

***United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,  
First Session,  
May 13<sup>th</sup> to May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002  
United Nations Headquarter, New York,  
Agenda Item 6: Education and Culture:  
Intervention by Stella Tamang, Nepal Tamang Ghedung***



Mr. Chair, Thank you!

I am Stella Tamang representing Nepal Tamang Ghedung. I would like to thank all the previous speakers. We are encouraged by their spirit and wisdom expressed by them in this historic 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of Permanent Forum.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute all those indigenous peoples who are struggling to survive dominant policies and practices ranging from genocide to protection and assimilation.

Mr. Chair, indigenous peoples all over the world are struggling and have been arguing that they have been denied their right to education. Indigenous peoples are struggling for the access to appropriate education that recognises, acknowledges, respects and promotes the rights of indigenous to be indigenous- a right that embrace indigenous peoples' language, culture, tradition and spirituality.

For indigenous peoples, education means farming, weaving, hunting, fishing and beyond and above not in the four walls of the school but out in the green field, in the farm, in the rivers, in the seas, up on the mountains and in the forest. It is our way we communicate with environments, with animals and insects.

It is vividly clear that the dominant education system and programme has been to assimilate indigenous peoples into non-indigenous culture and society. We know that once we let our children enter the tunnel of dominant education system, the outcome result is the production of a uprooted, confused children. Therefore indigenous children are not doing well in the dominant education programme. Unfortunately it is interpreted as indigenous children being less intelligent. In fact it is the failure of the dominant education system and is not of our indigenous children.

Pedagogy is another issues. Pedagogy is based on learning styles and teaching methods which are based on the specific language, cultures, environment and circumstances of indigenous peoples. Indigenous pedagogical principles are holistic, rooted, cultural, value-based and spiritual. It is for the development of the heart, the head and the hands of the peoples.

Mr.chair, language is power, language is a tool and language is resource. Language is one of the most important element in education. Unfortunately this rich, diverse language is considered as a problem and not qualified to be used to impart education. Denial of indigenous language to be used as the medium of instruction is the violation of human right as well as the right of the child.

Various initiatives taken by the indigenous peoples in this regards is the evidence that there is urgent need to recognise the languages of the indigenous peoples. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the initiative taken by my organization Nepal Tamang Ghedung. We have recently drafted the Indigenous Language Bill which has been registered in the last parliament session of Nepal.

Demanding to have education in indigenous languages does not mean that we want to isolate and deprived of the rich wisdom which exist in other languages. We want our children to learn from where they are, with what they have and with what they know. We want to have bi-lingual education. We want to be assured that we are not demanding for education in mother tongue only. We say education in indigenous language because language is the reflection of the cosmovision, wisdom and environment. Therefore it is very important for the survival and revival of indigenous peoples language and is imperative and preservation of indigenous knowledge, cultural values and wisdom.

Mr. Chair, for the protection and promotion of education for indigenous peoples, the indigenous women play a key role. They have been transmitting through rituals, stories, music, crafts, weaving and cultivation. But when indigenous women are separated from their cultural base and communities, they have been denied from their right to transmit the wisdom and knowledge of to the indigenous youth and the children.

Mr. Chair, meaningful, empowering and culturally sustainable education for indigenous peoples will be possible only when indigenous peoples have control and have the resources to develop educational theories, curriculum and practices that are indigenous and are able to determine the environment within which this education can best be visualised.

Mr. Chair, education was a service before and then became politics and now it has become more than that. It is a business to make money and to make power. Education is disappearing from school and educational institution.

I fully agree with the previous speakers who said that the present investment in education is for the education to promote mono language and mono culture. With the conflicts going on, I am bit pessimist at this moment since most of the countries where conflicts is going on, in the name of bringing peace more and more budget is now allocated for buying weapons and guns. The indigenous peoples still need to resist.

At the end, I would like to recommend the followings:

1. Indigenous peoples's right to be indigenous peoples must be respected,
2. Indigenous language must be protected, preserved and promoted,
3. Recommend for the development for the indigenous peoples language,
4. Respect indigenous pedagogy,
5. Recommend to develop educational theories, curriculum and practices that are indigenous and respect the culture, language, values and lifestyle
6. Recommend that the various UN Agencies and nongovernment organizations to have free and prio inform consent for any educational programmes design for indigenous peoples.
7. Recommend for the adoption of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples