

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND
PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

ELEVENTH SESSION WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

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JOINT STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATIONS OF ASIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Madame Chairperson, Members of the Working Group, fellow Indigenous Peoples and Ladies and Gentlemen ;

Thank you very much for giving us the floor to highlight some of the urgent issues which are being faced by the Indigenous Peoples of Asia, as all of you know that more than two third of Indigenous Peoples are in Asia and the existence of Indigenous Peoples are being threatened through the systematic campaign of assimilation, extermination, militarization, invasion and colonization, population transfer policy, development aggression and tourism. It is really painful that most of the Asian governments completely deny the existence of the Indigenous Peoples in their respective countries by giving discriminatory terms like schedule caste, untouchable, schedule tribes or something else. The Indigenous Peoples cherished profound desire with hope and aspiration to build a new partnership in the World' s Indigenous Peoples year 1993 but none of the government commemorated the Indigenous Peoples year in Asia in recognition of their rights.

Madame Chairperson, as the problems of the Indigenous Peoples in Asia are extremely urgent but we are aware of the precious time, so we would like to stress only few cases here.

One of the most critical issue in Asia is the Dalits (untouchable) issue which is a great crime against the humanity as every hour two Dalits are assaulted, three Dalits women are raped ; two Dalits houses are burnt in India ; and this is only as per the official records of the government of India.

The fundamental rights to have the name of one' s choice are denied as the Aboriginal Peoples of Taiwan are not allowed to have or use their Aborigines name ; and the dumping of Nuclear Waste is a threat to the Taiwan Aborigines.

The development strategies of many of the Asian countries are seriously affecting the Indigenous Peoples such as the Normada Project in India, Geothermal project in Philippines, national park for tourism in Taiwan. In Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, the government is going to acquire 131,000 acres of land in the name of Forest Development which will uproot 40, 000 Jumma Indigenous Peoples families.

Many territories of Indigenous Peoples are highly militarized as in the case of West Papua, Moluccous, Naga Land, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Karen, Kachins, etc, in the name of territorial integrity and sovereignty where the human rights situation is completely appalling.

The Indigenous Jumma Peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh are in the verge of extinction due to continuous violation of human rights and genocides and we appeal to the United Nations for intervention in this case.

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We are all aware, might of numbers, arms and wealth have been the shaping forces and tools of history. Without this assets of wordly power, the Indigenous Peoples of everywhere have always been vulnerable and insecure. Suffering and humiliation are therefore constant realities of existence for us.

From our histories of beeing exploited for centuries, we have developped an unerring sensitivity to hurt and pain. But could it be that this very sensitivity may become our strongest asset for bringing healing to the wounded memories of races whose quests for revenge keep so much of the world bleeding and impoverished ?

To secure the fullest human rights is essential for our survival in this world. The dedicated activists of Indigenous Peoples who have brought us to where we are in this field deserve our highest tribute and thanks. Yet if we stop at the pursuit of our own rights only, we may win pity and perhaps overdue concessions from the guilty nations but fail to rise to our greatest task, conditioned and stunted by a response syndrome of how others treat us.

Lastly we would like to leave this thought with you : while fighting to stop our sufferings, it is the challenge for us all to choose our highest right and option of using our tragic sufferings which could become our distinctive contribution.