

WORLD SINDHI CONGRESS

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UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities

Working Group on Indigenous Peoples
Sixteenth session
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Item 4: Review of developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedom of indigenous people.

Statement by Dr. Munawar A. Halepota, Chairman, World Sindhi Congress.

Madam Chairperson,

May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson. It is a great pleasure to meet the indigenous brothers and sisters, during this annual pilgrimage, and I extend greetings to all from the people of Sindh.

Since we could not get the relevant document E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1998/2, as it was not available yesterday, it becomes difficult to know what kind of developments we need to review. Whether it is the review of the developments in the field of human rights, technical & industrial developments or some other developments. As I know that the education & language will be discussed in the next item, so I will try to review the rest of the developments, which are equally important, so please persevere with me if you feel that I am deviating from your specified course.

Madam Chairperson, the most significant development in our region has been the '**Nuclear Explosion**' and the imposition of '**Emergency Rule**' by Pakistan Government. Couple of months ago the whole world was shaken by the nuclear explosions, we will know about the long term effects of the fall out in due course of time, but the immediate effect was the imposition of '**Emergency Rule**' curtailing the Civil and Political Rights, taking away the powers from the courts to hear important constitutional petitions.

We fail to understand the logic of such tests, as the people are suffering in poverty, and can not bear the additional burden of sanctions and economic tightening. This is highlighted in the recent budget which allocates **22.47% for the Defence expenditure and only 0.47% for Health and 0.14% for Education**. I have seen young kids dying of disease and hunger because their parents can not afford the medicines and food, and still we go on to do nuclear explosions. Our schools, hospitals and roads need urgent repairs and the people need medicines, food and jobs, rather than nuclear explosions. If anyone tries to raise the voice against these developments, they are put in prison for anti-state activities, and can not get the relief from the courts of law because of the imposition of 'Emergency Rule'. I was lucky to get out from the country, as the government decided to put my name on the '**Exit Control List**' and was prevented from returning to UK for three months, after attending the funeral services of my father who died earlier this year.

The other most significant development is the announcement by the Government of Pakistan to build a huge dam called 'Kala Bagh Dam' inspite of strong opposition from the indigenous nations ie. Sindhis, Baluchs and Pushtoons. The construction of the Kala Bagh Dam violates the international '**Indus Basin Treaty**' and would result in the increasing water logging and salinity severely affecting the agrarian economy of Sindh. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that there is any need for the construction of such dam, as Pakistan is self sufficient in the energy needs. Alarmingly we have learned that 31 other dams are planned on Indus River and these will result in catastrophe and ecological disaster, threatening the wild life and permanent loss of endangered species like Indus Salmon and Indus Dolphin..

Madam Chairperson, there is widespread violation of civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights as highlighted in the UN document E/CN.4/1994/NGO/56:

- a) More than eight million acres of land has been forcibly taken from local Sindhis and allocated to Military Generals and other outside settlers, forcing native Sindhis to abandon their centuries old ancestral homes and villages. Recently more than 200 miles of coastal land has been taken over by the defence forces, evicting local fishermen and depriving more than 2000 families of their livelihood.
- b) The natural resources of Sindh, including oil, gas and coal are being indiscriminately exploited and taken away without due compensation to the local people.
- c) Sindh is being deprived of its share of water from Indus River vital for agriculture, by construction of dams upstream, severely affecting the agrarian rural economy and resulting in the ecological disaster.
- d) Widespread deforestation has further worsened the situation, as evidenced by the recurrent flooding, extinction of many endangered species and damage to the wild life.
- e) Sindhi medium schools are being closed down, so much so that there is not a single Sindhi medium government school in Karachi, the capitol of Sindh.

f) The continuous settlement of outsiders has resulted in the disproportionate imbalance of the population resulting in the increasing tension between the native Sindhi people and the immigrants. The immigrants have further destroyed the native culture by bringing heroin and illegal weapons.

In the absence of any constitutional protection, Sindhis feel that their cultural, social economic, civil and political rights are being violated. Hence, Sindhis the indigenous people of Sindh, demand the **Right to Self Determination**, as per International Covenants and conventions.

I appeal to the indigenous brothers and sisters for their support in our peaceful struggle against the neo-colonisation and occupation of our land and massacre of our people.

Thank you again, Madam Chairperson.