

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES QUESTION IN AFRICA;

With Specific Reference to Tanzania.

Position Statement: Read by Moringe Parkipuny, Executive Secretary; KIPOC, Organization of Pastoral Peoples.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Madam Chairperson, Sisters and Brothers ,

I bring from Africa greetings of solidarity to all, you gathered here and those at home who are with us in the agonies of Mother Earth and Indigenous peoples. Agonies which are one of the manifestations of the principal disgraceful and disastrous junk of injustice endangering living in this most prolific modern global dominion. You may recall that in the year 1989 two representatives of Africa Indigenous Minority Peoples attended for the first time this forum. This is our second participation. We have learnt from you dear sisters and brothers that irrespective of enormous dimensions of physical and propaganda machinery of our oppressors that have impaired our unity we are indeed one extended family with a shared plight, a unified value system, plight and deeprooted determination to recover through restoration to humanity the sanity of respect to Mother Earth and the fundamental human right to cultural diversity. Joining you in 1989 has provoked a question, whether our peoples back home have valid identity with the global extended family of indigenous peoples. We appeal to you now to bear with us as we take your time and solicit your attention to answers to the question.

### 1 The Colonial Roots of Marginalization.

[In the 1880's, European partition carved up Africa into a haphazard assortment of 48 possessions in total disregard of not only socio-ecological boundaries and economic viability of the territories. Borders were fixed so arbitrarily that many nationalities were sliced into several European domains. For example, Masailand and its people were split between Germany and Britain, into three fragments assigned to the colonial states of Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. Secondly, these colonial creations were set up without consulting the peoples of the continent.

Indigenous African institutions at the core of peoples' self-determination were labelled primitive and rigorously attacked with the objective of total destruction, to enable the conquerors to impose their own systems. ]

The 1960's, the decade in which most colonies in Africa attained independence, promised great hope that the restoration of the dignity of peoples of this continent was imminent. However, the leadership of the new states received their territorial parcels as were drawn in Europe, and determined to hold on to them without altering an inch, as if these were sacrosanct entities. Indeed one of the first undertakings of the African post-colonial states founding leaders was to sanctify in the Organization of African States the arbitrary boundaries inherited from the era of European colonialism. It deserves to be emphasised that the highly esteemed founding fathers of independent states did not consult their peoples before taking such a profound decision. Secondly the economic structures and relationships put in place in the colonial era were inherited, with only cosmetic modifications if any at all. Thirdly the malady of nationalities split by artificial boundaries drawn in Europe was retained intact. Fourthly despite or more precisely, in view of the strength of cultural diversity in ways of living, languages, history and identity of nationalities under their jurisdiction, the new

regimes took a regimental approach to the fundamental need to foster national unity. Yet that ideal can be better realized through a process that ensures a fair deal for all.]

The assault launched in the colonial period to destroy African indigenous institutions of social organization, self-determination and cultural identity was inherited by the independent states and in fact intensified, no longer in the name of empire, but of fostering national unity. African regimes rather than reacting soberly and beginning dialogue with the citizenry, to forge remedies to the ailments, predictably produced by the malformed birth of the neo-colonial nation state with its inherent injustice, have adamantly dismissed even the most fundamental and very clearly legitimate demands as mere backward aberrations inspired by tribalistic and anti-patriotic sentiments. Needless to state that was in substance the position taken by colonial regimes, which perceived self-determination aspirations of Africa to assert its fundamental human rights, as agitations of peoples still in the age of primitive human civilization to disrupt law and orderly administration.

[The path taken by African leaders to build nation states through attempting to obliterate cultural diversity has proven with the short post-colonial period outright disastrous. The essential task of nation state building has in consequence suffered across the continent and fallen into a quagmire of boundary disputes and endless wars of nationalities asserting their right to cultural existence. That has in turn led to ~~scarce resources have~~ diversion of scarce resources from improvement of peoples living conditions and national progress to sophisticated weaponry and ever larger numbers of citizens in arms. The human tragedy of man exacerbated famine and mass suffering have been the consequent lot of African peoples in millions. The basic material needs and human rights of citizens persistently been given secondary attention as the mishap of destruction has been accord priority. The basic human right to cultural identity is held in ridicule and depicted as an intolerable aberration incompatible with the cardinal goal of constructing united nation states. African peoples outside of the mainstream society are therefore rendered politically powerless as their fundamental freedoms and basic rights are violated with impunity through discrimination, prejudice, exclusion from managing changes that affect their livelihood in the name of national unity and progress]

