

**Asia Caucus Statement on Agenda Item 7. Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues considered by the Economic and Social Council and emerging issues, specifically challenges related to pandemics and responses to them.**

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 20th Session  
April 19-30, 2021

Thank you Mada'am Chairperson for this opportunity to address the forum.

I am Eleanor P. Dictaan – Bang-oa a Kankanaey Igorot from the Philippines working with Tebtebba and the Asia Indigenous Women's Network. Today, I will speak in behalf of the Asia Caucus composed of various indigenous peoples' organizations, indigenous peoples Non-government organizations, networks and support groups in the region.

It has been more than a year and the COVID – 19 pandemic continues to disproportionately impact indigenous peoples due to underlying conditions of vulnerability resulting from historical discrimination. In Asia, this situation emerged by the pandemic, is exacerbated by heightened aggression and direct attacks against indigenous peoples asserting their fundamental rights to land, resources and appropriate development.

Recovery from the pandemic extends beyond the medical aspect and strengthening health institutions to enable timely response. Recovery has to be centered on the principles of human rights, and, specifically, collective rights for indigenous peoples. Studies have established that a lot of diseases, like SARS including COVID -19, are of zoonotic origin. The virus jumping from animals to human beings. A situation further traceable to the massive disruption of the balance between nature and human activities.

- Asia is home to 17 of the 36 global diversity hotspots. Four (Indonesia, India, Myanmar and Philippines) of these are inhabited by indigenous peoples. These countries are also rich in mineral resources and have in fact been longstanding hosts to some of the biggest mining companies in the world. On top of these are infrastructure, tourism, agroindustrial, energy and conservation initiatives by states and private sector that renege on indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources allowed by the principles of free trade, liberalization and deregulation governing structural adjustment programs in the region and the ASEAN's economic blue print. It is not a coincident that land and resource conflicts, attacks on indigenous persons and communities, are common in Asia and indigenous peoples' and their rights are yet to be fully recognized and realized. This situation is tantamount to depriving the future generation of their wellbeing – a threat to the visions of sustainable development! (Dictaan-Bang-oa, et. al. Situation of Indigenous Women in Asia; 2020.unpublished)

Indigenous peoples' knowledge and resource management, use and practices have always been underpinned with the value of maintaining the balance of nature for sustained wellbeing.

In this regard, we, the Asia Caucus, urge the UN Permanent Forum to adopt for its future work, further advancing and accelerating mobilization of support for the strengthening and institutionalization of the protection and conservation indigenous peoples' land and resources, by indigenous peoples themselves, as a resilience strategy. We believe this will not only prevent zoonotic diseases but also ensures the balance, therefore, the recovery and wellbeing of both nature and humanity. In this sense, it simultaneously functions as a preventive or mitigative measure against the impacts of climate change, including disasters. Particular attention and resources should be provided to leverage meaningful participation of indigenous women and youth, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

On the immediate we urge the UNPFII to strengthen engagement with the states, the private sector and donor agencies to ensure the respect and protection of indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and territories. The aggressive intrusions into indigenous lands and resource grabs, in the name of economic recovery and development, deprives us and the future generations' of our right to life with dignity.

It negates our common vision for peace, prosperity for people and sustainable planet.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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