

**17th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)**

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**Theme:** "Indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources"

Statement on Item no. 4

**Statement by: Mr. Pankaj Teron**

Kardom!

Thank you, Chair, I am Pankaj Teron, from Diphu, the small head quarter town of Karbi Anglong, Assam in the Northeastern part of India. I am representing Karbi indigenous people and Karbi Human Rights Watch (KHRW), a community based organization.

Our people are spread across Northeastern states of India and are mostly populated in Assam's Karbi Anglong. We are called as the most peace loving indigenous peoples of the region. I on behalf of our people would like to welcome the declaration of 2019 as International Year of Indigenous Languages. Our Karbi language is bracketed under vulnerable category and is a matter of serious concern for us like many Indigenous Peoples around the globe. It is because of the imposition of dominant languages on Indigenous Peoples five decades ago that led to the sense of insecurity about our Language, Culture and Traditional practices in Northeastern part of India. This has forced us to assert our own path for self governance as per law to shape and decide our destiny.

Likewise, we have been through peaceful means demanding our Rights which are enshrined in the Indian Constitution under Article 244 (A) for more than three decades for separate autonomous political institution. In the course of the peaceful mass democratic movement, our people have suffered series of Human Rights violations like detention, arbitrary arrest, fake encounters, rape, and intimidation. Serious issue we are facing at present is the dilution of autonomy at the behest of the state governments under the leadership of dominant nationality in an environment of majoritarian democracy.

Chair, since pre-historic past we have been living in the midst of Nature. We are nothing without mountains, forests, rivers, traditional lands, territories and resources. But in the name of wildlife sanctuary, eco-sensitive zones, wild-life corridors - our people are forcibly displaced and are under constant threat to cede their territories without Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the people. Those wild life corridors/sanctuaries/eco-sensitive zones were implemented without proper mapping of the area and without consultation with the community. Our people who have been the traditional guardians of Nature and thereby protecting our Environment are systematically displaced.

Respected Chair, the indigenous peoples are also being forced to make way for the extractive industries in North Cachar Hills of Assam and similar surveys are continuing for drillings in Karbi Anglong without following the required procedures. At the same time, there is also systematic agenda to marginalized the Indigenous Peoples in the Northeastern region of India by encouraging settlement of non-indigenous peoples is going to be important issue in all front for us.

Chair, on the above issues here I would like to recommend the UN Permanent Forum to urge upon the responsible Governments to:

1. Recognize the Indigenous Languages of our region as language not as dialect and ensuring acceptable mechanism to promote and protect it in consultations with the Indigenous Peoples.
2. Put on a halt the growing Human Rights violations against popular demand for the implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution and initiate the process of implementation of the same immediately and thereby recognize the Rights of Indigenous Peoples particularly Karbi people under UNDRIP and other provisions.
3. Enforce moratorium on projects which failed to take the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous communities in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills (Dima Hasao). Thereby, to follow the procedures and provisions under the existing UN and Indian mechanisms to protect Environment and recognize our collective rights over Land, Territories and Resources.
4. Enforce protection of our traditional and constitutional territories against encroachments of Hindu Bangladeshis who are being encouraged to settle in Assam as the result of the current federal government policy.

Last but not the least - here I would like to thank the Chair for giving me this opportunity to deliver this statement and at the same time I would also like to convey my sincere thanks and gratitude to the UN Voluntary Fund for this opportunity.

Kur-Eh-Vang!

Thank you Chair.

**Mr. Pankaj Teron**  
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