

**Second Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
New York, May 15th, 2003,**

**Agenda Item 4 (f) Education,
Statement by the Asia Caucus**

Education is a fundamental human right. Education does not mean written and printed only. It means oral, inherited and memorised one too. For us education is not only a means to study modern science and technologies but it is a means and way to protect, preserve, develop and promote our traditional indigenous wisdom, knowledge, heritage, skills and technologies also. It would be unforgivable violation of all the other values, if our children are forced to go through education system which has no connection with their roots and has no tolerance or respect for the rights of others.

Education is of crucial significant step towards empowering indigenous peoples to participate more fully in the economic, social and political life of their community and a narrow focus on the education of indigenous peoples may reinforce social and economic marginalization. In confronting the many challenges for the development of indigenous peoples, education becomes an indispensable asset to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice.

The call for "*Education for all*", *will be possible only if:*

- 1. Indigenous children can have access,*
- 2. Education is appropriate for indigenous peoples,*
- 3. Education is affordable by indigenous peoples, in terms of lingual, cultural and monetary cost*
- 4. Education embodies the rich diverse language, culture and religion*

Language is a key factor in education. People's clamour to speak their own mother tongue is central to their assertion of their distinct identity. After all, "language is the soul of the people". It is linked to their cultural environment where the world of meanings is stored. Language doesn't exist in isolation rather is interwoven with culture, social structure, social values and religion. It is through the mother tongue that history, traditions and myths about people and its history come alive. The language is in itself a living symbol of the community.

The use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction has proven advantageous, especially where the development of cognitive faculties is concerned. Conversely, the use of a strange language results in cognitive and pedagogical difficulties. It is unfortunate that our children are denied of their right to get education in their language. Most of the schools have generally approached the education of indigenous and ethnic children from a deficit model, based upon the belief that they have "lacked the innate intelligence to succeed in school.

Indigenous peoples have central concern regarding their language and education for their children. In this respect I would like to call the attention of the following Convention and Declaration

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples
- UNESCO's Guidelines and Dakar Framework for Action.
- ILO convention 169

The present mainstream education system denies the indigenous peoples right to education that is appropriate to them. Education has been used by the state to destroy the indigenous peoples, their wisdom and beliefs.

We therefore recommend Permanent Forum to recommend to:

1. *Invite UNESCO to explain its policies, plan of action and initiatives regarding the indigenous cultures,*
2. *UNESCO to guarantee the indigenous educational methods in its plan of actions and should influence the government through its representatives and facilitate opportunity to have appropriate, affordable and accessible education for indigenous children,*
3. *UNESCO to organise a global level international meeting to discuss about the education for the indigenous children,*
4. *UNESCO to provide indigenous peoples organisations, the technical and financial support to develop indigenous languages and their eventual use for mother tongue education and provide financial support to open the mother-tongued school,*
5. *UNESCO to ensure that indigenous languages are used by other groups of peoples in their society and that resource adequate to the achievement of high quality education are allocated,*
6. *UNICEF to ensure the fulfilment of the rights of the indigenous children with the special focus on indigenous girls,*
7. *UNICEF to prepare a report on the policies, guidelines and programmes of United Nations agencies to address the specific needs of the indigenous children,*
8. *Request UNICEF and UNESCO and other specialised agencies for the promotion of mother tongue education for the indigenous children,*
9. *Call upon the committee on the Rights of the Child to declare indigenous children as the subject for its theme day in September 2004,*
10. *Recognise and respect the indigenous traditional way of learning and imparting knowledge.*
11. *Establish an International Council or Commission for the protection, preservation and promotion of indigenous and ethnic languages comprise of indigenous and ethnic representatives,*
12. *Support the training and production of curriculum, text books and other reading materials in mother tongues with the active participation of the community concerned,*
13. *Strengthen the role and position of Indigenous Peoples Organization in solving problems of multicultural and multilingual education.*