

Statement by Shimreihon Luithui, All India Coordinating Forum of the  
Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples, at the WGIP July 28.7.98  
Item no.4

Dear Madam Chairperson,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the "All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi / Indigenous Peoples"

Between June 29-July 1<sup>st</sup> 1998, twenty one indigenous people in Madhya Praesh, in central India were arrested because they stood up to protect their forest from timber loggers. Threats to forest and environment are coming both from the State and State sponsored agencies. And what is worse, all these destructive activities are taking place in the name of Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks, Eco-Tourism and Bio Reserves. There is a growing threat to the very survival of the indigenous peoples. Millions of them have been displaced from their ancestral lands and livelihood by development projects, mines, industries and dams. Most of the indigenous peoples remain unrehabilitated even today. Land alienation to non indigenous peoples continues to be a serious issue for a large number of indigenous peoples in India. The Forest Act does not recognise land rights within the forests. Outside the forest area, in variably more fertile lands in the villages are taken over by the non indigenous peoples. There is transfer of lands to non indigenous in the form of lease and mortgages, land encroachment is taking advantage of the lack of land ownership records. Despite being the most resource rich area in the country, yet the indigenous peoples live a life of scarcity. Their wealth flows to the urban industrial complex. In the Western region of India, the Bhils spread over southern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh and eastern Gujarat are not able to sustain with local resources even for three months in the year. Even though south Gujarat has prospered agriculturally, particularly suger cane, the Halpatis who had lost control over their resources and have no improvement in their life and continue to serve in bondage for meagre wages. In the southern region the indigenous peoples lands have been invaded by migrants, thus marginalising them, reducing them to exploited minorities. The progressive Land Act passed in Kerala, instead of being implement, there was an attempt to undo the law, which fortunately the President of India has rejected this proposal recently.

If there is massive displacement of indigenous peoples taking place in the mainland India, through industrialisation and the accompanying urbanisation in the name of "national development", "national interests", "environmental initiatives", in the North East region of India, there is extensive militarization and state sponsored violence in the name "nation state security", "national sovereignty", which has caused so much human tragedy.

We strongly urge the international community to press the government to ensure strict compliance of the law and guarantee the restoration of the land to the indigenous peoples and that no developments in the ancestral lands and territories of indigenous peoples should be permitted without the informed collective approval of the communities who are

directly affected. And we ask for the repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act from the statute of the Indian law.

Thank you once again,

Shimreichon Luithui