

UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues, 17 May 2004, NY
Statement on "Human Rights" on Behalf of the Sherpa Association, the
National Indigenous Women's Federation and the British Gorkha Army
Exservicemen Women's Organisation of Nepal, (Collective Statement)
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Thank you, Mr. Chair

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the Honorable Secretary General of the UN, Mr. Koffi Annan, for his attention and offering to help re-establish peace in my country, my Nepal.

I had mentioned earlier at this session that young men, women and children were dying in the ongoing conflict in Nepal. Since I last spoke here, dozens of people have died from both the Maoists and the Government sides. Hundreds of people have been robbed, harassed, and kidnapped while traveling by bus; the border of Terai region has been closed; and hundreds of protesting students and youth are clashing with the authorities in their schools and colleges in the capital city. Peaceful public demonstrations and protests are banned; and the areas where they occur are declared so-called violence-affected zones; and certain areas are still running under officially and unofficially imposed curfews; and the violence is still ongoing.

This kind of news has become a daily routine to be heard as taking bread as supplement and we are afraid of getting used to it, and are tired of it. We do not want our young generation to grow up becoming used to war and violence as a normal part of life. We want to hear about something new with hope and productive for our people to have pride for future generations. We want to practice our indigenous knowledge and system in our indigenous land with respect. We want to live in peace and security like many of you here today.

The indigenous areas are the worst affected as the people are caught between the Maoists and the army and are forced to cooperate with either or both. They are trapped in a cycle of forced cooperation, suspicion, harassment, criminal charges, abduction, torture and extra judicial killings. So people are migrating rapidly to the cities from their homeland over and over night. However, they are not secure and are suffering more in the new atmosphere with no resources. Only the aged, weak and sick people, women and children remain in the villages. The widows, orphans, handicapped and helpless elders are suffering and dying with no food and security.

The issues about violations of human rights against indigenous peoples are not being taken seriously, even by the human rights organizations.

Nepal is suffering also from additional political protest movement since last year. But the indigenous peoples' issues have also been isolated from this the so-called five agitating political parties' movement for the restoration of democracy and peace.

Therefore, I strongly recommend the following to the Permanent Forum

- 1) Call for a nationwide ceasefire between the government and armed groups as soon as possible,
- 2) Reconstruct an environment for peace talks and negotiation,
- 3) Facilitate a transition towards a **secular state**,
- 4) Encourage the government and all civil society to draft a new constitution, which is more balanced, based on the essence of equality, equity and uphold peace and democracy in our society and country. And
- 5) Urge the national government to take the initiative in demanding from the British government the salary, pensions and allowance owed to the British Gorkhas, including veterans of the British military, their widows and children.

Mr. Chair, now I would like to draw your attention
to the often-raised, but always ignored human rights issues in my state.

We, the women, are living like aliens in our own country. Mothers, when they give birth, have no right to identify the citizenship of their children. This is very painful, shameful and insulting, to be a mother and so-called human being. Women cannot even get citizenship without men's permission. If a woman wants to marry a foreigner, she has no power to secure citizenship for him or their children. A man, however, does have this right.

The majority of indigenous women and girls are still being sold as animals in different markets. The rates of violence against women, such as torture, rape, suicide, maternity death and infant mortality are increasing rapidly since the conflict began in the country. Access to education for girls, economic opportunities, health assistance to the rural areas, political and decision-making processes are out of reach for women and indigenous peoples. There is a need for adequate affirmative action to be taken by the State; the present constitution and laws need to be reviewed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman