



**First Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
New York, May 14, 2002**

**Agenda Item 6 – Economic and Social Development
Statement by Jannie Lasimbang, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for giving me this opportunity to address the first Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and on behalf of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact or AIPP, an organization of indigenous movements and network in Asia, I extend my congratulations for your election as Chairperson of the Forum.

The situations of indigenous peoples in Asia are so diverse. In terms of economic and social status, it can be said that our situation is generally getting worse - not from the perspective of the mainstream societies who consider us "poor", but because our traditional economic and social systems are not being respected and are being subtly or forcibly being replaced.

In case studies conducted by AIPP on Indigenous Peoples and Integration to the Market Economy in Nepal, Northeast India, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, it was found that indigenous peoples who have been drawn from their traditional economic system into the modern economic system have produced some rich individuals but poorer communities. The extractive and individualistic form of the modern economic system has eroded our traditional economic principles of reciprocity, social responsibility and maintaining resource integrity and sustainability.

Modern economic systems give no importance to small-scale productions and barter system of the subsistence economy, a fair valuation of goods and services, and the roles played by each member of the community, particularly women. Many indigenous peoples of Asia have been displaced from their traditional territories in the name of large-scale development projects. Such displacements have destroyed the social fabric and cohesion of indigenous communities.

In terms of the development of our traditional social system, our community values have always been the basis of our relation. We interact with and support each other at all times, whether in grief, during ceremonies, celebrations or when disaster strike. We learn to respect our elders, leaders and every member of the community through codes of behaviour from a very young age and is passed from generation to generation. We exercise our customary laws and judicial system when wrongdoings were committed by any members of the community.

However, our indigenous social system is not given respect as expected in a pluralistic society. Our social organizations are being systematically replaced by alien system that does not bring harmony to our communities, particularly in the name of political stability. Leaders who are pro-establishment and support the type of modern economic development are appointed without consultations and appeals from indigenous communities for democratic elections of their leaders are not heeded. Leaders from communities who proceeded to select their own leaders are not recognized by the authorities, and face contempt from authorities. After years of such imposition, indigenous peoples themselves have stopped questioning or asking for social change.

Mr. Chairman, with regards to these concerns of indigenous peoples in Asia on economic and social development, the AIPP would like to recommend the following:

1. That the Permanent Forum requests all UN agencies and Programmes:-
 - 1.1. to evaluate the projects that involve indigenous peoples that were and continue to be supported, so that such projects would stop the displacement of communities;
 - 1.2. to ensure that economic projects involving indigenous peoples would be sensitive and maintain the values and principles of traditional economic and social systems; and
 - 1.3. to compile and disseminate cases of best practices that would serve as positive illustration to any future projects involving indigenous peoples;
2. That the Permanent Forum include in its future work, the development of a Guideline for the Conduct of Social (including economic), Cultural and Environmental Impact Assessments for proposed development projects in traditional territories of indigenous peoples together with the Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of Convention on Biological Diversity.
3. That the Permanent Forum recommend to ECOSOC to press its member states to enact or amend domestic laws and policies so that such laws and policies would recognize indigenous economic and social systems, in line with international laws and standards.