Tanzania is reckoned to have been most successful relative to other African countries in fostering the sense of national identity and unity. Tanganyika and Zanzibar won independence from Britain in 1961 and 1964 respectively. The two governments immediately formed a union, the United Republic of Tanzania. This country with more than 120 nationalities has the rare situation in Africa, in which the overwhelming majority of people across the nation speaking a common local language, Kiswahili which thus provides a vital medium of cross cultural communication.

Even in that case where the political situation was very favourable to flexibility, the stereotype approach to nation state building was adopted and at that without the mandate of the people. Despite the democratic rhetoric of the

Ujamaa and Self-Reliance national policy, the state has systematically institutionalized a subtle system through which it maintains tight control on the populace. One party rule has been entrenched in the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania. In the framework of monopoly of the political process, promulgated in the supreme law of the land the Party proceeded to intertwine with the government and armed forces. The composite three-in-one machinery prescribes and enforces country-wide uniform policies. It maintains control of the decision-making and development process, the mass media, political, social and economic association.

## 2; The African Indigenous Minorities Question.

The overwhelming majority of East African peoples are Bantu speakers who earn their living from cultivation and have cultures with a great deal in common. The national culture prescribed by the state is constructed from the value systems of the mainstream population but with strong influences of European and Arab cultures. Kiswahili, the national language, which is the pivot of the prescribed culture, is predominantly Bantu and Arabic, with considerable Asian and European influence. The stereotype modern Tanzanian is conceived to be a Kiswahili speaker and ideally actively engaged in farming or at least of peasant origin.

[ In Tanzania, indigenous minority nationalities include the pastoral Nilotic speaking Maasai and Tatog, as well as the Hadza, Sandawe and Dorobo hunter-gatherers. Each of these peoples has its own culture. Pastoral and hunter-gatherer communities have inhabited extensive areas of East Africa for over 3,000 years. At present they constitute only a small proportion of the total population in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. In each of these countries however such peoples constitute a distinctive segment of the national population, peoples who have maintained the fabric of their cultures that are very different from those of the mainstream population and the state prescribed national ideal. They are conspicuously distinct from the rest of the population in dress, language, rotational systems of resource utilization and relationship to the environment. Pastoral and hunter-gatherer peoples persevered, through passive resistance, to hold on to their indigenous lifestyles, traditions and cultures, to the end to the colonial period. These are peoples who have continued in the independent African nation states period to resist assimilation impositions. They have neither converted to cultivating cash crops nor have they been obedient to the well known state policy of compulsory village settlements, which became a must for all in rural Tanzania in the early 1970s. They have not become any more amenable to state control now than under European colonial regimes. For that defiance they received the stigma of resisting modernization and even of being incapable of adopting "civilized" way ]

Contrary to predominant prejudices these societies are by no means static, rigid or hostile to cultural interaction and exchange. Neither have they been irrationally opposed to economic development nor uncompromising in dealing with external interests and forces. Over the years they have interacted with peoples of other cultures and repeatedly adopted changes that were

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inconceivable to their past generations. These peoples have accepted changes which they perceived would enhance their wellbeing. They have in the meantime recognised and tactically negotiated to win concessions, to ameliorate the impact of impositions that they were aware would be to their detriment. They have not practised blind commitment to tradition nor relapsed into embracing change as prescribed from outside, be it by the state or prevailing mainstream society fashion at anytime.

[In the 100 years since the 1890s both the colonial, and subsequently the independent African states have continually fought to obliterate the cultural identity of our peoples through policies of assimilation and alienation of the land that constitutes the basis of sustainable survival for us. This is not a generalized cultural genocide against minority peoples. In East Africa minority peoples of Asian, Arabic and European descent are free to maintain their lifestyles, languages and religions without intervention by the state. It is specifically indigenous African cultures which are well known to have firm roots in value systems, languages, lifestyles and grassroots community oriented economic systems, all profoundly different from those of the mainstream population which have actively been the target of total annihilation. They are looked down at, as backward, evolutionary relics of past primitive ages and outright disgraceful to national image.]

