

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF
THE INDIAN COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES
AT THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF
THE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
Geneva, July 19-30, 1993, Agenda Item no. 4

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable Members of the Working Group,
Distinguished Government Representatives, and
Fellow Delegates of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from around the world,
I bring you greetings from my 70 million fellow indigenous and
tribal peoples from India. Madam Chairperson, I join my friends
in this hall in congratulating you for your getting elected as
Chairperson again. Along with my colleagues, I am ^{eagerly} looking forward
to a successful completion of the first phase of a historic effort
to empower the indigenous and tribal peoples under your able guidance.

As the Declaration is nearing its final stage, our delegation
feels strongly that the Declaration should have a section on definition
and characterisation of the term "indigenous". Words gain meaning
in their historical context. Indigenous in the old and the new worlds
are not the same. Similarly the term 'colonial' signifies differently
to different peoples. In the Indian context unless definitionally
specified, everyone ^{could be called} ~~is~~ "indigenous" after the British colonisers
left the country in 1947. Independent India is developing indigenous
locomotives, indigenous rockets and so on! Non-specification of
the term has led to our government's refusal to equate its Scheduled
Tribes with the Working Group intended "indigenous peoples" consistently
during the last seven years. The term 'tribal peoples' though
considered somewhat pejorative among Indo-European speaking countries,
is relatively more acceptable in India for this purpose. That is
one reason why the ILO convention 169 which uses 'indigenous and
tribal peoples' to signify this group of peoples, is more acceptable
(though not yet ratified ~~was~~ for some other reasons). The other
most widely acceptable term, though of Indo-European origin, again,

would be adivasi (the first settlers) frequently used for 'tribe' or 'scheduled tribe' in common usage, ^{and} in academic and government circles. Recently there has come up in the government of India circles a usage 'tribal and analogous peoples' as in the booklet ETERNAL VOYAGE as a substitute for 'indigenous and tribal peoples'. It is too early to comment how the term is going to be received by the peoples concerned, but it surely avoids the term 'indigenous' altogether.

We therefore strongly suggest that the expression 'indigenous and tribal peoples' form a single segment when it comes to defining the peoples concerned, particularly in the Indian and Asian context.

Finally, we wish the right to self-identification, operative para 7, be explained in a manner that should not lead to misuse by non-indigenous vested interest groups.

I Thank you, Madam Chairperson, for giving me the opportunity to express my views.



Dr. Ram Dayal Munda
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