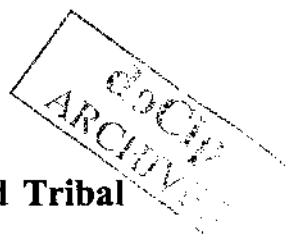


**Third Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
10-21 May 2004
New York**



Oral Intervention of Mr Suhas Chakma, Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network under Agenda Item 4(d): Human Rights

Thank you Mr Chairman,

The number of speakers listed under this agenda item indicates continued gross and widespread human rights violations against indigenous peoples. Mr Chair as you are aware, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights discusses 24 agenda items on human rights over a period of six weeks. The question is how would the Permanent Forum address human rights issues without any mechanisms for intervention. The limitation imposed by the resolution on the establishment of the Forum that consensus shall govern the conduct of the Forum is not helpful.

The Permanent Forum should understand its mandate and adopt appropriate methods of work and programme of activities if it is not to be reduced to be another Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The last two sessional reports fail to indicate the status of human rights of indigenous peoples, among others, because of the inability to record the oral interventions. Mr Chair, the experiences of the Sub-Commission on Human Rights, which cannot pass any country resolutions or mention a country in thematic resolutions since 2001 under the review of the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights, is not encouraging. The number of civil society groups attending the Sub-Commission has reduced drastically. It remains the biggest challenge for the Forum – the ability of the Forum to relate to indigenous peoples and address the needs of the human rights situations.

Through, it is only three years, Mr Chair, the portends and trends of the Forum are not encouraging. In this Forum, speakers after speakers continue to receive applause from the participants for their intervention. My fear is how long would this enthusiasm continue before many of us realise that our interventions are not even recorded in the annual report, not to mention about the need for action by the Forum. Or is it that the applauses have become ritual? Even the distinguished representative of Viet Nam was applauded yesterday. Mr Chair, only on 10 April 2004 during the Easter, the Vietnamese security forces allegedly killed many indigenous peoples and arrested dozens of indigenous peoples in Central Highland provinces of Dak Lak and Gia Lai. The regions have been closed for foreigners. Many crossed international border to flee to Cambodia where they faced further human rights violations. Later on, some foreign correspondents based in Hanoi were taken on a guided tour where indigenous leaders were parroting that the uprising was instigated by the United States and FURLO. It is fashionable to blame the Americans when the indigenous peoples are protesting that their gradual extinction because of the transmigration of majority Kinh people into indigenous territories. Therefore, I wonder what was the applause about the statement of distinguished representative of Vietnam. And for this reason I request not to applause after I finish the statement. At the same time, I firmly believe that it is unfair and does not go well with diplomatese if indigenous representatives were to applause only for themselves.

Mr Chair, it is a sincere request to you, other members of the Forum and those who have been reappointed to consider working methods of the next Forum. The opening and closing sessions of the Forum must start with prayers by indigenous spiritual leaders to show our distinctiveness. But with all due respect to religious freedoms and feelings, it should not be a ritual for everyday where we lose half an hour. The Forum must rationalize time-management.

The number of speakers on agenda item culture and education are less and therefore, yesterday afternoon, the Forum discussed the agenda item on human rights. Yet, Mr Chair, I like many others was given three and half minutes to complete my intervention on the special theme – so much so that I could not read even the recommendations. Some of the panelists for agenda items are given disproportionate time – whereas at the Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteurs are given exactly 10 minutes to present their yearly reports and reports of country visits. The Joint Statements are increasingly becoming meaningless – I am speaking on behalf of the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network and is which also a part of the Joint Statement of Asian Caucus on this agenda item. Most of my colleagues from Asia will either speak individually and through joint statements. Therefore, the preference to joint statements becomes untenable. It is essential that the Forum carefully examines the time management by other bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights.

In conclusion, AITPN would like to recommend that the Forum should facilitate a process where indigenous peoples could vent their moral outrage against gross human rights violations; yet explore the possibilities for effective intervention. In addition to general statements, as the Forum does not have any mechanisms for intervention, it should select one specific sub-theme on agenda item on human rights in each session and invite the Special Procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, Treaty Bodies or Chartered on the concerned agenda items for a debate at the Forum, followed by meetings between the Bureau of the Permanent Forum and the Bureau of concerned bodies or concerned special procedures; and participation of Permanent Forum members in the annual meeting of the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies to ensure that indigenous peoples' human rights and fundamental freedoms are given adequate attention. That is the precise role of the Forum – to promote integration and coordination within the United Nations system including human rights mechanisms. Such activities have financial implications and we should definitely applaud when the governments, members of inter-agency task force etc promise financial assistance!

Thank you.

For further information, please contact,

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