectric project has already caused inestimable damage since its commission in the mid 1980s to the unique ecosystem of this

wetland, a designated Ramsar site now in the Montreaux Register. The damage to the traditional economy, agricultural and common lands and the culture of our peoples is likewise inestimable and irreparable. The WISA-ICEF intervention, misleadingly named "Sustainable development and water management of the Loktak lake" is being implemented presently, and will considerably compound the loss to and problems of the indigenous peoples of the surrounding area. No cognisance of protests by the affected indigenous peoples has been accorded either by the WISA, the ICEF or the Government of India. The Ramsar Secretariat at Glands, Switzerland, has been informed by our representatives of this development.

In addition, a World Bank funded multimillion dollar conservation project is also being negotiated by the Government of India with UNDP for implementation in the Loktak lake without consultation with indigenous peoples to be affected.

Madam Chair, as an integral component of a consistent campaign to disinherit and distort the indigenous culture of our peoples and to assimilate it within the undifferentiated national context of India, the Government of India, Tourist Office, New York, and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, USA jointly presented a dance recital of our ancient sacred dances in New York city on 31 May 1998, describing their origin and character within the orthodox Hindu context. Our peoples dances and art forms pre-date the introduction of Hinduism by several thousand years and the expropriation of our sacred rites, of which dance is an integral part, is a clear violation of our cultural rights. Madam Chair, we have appended documented information regarding this for the reference of the distinguished Working Group.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, in spite of the consistent achievements of the Working Group in promoting the rights of the indigenous peoples and setting standards it must be regrettably recognised that the Government of India is reluctant to accord to indigenous peoples, the recognition and liberties which are our due and just right. While much has been accomplished, much more remains to be done. We strongly recommend that the mandate of the Working Group be strengthened by the improved co-operation of the various UN agencies and treaty committees such as the Human Rights Committee, Committee on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Committee on Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Enforced Disappearances and all national government working in concert with our peoples.

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MANIPUR