

Agenda Item 4d: Human Rights
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Third session
May 2004



STATEMENT

British Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen Women's Organisation (BGAESWO)

Sita Devi Gurung

Respected Chairman, distinguished members of the Permanent Forum, my brothers and sisters,

I am Sita Devi Gurung, member of the Gurung community of Nepal and the Secretary of BGAESWO (British Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen Women's Organisation), representing on behalf of 50,000 Indigenous people in Nepal, who are known for their soldiering skills as Gurkhas, under the agenda item on Human Rights.

Dear Chairman,

I take this opportunity to bring to international attention, perhaps for the first time in about two centuries, of an unacceptable and tragic situation of indigenous peoples in Nepal who are continuously exploited by other powerful states under very unusual circumstances in international law today. The particular recruitment and use of indigenous peoples by States as soldiers is not unknown in history.

In my opinion I think I don't have to describe about the **GURKHAS**, the indigenous peoples of Nepal who have fought in the two World Wars to save the British Empire and who still do so today for the governments of the United Kingdom and India under the peculiar 1947 Tri-Partite Agreement on the Recruitment of Gurkhas between the governments of the UK, India and Nepal. If we go through the pages of history, the Gurkhas as an honoured soldier of the nation have paid respect and served the British government to save the royal crown, the kingdom, sovereignty and the nation. Although it has been almost 200 years, we feel that we have been serving the British government only since yesterday.

Mr. Chairman, we are acutely aware that this Permanent Forum is not a forum for complaints but we would like to bring to its attention some long outstanding issues that concern the indigenous peoples of Nepal who are exploited as professional soldiers outside their country. This is to also bring to the special focus of this Forum, on the situation of the wives of soldiers, who have been subjected to mental and physical torture, by nature of being wives and dependants. For the last 200 years of Gurkha recruitment, thousands of indigenous men serving as Gurkhas in the

British Army have sacrificed their lives and limbs, thousands innocent indigenous women became widows, thousands innocent children became fatherless orphans.

Besides giving some compensation to their widows and families, many of the soldiers' families are, till today, still waiting for proper news about whether dear ones are still alive or not. In the remote **village of Nepal the widows of the war veterans** are still waiting and looking forwards for their dear ones to return home with their tears in their eyes remembering them and blaming themselves for their fate.

Although the Gurkhas have won the case of the Prisoners of War in 27th November 2003 they are still not been compensated.

Besides, in violation of the standing tri-partite agreement, indigenous soldiers from Nepal were used in Malaysia and Brunei in very recent times. In fact, after recruitment, Gurkha soldiers are presently also serving in Brunei under conditions that are not included in the agreement of 1947. After the recent conflicts in South East Asia during the 50s and 60s Gurkhas were sent off from the regiments without any compensation.

Respected chairman,

We would like to let you know about the pain and sorrows faced by the wives of the Gurkha soldiers.

The Gurkhas are allowed to serve in the army for 15 years and in that period of their service, the wives and children are allowed only to stay together for hardly 3 years. The educational system, lifestyles, environment and everything made our children neither English nor Nepali, and they have to a very large majority become spoilt and delinquent. No one can imagine how hard the wives of the Gurkhas have suffered when their husbands are away. They are not given any proper care; some of them died without proper medical care, the community misunderstood them instead of sympathy and support.

Service conditions of the indigenous people serving in the Gurkha regiments are very discriminatory. Even after the retirement from the army, because of the pension given to our husbands could hardly feed the family they are forced again to seek for another job abroad to earn a living. As the Gurkhas are hardly given 91 pounds sterling and the same rank of the British soldier receive 625 pounds sterling, **WE the Gurkhas servicemen and their families are humiliated and discriminated because we belong to the indigenous peoples' of Nepal.**

The indigenous peoples as Gurkhas have taken oath to serve with their heart and soul and sacrifice for the recruiting States', as an equal participant in any war condition. As such, they must have the equal rights as the all citizens of the recruiting State. **Our demand is neither against the British citizen nor the British government; our demands are to correct the mistakes done by the British soldiers to the Gurkha soldiers in the brigade of Gurkhas.**

Respected chairman,

Keeping these words in mind, we the former Gurkha soldiers under the banner of GAESO and their families, BGAESWO have some recommendations for the Forum.

- 1) The Permanent Forum should recommend to states involved in continuing the recruitment of indigenous peoples from Nepal for active army purposes that the recruits be treated equally and in full accordance to international and regional human rights and international labour standards as established by UN, ILO and European human rights treaty framework.
- 2) The Permanent Forum should also recommend to states with or entering into international agreements to recruit indigenous peoples for active army service outside their home countries that such agreements are entirely in accordance to existing international laws and standards.
- 3) The Permanent Forum recommend to concerned states and international UN agencies to assist in the establishment of appropriate educational and vocational training institutions for Gurkha children and appropriate rehabilitation care for the women survivors of indigenous people who served in as professional soldiers in remote countries.
- 4) The Forum also recommends that indigenous ex-servicemen's rights to continue to work and employment in the host state after retirement be respected and honoured.
- 5) The Forum also recommends that appropriate and equal compensation be awarded to indigenous war veterans and their widows.

Thank you.

Ms. Sita Devi Gurung,

Secretary, Pokhara, Branch

Ms. Deoki Gurung

Chirperson, Chitwan branch

Ms. Jayanti kala Rai

Chairperson, Lalitpur Branch