

**First Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
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**Agenda Item No: 5 –General statements**

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Thank you Mr.Chairperson for giving me this opportunity to address the historic First session of the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues.

Distinguished <sup>member of the P.F.</sup> representatives of the indigenous people, Government delegates, NGOs and UN specialized agencies- ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Chairperson, since this is the first time that I am taking the floor, let me congratulate you on behalf of the indigenous Borok People for being elected to chair the Session of the Permanent Forum. We are all aware as to how this historic Session was made possible due to the efforts of many indigenous brothers and sisters who were really cornered for our survival.

I have many things to share as many of our indigenous brothers and sisters but I <sup>am</sup> also aware of the constraints of time and try to be brief.

My grandfather used to tell me that the land, forest, rivers, flora & fauna belongs to us. But now we are all deprived of the harmonious relationship not because we desire but were forced from our ancestral land & forest by the illegal migrants who have become the legitimate citizens. This is policy followed by the Indian government to displace the indigenous people from our ancestral homeland. Today the indigenous Borok people have become only 31% of the total population indicating that the rest are illegal migrants. It is not that we were few in numbers nor our population decreased but the outsiders have swamped us over the years. This was made possible as the illegal migrants from then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were given Indian citizenship. In the legislature out of 60 members the representation of the indigenous Borok people is only 20. Laws that are enacted by the state are discriminatory and go against the interest of the indigenous people.

The Forest Laws & Acts have forcefully displaced the indigenous people from our ancestral forestlands. All the lands in the forest occupied by the indigenous people have been declared reserved and the people living there in from time immemorial have been declared illegal occupants. The forest & jungles is the source of our spirit, joy, food, water etc. The government also planted alien trees in our forest, thereby causing many problems such as the drying of the steams, disappearance of medicinal plants, edible roots & plants. It not only we who are affected but the birds and animals who are our friends are also affected. In the absence of medicinal plants our traditional way of healing sickness also came to standstill and at the same time the state does not have adequate health program in the areas inhabited by the indigenous people.

As our people are dependent of shifting cultivation in the forest and the forest being declared reserved by the government most of our people are forced out of cultivation and are starving. It is not only economy to us but our entire life style, customs, song, dance and in fact our entire happiness is bound together with the economy. In one of the study conducted on the shifting cultivation in our region with the assistance of DANIDA and I happened to do the survey in my area. One pertinent question was asked by the one of the elders was whether we came first or the law? I answered him promptly that the law came later. This is a mater of great concern to the indigenous people.

It is the same case with the plain land or wet land cultivation. The alien land laws have been enacted and all such lands have been taken away from the indigenous people. Whatever the lands that are left with the indigenous people are again taken away for construction of roads, power projects, government buildings, armed forces head quarters etc. In this way all our ancestral lands have been taken away. We don't know what the laws say but only know that the land, forest belongs to us. This brings us to the situation of confrontation with the government and the non-indigenous who have come and forcefully occupied our lands. This leads us to the conflicting situations and when we come forward to protect our land are we termed as militants, insurgents, extremist, anti-national etc. All the areas occupied by the indigenous people have been declared as disturbed areas and many draconian laws such as Armed Forces special Powers Act 1958,POTA etc are operating. The maximum human rights violations are committed by government security forces everyday in the areas inhabited by the indigenous people but

such violation goes un-noticed and unreported as we do not have our own media. If at all reported the government flatly denies it.

Our people suffer from the worst victims of racism from the government. Absence of health care, proper clothing & shelter makes the situation more complicated. No forest, no lands where do we go?

**Having said all these I now want to make a few recommendations:**

1.The Permanent Forum may recommend the ECOSOC to undertake /conduct / or develop some kind of mechanism to evaluate the national laws & policies and see how these laws are discriminatory against the indigenous people.

2.After having done the evaluation the Permanent Forum may prevail upon the national government/states to do away with such discriminatory laws. The Forum also can highlight such discriminatory laws in different forums.

3.The Permanent Forum can focus on Violations of the rights of the indigenous people in particular by the nation states and agencies. This will bring the Permanent Forum closer to the communities in the remote far-flung areas.

4.To create a data bank on the indigenous people for a ready reference.

The recommendations that I have made, I know will not be an easy task for the permanent Forum but I can assure you that it will be challenging. If any time, anywhere our assistance is required in these regards, We will be glad to give a helping hand.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity.

Hambai

Thank you.