

AMBEDKAR CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

(voice of 250 million Indigenous People of India-Dalits (the Untouchables))

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Commission on Human Rights: Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Twentieth session, 22-26 July 2002

Item 5: Review of recent development

Dear Chairperson and distinguished Members of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and our indigenous sisters and brothers around the world:

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the election of Prof. Martinez as a chairperson of this Working Group on Indigenous Population

I am representing 250 million Indigenous people of Indian subcontinent popularly known as Dalit and Tribals. I consider this a privilege to speak to this distinguished body today on the condition of our millions of brothers and sisters back home.

Recent 2002 UNICEF Report tells that:

1) India has the half of the world's child labour, mostly our indigenous children- more than 100 million plus.

(2) That the destitutes, whose income is below \$1 a day, has grown and half of the world's destitutes are in India alone, most of them are again indigenous peoples- Dalits and Tribals. Their literacy rate in rural India is less than 30% ,and they are forced to serve as landless labour, bonded labour, thus exploited by ruling dominant culture in the name of Hindu Caste system. Their most sacred place of worship like the Lord Buddha's Enlightenment place, known as BuddhaGaya Temple, has been controlled by the dominant culture and inspite of last 10 years peaceful struggle headed by Ven. Surai Sasai, we are not any close to recover our cultural rights for this sacred place.

May I, therefore, draw your attention to the recommendations made in the Concluding Observations ,during India report, by :

(a) CERD Treaty Body in 1996

(b) Committee on Human Rights in 1997

(c) Committee on Child Rights in 2000

and ask Indian Government to impliment them fully.

I would also request to UN to ask India to free the Buddha Gaya Temple from the dominance of hindu culture immediately so that indigenous people can excercise their cultural and religious rights fully. Thank you again for giving me this oppurtunity.