

**STATEMENT MADE BY JEBRA RAM MUCHAHARY OF  
TRIBAL WELFARE SOCIETY, ASSAM BRANCH, BIJNI, ASSAM  
IN THE 17<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE WGIP ON THE ISSUE  
OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO LAND**

Madam Chairperson,

Assam, the second largest state of North East India is the original abode of the Bodo Indigenous peoples and other tribes of Bodo origin is geographically lying in between  $25.50^{\circ}\text{N} - 28.00^{\circ}\text{N}$  latitude and  $88.25^{\circ}\text{E} - 96.00^{\circ}\text{E}$  longitude.

The Bodos are the earliest known inhabitants of Assam who are now included in the tribal group, majority of whom are not at all inclined to be called so rather are proud to be called as Bodo Mongolians as they are of the Mongolian origin, whose evidences of their presence in this part of the globe can be traced as back as 5000 B.C.

Out of the total area of 78,532 Sq. Km. of present- day Assam, 63,298 Sq.Km is plains and 15,225 Sq.Km. is hill out of the total area of plain, Bodos are spread over 25,000 Sq. Km. covering almost of Brahmaputra Valley which is known as BURLUNG BUTHUR HAYEN in Bodo. Presently, the total population of the Bodos is about 4 millions against the total population of 22 millions of Assam constituting about 18% to the total population in the state. The other tribes are Misings, Karbis, Deoris, Lalungs, Dimasas, Sonowals, Ravas, Garos, Chutias, Modasis, Morans etc who are about 4 millions altogether. Thus about 8 millions of Indigenous peoples are spread over 19 districts of 23 districts in Assam including Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts, constituting about 36% to the total population of Assam.

The entire Indigenous People's lands, the soil of whom is alluvial tracts in Brahmaputra, is locally called as HASAM, means dark soil, the original name of Assam in Bodo is very much fertile and highly productive, where streams and rivers behave normally except the summer spilling and remain functional throughout the year. The main occupation of the Indigenous peoples is agriculture, where 90% of them live in the villages based on Agriculture.

The land is the life for the Tribal Peoples/Indigenous Peoples of Assam, being the only source of livelihood or productive resources. Land is part of their culture, world-view and identity. Moreover land is associated with, laws of inheritance and succession and even with the matrimonial matters in the indigenous and tribal society.

Today, the scenario has rapidly changed over last few decades. Land alienation due to influx of immigrants of large numbers of Bangladeshis and refugees after Independence by whom 50,000 acres of land have been alienated in Bodo dominate area of lower Assam, 3256 acres of land in Mising in Tiwa dominated areas in upper Assam had passed on to non- tribals and more than 1300 acres of land for industry and more than 1900 acres of Indigenous/Tribal land had been acquired for tea gardens in Assam. Population exploitation and consequently over exploitation of Indigenous natural resources, faulty land-use and the related problems depleted the green cover & subsequent loss of fertile top soils causing not only production lesser, but also trigger a chain reaction imbalance & consequently degraded the quality of life of the Indigenous peoples. It has been estimated that more than 50% area in the hills

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and about 5% area in the plains have been seriously affected by land-degradation. Assam has now about 10.60 lakh hectares of non-forest Waste lands (Including 7.45 hectares of jhum-lands. Also (4248639 acres) 20% agricultural land has been disposed for National development projects. Interestingly almost all the major developmental are built in the indigenous cultivating land and on their moorings displacing 60% of the native people to be land less labour class in their own home, reducing them to be land less whose next alternative means of lively hood is to work as labourers, and wood cutters. Moreover, the new course of rivers due to impact of deforestation by the timber smugglers, the erosion has caused heavy damages to the Tribal land forcing them to enter the forest which is again causing a conflict between the forest department and the native Indigenous and tribal peoples. Today some of the most poignant poetry is about losing their land, land floating away like a tortoise land whirling and so on. The transferred of tribal/ Indigenous lands to non-tribals has been feature of our agrarian economy.

When the Bodos objected the influx of the Bengali and Muslim immigrants and their settlements over their land to the British Govt. towards the end of nineteenth century a line system "was created by the Britishheres to protect the Bodo areas vide Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act. 1886-Chapter-X. Interestingly the same line system was withdrawn on the basis of policy of Assam Muslim League's "grow more food campaign". On demand of tribal League in 1948, 33 no of Tribal belts and Blocks were created to protect the Indigenous People's land of Assam, specially form further alienation of land which was later on raised to 44, covering about 1,25,28,320 Bighas of Land (1,789,731,42 hactres) but interestingly till recently 2 lakh 13 thousand and 40 of land in Tribal belts and blocks are already illegally occupied by non-tribal encroachers. (30,434,28 acres) and a process of de-constituting of the said Tribal. Belts and Blocks which had been already reduced only to 34 till to day on various pretext by the Government. Practically, the Tribal Belts and Blocks were not implemented in real sense of letter and spirit and hence great apprehensions of loosing their mooring and insecurity in the minds of the Bodos and the other plants tribes of Assam grew more and more. "The chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 meant for protection of the land of the Bodos and other Tribals proved to be farce as the Govt. of Assam did not implement the provisions of the said Act. Which also can not be enforced in the law courts.

It is clear that mere Legislation will not suffice to protect the Indigenous Peoples against the market forces. Only laws implemented in connection with social activities, and raising tribal consciousness, granting more autonomy for their self-rules and empowering them politically can only checkmate this process.

Thank you Madam Chairperson for bearing with me.