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ALL ARUNACHAL PRADESH STUDENTS UNION
Agenda item 7C
Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples

Respected Mr Chairman, Sir, members of the Working Group, my sisters and brothers

Arunacha! Pradesh situated in the far north eastern part of India as one of the 28 States of the nation. **The** State was called NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) prior to 1972. It became a full-fledged state on the 20th of February, 1987, It is one of the most geo-politically sensitive states of India as it is surrounded by Bhutan, China and Myanmar from three side.

The population of Arunacha! Pradesh stands at 10,96,702 comprising mainly 25 major indigenous tribes and more than 6000 sub tribes. Since time immemorial these tribes have been living a life of peace and harmony each maintaining its unique individuality, culture and custom. This special status was recognized both by the British india and later by the Union Government of India itself.

However, this timeless setting was about to be shattered since 1964, since when the Government of India has been using our lands as terra nullius, for the purpose of resettling large populations of other ethnic origins including indigenous from other areas, other countries and mainstream populations. Our survival and lands are under serious threat with an increasing imbalance in the demographic make up. Those who do not share our connection with our lands do not have either the understanding or the aspiration to retain and develop them intact, in keeping with the principles of trust for future generations and for the well being and thriving of our peoples and cultures today. On the contrary they are being subjected to relentless attacks on its resources for the purpose of the "national good", the profit of individual entrepreneurs and the invasion of an alien way of life that is destroying our heritage.

Often these settler populations are manipulated in the vested interests of political electoral process to support initiatives and interventions in our lands that are catastrophic for the survival of the lands themselves and of our peoples.

The problem with this ever growing enormous number is that the indigenous are on the verge of becoming a demographic minority and consequently being disenfranchised I our own lands under the present one person one vote system imposed on us by the Government of India. We are unable to cope with the modem systems of market and destitute in our own lands. Given that we inhabit a very fragile bio-system, this intensification of population density is resulting in encroachment on the reserved forest land leading to unparalleled deforestation and destruction of precious and unique flora and fauna.

Our stand

The human history is a mute witness to the fact that in any conflict between indigenous tribal people and the outsiders/settlers the tribal people have lost. Therefore it is the indigenous tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh in the instant case, which requires protection and not refugees and foreigners.

The highly exaggerated cases of alleged human rights violations raised by Refugee leaders and some human rights organizations as also their demand for citizenship rights to Chakma and Hajong refugees have created fear in the minds of the indigenous tribal people that they will be reduced to a minority in their own homeland with the given rapid population growth of these refugees. In other words, the very polity of Arunachal is in jeopardy. Inability of the media and the human rights organizations to have a rational and objective view of the refugee issue and the casual attitude of the central government for over three decades in addressing the problem on the basis of ethnic issues involved and the ground realities have made the problem a burning issue.

At the time of settlement of these refugees it was informed to be a temporary arrangement. What the people of this state wonder is as to the length of the "temporary" arrangement. Also when the settlement was decided, Arunachal Pradesh was a part of NEFA and therefore did not really have any say in the issue. Moreover the indigenous peoples were never consulted as to what they felt about the influx of a foreign culture in their land. A casual decision of the then governor of Assam on April 10, 1964 to settle these refugees in Arunachal Pradesh did not take into consideration the legal protection of the indigenous tribal people and their traditions, culture, and customs.

According to the Citizenship act 1955, the children of these refugees who have been born in India till 1987 are automatically entitled to Indian citizenship. The people of Arunachal are not against the granting of citizenship to the any refugees but they are of the views that like the Tibetan, Bhutanese refugees why can't chakmas also be distributed all over India. These refugees from Tibet are not concentrated in one place but they have camps all over India and thus they do not pose a threat to the culture and resources of a particular state. Hence the issue being agitated is not one of conferment of citizenship rights on these refugees but against their permanent settlement in Arunachal Pradesh. Under these circumstances, if these refugees are allowed to settle in the strategically placed sensitive border of Arunachal Pradesh, not only the staunch nationalist indigenous tribal people will be alienated from the main stream of the country. The situation emerging after permanent settlement of refugees in the state may provide a fertile ground for fissiparous tendencies to strike roots and create situations similar to other terrorism affected states of India..

Conclusion

This paper attempts to present an account to refugees' problem in Arunachal Pradesh in the backdrop of legal provisions, customs and traditions of the indigenous tribal people, and the administrative development of Arunachal Pradesh. The paper shows that refugees were settled in Arunachal Pradesh in haste by the central government in total disregard of the rights, privileges and ethnic values of people of Arunachal Pradesh. Time has come now to redress the pending and legitimate grievances of the Indigenous tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh duly protected by the constitution of India and other enactment. Tomorrow may be too late.

The Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972 according to which those refugees who came to India from erstwhile East Pakistan before 25th March 1971 will be considered for granting of Indian citizenship. However, why have these or other peoples been allowed to settle our lands, when in fact our own guests, visitors and relatives are forced to request an "inner line permit" including those UN monitoring mechanisms that might be able to intervene effectively on our human rights situation and to mediate an appropriate process to assure a peaceful resolution of the problem? Indigenous people had no say regarding the agreement and we are clear that we are being denied our rights to effective legal recourse under both domestic and international law.

We request the eminent working group of experts to suggest appropriate process and initiate access for the monitoring, resolution and dialogue of the large number of such disputes, many of them extremely violent, flourishing in our homelands in the north east region of India, as a well thought strategy of the Government to eliminate our opposition to the alienation and destruction of our ancestral territories.

Thank you Sir.