



Voices for Peace

Statement by **Yoanna Claquin**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson for giving me this opportunity to speak.

Distinguished Government Delegates, Representatives of UN Specialized Agencies, Brothers and Sisters of Indigenous World, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Yoanna, I'm from the Garo community, and I'm representing Voices for Peace, an organization working with 45 indigenous communities of the northern part of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country rich in many cultures and different nations. But the government doesn't recognize indigenous people in the law and its constitution. So for long the Indigenous People of Bangladesh have been suffering from serious violation of human rights which includes killings of indigenous leaders, threats, forceful migration, population transfer, eviction from homelands and insecurity. Bangladesh government has failed to ensure that indigenous people can practice their Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural rights as well. It has failed to ensure that indigenous people can participate in economic progress and development. There is no policy for the development of indigenous people. Even indigenous children do not have right to learn their own mother tongue at school. The traditional and community land rights of indigenous people are denied by the state. The assailants from majority Bengali community kill indigenous men and women every year for taking land and resources. Since 2000 many indigenous leaders including Alfred Soren, a Santal leader of North-Bengal, Ms. Gidita Rema, a Garo women leader of Modhupur forest and Sentu Nokrek, a young Garo leader were killed and no justice has been given to them.

Many times the government itself takes land away from indigenous people in the name of development projects, national parks, Eco-Parks, protected areas, building dams, tourism, military base, social forestry etc. Government doesn't consult with indigenous people before taking such so called development projects. Thus indigenous people of Bangladesh became marginalized and vulnerable people in the country. They do not have the right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct people or any full guarantees against discrimination or any other act of violence.

The ILO Convention No. 107 on indigenous and Tribal Populations, to which Bangladesh is a party, in Article 11 states that the rights of ownership of the peoples concerned over the lands, which they traditionally occupy, shall be recognized. Bangladesh government denies practicing and implementing this convention from its inception.

In 2001 the Khasi and Garo indigenous people faced eviction from their ancestral land living in northeastern region of Bangladesh. They practice the traditional and collective right on their land and forest and they believe it and practice the land such way. But Bangladesh government took a plan to establish an Eco-park on the land of Garo and Khasi. Before taking the plan Bangladesh Government did not consult with indigenous peoples. The government did not even mention the villages of Khasi and Garo people in their project proposal, instead considering our people almost illegal inhabitants of the forest. Seven indigenous villages would be affected and one thousand Khasi and Garo families face forceful eviction from their homelands where they have been living for thousand of years. At present the Khasi and Garo people of Moulvibazar district are facing serious problems with their lands. The criminals from majority Bengali are making pressure to evict the indigenous people from their land.

Regarding indigenous issues I request the Working Group on Indigenous Populations to have attention on these issues:

1. Bangladesh Government should recognize all the indigenous people living in its territory in the constitution and there should be a policy for their development. Before taking any development activities for indigenous people, meaningful consultation must be ensured with them.
2. Eco-Park and other social forestry projects to be taken on Khasi and Garo land in Bangladesh must be cancelled immediately and a new dialogue should be made regarding the forest issue.
3. Appropriate measures should be taken to promote indigenous language so that their children can learn own mother tongue in schools at the primary level.
4. Bangladesh government should establish a Land Commission for the plain land indigenous people of the country.
5. Indigenous people are usually deprived of all development activities; so special measures should be taken to develop the indigenous people.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and you all.

Yoanna