Instead of appreciating and harnessing the potential of diversity of cultures and systems of production in building new nations, African regimes are determined to subjugate indigenous minority peoples under their jurisdictions to ultimately bring to their end their resistance to assimilation. The values cherished by our peoples are at variance with the uniform national prescription. This gross misconception has condemned indigenous African minorities to an inhuman citizenship, peoples whose cultural heritage is dismissed and relegated to irrelevance in the making of the nation states, to which they have become citizens not on their own free will but as a result of the 1884 Berlin Agreement among Europe powers on the partitioning and conquest of Africa.]

This is a case in point of peoples who have consistently maintained unshaken confidence and pride in their cultures despite relentless onslaught by the state and mainstream society awash with chauvinism, emanating from superiority derived from control of the centralized machinery of domination. But their resilient resistance to assimilation have resulted, in effect being marginalized in the process of development, control of resources and exercise of human rights. The primary criteria used nationwide in allocating resources to social services and economic infrastructure. Both the state and the international donor community tend to use the criteria of population densities and contribution to cash crop production in allocating development resources. Resources allocation systems based on those criteria have been one of the major causes of indigenous minorities being left out of the development process, from getting a fair share of resources allocated to development.]

African indigenous minorities are an integral part of the world-wide extended family of indigenous peoples, clearly not by virtue of being the Aborigines of

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the continent. It is only in this last decade of the century in which Africa has been under foreign subjugation that access to trans-continental communication has awaked us to a momentous realization. We have become aware that we belong to an authentic worldwide family of peoples who despite their far apart concrete socio-ecological environments have maintained their ages old community value systems and coherent views on the universe totality in a very perverse world power configuration dominated by the cult of reckless conquest. Secondly the strikingly common historical plight in relations to the dominant powers on the land and perseverance to survive with dignity mutually recognised by all peoples to the fundamental right to distinct cultural co-existence and peoples maintaining sustainable lifestyles in relations to nature. The third commonality hinges on ancestral land that we relate to with profound spiritual respect and historical ties to our children at birth; on which in community we learn to be responsible, disciplined and to uphold coherent values that link new generations firmly to our ancestors; and to which we die. We in common with the rest of humanity are determined to live in dignity, strengthened in that resolve by the awareness that we are not isolated but indeed part of the global struggle of indigenous peoples to restore respect for our rights to cultural identity and to the land of our birth. These fundamental human rights that have been blatantly violated by dominant cultures in a World endangered by the reckless drive with utmost arrogance of might to plunder global natural resources and sbjugate peoples.

### 3; Obstacles to Autonomous Organizing.

Under these circumstances the formation of authentic grassroot organizations has been impaired by the state, which acts with suspicion that such institutions will encroach upon and undermine its monopoly of power. Organizations that are autonomous from the state are registered under the Societies Ordinance of 1954 which is part of the colonial legacy and has not been altered in the past three decades. And, they are not accorded legal recognition as a democratic right of citizens to organize, but at the discretion of the state. The actual process of registration is cumbersome, lengthy and prone to political blockage. Moreover, legally existing organizations are subject to state surveillance, which may be accompanied by harassment and ultimately banning. In view of these circumstances, in which autonomous existence is at the mercy of the state, it is no wonder that genuine grassroots organizations are a rarity in Tanzania.

The state becomes even more suspicious in the case of organizations of peoples whom it has loaded with the stigma of anti-nationalistic, and "resistant to progress," for having defied the forces deployed in attempts to melt them, to assimilate into a hypothetical national culture and development route that requires minority nationalities to discard their indigenous value systems. We went through a painstaking process, lasting three years, before finally securing formal registration of KIPOC. Furthermore, we were compelled to conform to an organization structure predetermined by the Societies Ordinance. KIPOC founding members had to revise the original draft of their constitution which provided for a representative structure keeping with pastoral peoples organizational systems. We had to conform with the prescribed individual

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membership system, precisely so that we would stand a chance of getting registration. Even after KIPOC had been registered we were summoned by functionaries of the ruling Party at the district level to account for KIPOC existence, to the District standing committee that deals with security matters, to the best of our knowledge there was not even a sign of us being a threat to the any body. The summon came to us as real surprise, because we had already voluntarily shared with those officials the relevant information in all stages of the registration seeking process. That we did as act of soliciting goodwill to preempt anticipated local political intrigues. The Societies Ordinance does oblige only the registrar but not those seeking registration to consider the views of the relevant District Commissioner who heads the Central Government at that level. It is noteworthy in that regard to point out that the local elected councillors of Ngorongoro had resolutions, first to support the initiative taken to form the organization and to urge for its speedy registration.

