

Fifteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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19th May, 2016

Agenda Item 4 : Implementation of the Six Mandated Areas of the Permanent Forum with reference to the UNDRIP

Statement on behalf of the National Indigenous Women Federation (NIWF), Nepal.

May 19, 2016

Mr. Chairman/ Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am Parbati Thapa Magar representing National Indigenous Women Federation from Nepal.

Since this year's Fifteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues theme is: Indigenous People: Conflict, Peace and Resolution (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/news/2016/01/unpfii-fifteenth-session-9-20-may-2016/>), I would like to share my views on this theme here today.

I come from a small, least developed Himalayan country of Nepal which underwent a 10 year armed conflict from 1996 to 2006 and that took over 15, 000 Nepalese people's lives.

A comprehensive peace agreement was concluded in between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) on November 21, 2006 following which a new era of drastic socio-political change has occurred: two constituent assembly elections were successfully held and since September 20, 2015 there is a new constitution (http://www.nepalembassy-germany.de/pdfs/Constitution_full_english.pdf) in the country. The 247 years old monarchy is abolished; Nepal is now a democratic federal republic country.

The tiny country of 27.8 million (2013) people was hit hard by two devastating earthquakes of April 25 and May 12 last year. The country still hangs in transition and as a result of which its national politics remains unsettled; governments keep falling or in other words governments are short-lived and therefore they are unable to deliver - people are suffering from many hardships.

A brief demographic discussion of the country would help here. The Himalayan country tentatively has four different groups of peoples:

- a) Adivasi Janajatis or the indigenous peoples [so-called lower caste, marginalized peoples] 37.38%,
- b) Brahman, Chhetri and Others [so-called upper-caste, the ruling elites] 36.56%,
- c) Dalits [so-called water-untouchable] 21.79%,
- d) Muslim 4.27%

(Total 100%, Source: His Majesty's Government, Central Bureau of Statistics, National Population Census Report 2011)

The number above clearly shows the indigenous peoples collectively make the largest size of population in the country. Number counts in democracy but despite being the largest group of population collectively, the indigenous people of Nepal are marginalized, disadvantaged or sometime discriminated as well. They have not been able to come to the mainstream national life or I would say they are deprived of coming to the forefront of national life.

As I mentioned above the 247 years old monarchy of Nepal got abolished in 2008. The monarchy had remained as an institution that promoted one language and one culture policy in the country. It promoted Nepali language and Hindu way of life, which helped the rulers, unify the country in present physical size and boundaries. Physically, the country was unified but peoples' aspirations and sentiments were ignored, they were not unified. This led to Nepalese indigenous peoples' language loss or death, cultural coercion or segregation and marginalization.

The current constitution's article 32 (3) reads: "Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization and heritage." This provision seems promising but how it gets translated into reality remains to be seen because, in the past, local governments were banned from the official use of local languages.

For example: 'Newari was used as additional official language from July 25, 1997 in Municipal Office in Kathmandu, Dhanusha District Development Committee on November 18, 1997 and Rajbiraj Municipality on November 25, 1997 also respectively began using Maithili as their additional official language. The Supreme Court of Nepal on June 3, 2001 passed a verdict that the use of local languages in local governments is unconstitutional and unlawful.

Only about 50% women are illiterate in Nepal. Most of them are indigenous women. They face problems like unemployment, healthcare, lack of awareness, early marriage and early pregnancy. Due to social pressure and lack of education, women are forced to give birth to many babies in the hope of having a son.

They don't have easy access to healthcare since it is far from their location. On top of that they have household work load so they don't get enough time to go to the hospitals. Also, they don't care about their own health due to lack of education, awareness and financial limitations.

Today, the indigenous people of Nepal are demanding for the preservation their cultural heritage, recognition of their identity but the government visibly stands adamant, unwilling to offer any sort of recognition <http://kantipur.ekantipur.com/news/2016-05-17/20160517165048.html> , which may result in more socio-political unrest in the country.

Thank you,

Parbati Thapa Magar
Member
National Indigenous Women Federation Nepal.