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Thank you, Mr. Chairperson for giving me the opportunity to speak at the Permanent Forum.

Mr. Chairperson, Indigenous Sisters and Brothers.

With this statement I bring warm greetings to all of you from the indigenous peoples of Manipur!

The indigenous women of Manipur face violations of their rights in everyday life. The most draconian law, i.e. **Armed Forces Special Power Act of 1958** that is still in full use in the state empowers the security forces to shoot at sight any person suspected as "militant". This law is misused in many cases against the indigenous women resulting in human rights violations, sexual harassment, rape etc. everywhere in the agricultural fields, jungle, roadsides, and at homes. The security forces have forcefully occupied many of the good hillocks and cut down many forests to keep themselves safe from the attack by any outsiders. Many times the indigenous villagers are forced to work in clearing these jungles for security forces for which they are never paid, instead if any villager does not work for them, they have to pay heavy price like brutal torture sometimes even death for going against their wishes.

The heavy presence of armies and other paramilitary forces have led to several incidents of shooting in public places, house search, conducting operations, arrests, detentions and imprisonment without any trial. There is no safety for the indigenous people and especially the women who are to work in the agriculture fields that are very far off from villages. The innocent villagers are often abused and described by the State as "terrorists", "militants", "misguided youths" etc. The right to life is not respected, not to speak of recognising the indigenous people right to self-determination. Today apart from the Armed Forces Special Power Act of 1958, the **Prevention of Terrorist Act (POTA)** came into effect in after September 11, has given more power and authority to the security forces threatening the fundamental rights and freedoms of the indigenous people. So the worst is yet to be experienced by the indigenous people.

Due to the intra- ethnic conflict engineered and unleashed by the State many indigenous women were forced to become refugees, children became orphans and were displaced from their ancestral homes. Once they are displaced or uprooted from their original place they lose their source of livelihoods, besides these, the opening of the Free International Trade at the border town in Moreh led to the heavy inflow of cheap products from abroad like cereals, pulses, drinks, eatables like sweets, biscuits, sugar, oil to clothes, electronic gadgets resulting in loss of market for the products of the indigenous women like handicrafts and handlooms and making them lose their important source of earning. Finding no alternative means the displaced women are forced into prostitution to earn their livelihood.

Even the children instead of going to schools are forced to go to hotels and others' homes to work as child labourer so as to fulfil their stomach. The indigenous women have no access to drinking water and health care resulting in malnutrition, poor hygienic living conditions, many endemics like malaria and venereal diseases including HIV/AIDS. Non-availability of basic health-care and medicines leads to increasing infant mortality rate and maternity deaths.

In politics, it is difficult for indigenous candidates to get elected in the State Assembly, and the tragedy for those who get elected is that they become puppets at the hands of the government run by non-indigenous Ministers who use them according to their own ways to serve their vested interest, and

therefore they cannot raise the concerns of the indigenous peoples. There is no adequate women participation in the local administration, i.e. the Village Councils. **Naga Women's Union Manipur (NWUM)** is lobbying to the Village Councils for the women's participation in the decision making process. And of course because of this today there are five to ten villages that have women in the Village Councils, but there is still a need of full and effective participation of women in all levels of decision-making processes.

So-called national development projects, like national highway construction, dam, forestation etc. have affected many of the indigenous people in the state. The irresponsible logging business in indigenous areas has resulted in massive deforestation, land infertility and erosion and environmental disaster. The government is trying to amend the **Manipur Land Revenue Act, 1957(LRA-1957)** to allow any non-indigenous individuals and multinational companies to buy lands and land resources belonging to indigenous people. It will make the indigenous people landless. The land is a community property in indigenous areas in Manipur today, though individuals can own land. This will result in further discrimination against and displacement of women from their ancestral lands, besides snatching away their main source of livelihood.

Lack of employment opportunities in the state has contributed frustrations and social problems among the educated youths, especially the indigenous youths. Despite being educated they cannot get job due to corruption like political backing from Ministers. They need to pay bribe in huge sum for even a small clerical job. Though there are quotas/reservation in jobs and education for the "tribals", the term as used by the Indian government to identify us, the jobs are given to the non-indigenous persons on bribe. There is no scope for these youths to take up enterprises due to lack of financial support and corruption and discriminations in the financial institutions.

The most recent case even in selection process for medical examination, an indigenous student who got first distinction was not figured in the list of successful candidates. On enquiry, he found out that his name was in the distinction. Had he not inquired he would have lost the opportunity. On the other hand a lot of non-indigenous people got the chance to undergo Medical and Engineering courses in the name of indigenous people by getting a fake certificate issued by the department on bribes, or by the marrying an indigenous women to get these facilities.

The indigenous people with their rich traditional cultures and costumes today have been threatened with a common dress being imposed on them by dominant groups banning use of other dresses. On the other hand the traditions of marriage are now in its transition as many copied the way of the non-indigenous people in their marriage ceremonies, like demanding of gifts and putting other extra demands on families to arrange for luxury items and these make the parents run into deficit and become more debt ridden worsening their already bad economic condition. There has been a developing trend among the indigenous people in which they feel their own rich cultures inferior to that of others.

Recommendations:

- An international fact-finding team be made to investigate and document all the Human rights violations in Manipur.
- The State should recognise the rights of IPs and implement all International Human Rights treaties.

Thank you, Mr chairperson for your kind attention.