### 3; The Democratization Wind.

The current world-wide resurgence of democratic change has touched Africa. That marks the beginning of a new phase in the predicament of the continent. The dramatic fall of autocratic regimes and the suddenly loud voices of people debating their destiny across the continent in these early hours of the 1990s are manifestations of irreversible change. To the dictators Africa is in turmoil. To others the Western multiparty democracy system is advancing to even frontier Africa in the match to complete economic, political and cultural unification of the entire World. Multiparties per se will not curtail the miseries afflicting Africa. It is very obvious from the pathetic plight of minorities, that include peoples of colour and natives of America, in the United States proud home of that Constitution of Liberty, most vocal advocate of multiparties and the unequaled world superpower that political pluralism have not guaranteed social, economic, political or environmental peace. Moreover India, the largest western type democracy in the World, has been with multiparties for over half a century now, without discarding its colonial legacy. It is very obvious that multiparties have not made a difference to the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the sub-continent which has some of the strongest indigenous cultures on this planet. To this very day great India has overwhelming and accentuating socio-environmental devastations.

[In our viewpoint what is clear from the writings on the wall is, Africa is in momentous motion at the threshold of the 21 century. Beyond that it is not clear where we are heading. This belingered continent cannot afford to be hooked into another false start. The multiparties and Soviet supreme single party systems are both Western. The move from colonial domination to mono party rule in Africa was both a bitter reaction to the inhumanity of the crude phase of Western hegemony that denied the colonized peoples a voice in their destiny and a carry over of the dominant belief of the rulers of the time that African peoples were so primitively fragmented in tribes hostile to each other that they could only be made to live in harmony under one flag by the power of a strong central authority. To crip out of the horrors of the colonial legacy and swing with jubilation into multiparties in the framework of structures of power bestowed

to Africa at independence is outright disgraceful and dangerous.]

[Africa should not fail to enter into critical dialogue on its political and economic colonial legacy as a crucial aspect of the search for alternative forms of governance and a new global economic order. Beyond doubt, preoccupation with the promotion of the rights of the majority and the need to consolidate national unity are vitally necessary. But these concerns should never be pursued to the exclusion of the equally essential obligation to protect the basic rights of vulnerable national cultural minorities. Pursuit of the course of the the majority in a manner that involve seeking to obliterate minorities undermines the very foundation of unity among multicultural peoples and places a primary component of human rights, to cultural diversity, outside national agenda. The reality of multicultural nation states cannot continue to be ignored yet expect to socio-environmental harmony to prevail on the land, or even to forge genuine national unity.

[Among other prospects, the great political change that has dawned on Africa brings to light the suppressed question of the right of indigenous nationalities to their cultural identity. We are at the threshold of a period likely to witness qualitative progress as peoples of Africa take control of their destiny. That is through autonomous grassroots organizing, without the fear of intimidation and harassment by the state with intent to enforce the rigid monopoly of power that it has wielded since the attainment of independence. In that context, the birth of KIPOC is timely. We are determined to evolve this organization into a dynamic grassroots instrument with sustainable strength to motivate and give support to indigenous minority peoples in Tanzania, who are currently excluded from the management of the process of change that affects them as peoples.

Madam Chairperson we invite and appeal to visit Africa. By doing so you will give us an immense morale boost. Madam Chairperson, Brothers and Sisters present here on behalf of your peoples and support groups it is glaringly clear from the presentations that we have shared that Mother Earth and indigenous peoples are in gross distress. Relentless determination in unity is without doubt our greatest strength. As Nelson Mandela reminded his peoples years back, there is No Easy Way to Freedom. We Shall Over come.