

## The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

U N Headquarters, New York, April 21- 2 May, 2008

Agenda Item 7: Half-day Discussion on Indigenous Languages

The Joint Statement by Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is great pleasure for me to have this privilege to address the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, representing the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus.

The Asia Region is the home of millions of indigenous peoples and have the most diverse languages in the world. However indigenous languages remain not officially recognized in many Asian countries, in spite of its continuing use by indigenous communities across the region. National languages are being imposed to indigenous peoples as opposed to developing their own language. In certain areas, indigenous children are not even allowed to speak their own language to inter-act with each other while in school premises. Because of this and other factors, there is an increasing threat of extinction of several indigenous languages across Asia.

In the case of North East India, indigenous peoples are not given the freedom to choose the script to use in recognition of their mother tongue. In 1974 the Boro people had to struggle to demand the use of the Roman Script, where 15 people were killed by the state security personnel. But in spite of this, still the very script was not given. On the other hand, in 2003, when the Boro language was included in the 8<sup>th</sup> scheduled of the Indian Constitution, particular script was mentioned as condition which was never done before to the use of other languages.

In Japan, the Ainu community could not keep their mother tongue because of the Government's assimilation policy. Thus, many Ainu can only speak the national language, Japanese. In this context, their identity as Ainu is being eroded and their knowledge and appreciation of their history and culture is also undermined by the almost total loss of the Ainu language. The same cases also happened to Burma and with other Indigenous group of Asia

Madam Chairperson, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus welcomes and fully endorses the recommendations made in the International Experts Groups meeting on Indigenous Languages (E/C. 19.2008/3), January 2008.

In addition to this, we also recommend the following:

1. States should immediately provide for the mechanism needed to implement the articles in the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights pertaining to indigenous languages and indigenous education: Article 13(1) and Article 14(1) related to content and teaching methodology (resources/ fund/ curriculum/ official use).
2. For States to ensure the effective representation of indigenous peoples in decision making bodies in relation to policies and programmes on languages at the national and local levels.
3. For States to stop any practices in prohibiting and restricting the use and development of indigenous languages while imposing other languages should be stop.
4. For UN agencies to provide direct support to community initiatives in developing their own indigenous languages as part of their distinct identity.
5. For State and UN agencies such as UNESCO to put up a programme for the revitalization on endangered IP indigenous languages .

We also wish to put forward the following recommendation for indigenous communities:

1. To continue to take initiatives in the promotion and development of their own languages.
2. To ensure the use of the mother tongue in their daily life in order for their children to learn and appreciate their own indigenous language
3. To document their own languages and folklores to ensure its transmittal to the future generations.

Thank you for your kind attention!