

Respected Madam Chair Person,

I express my deepest gratitude to UNO Voluntary Fund to enable me to attend this 17th Working group on the "Relationship to land to the Indigenous People". I am from Eastern Ghat regions of India. I represent HSW, an indigenous peoples organization.

There is an urgent need to find out solutions to the long standing problems that exist between Govt. and Indigenous Peoples. The very survival of the Indigenous people is at risk due to the continuing threats to their lands, territories and resources. The relationship with the land and all living beings is at the core of Indigenous societies. There is a need for deeper understanding on the spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political significance of lands, territories and resources to the continued survival and reality of Indigenous societies. There is a need for recognition of cultural differences and distinct identity because of the profound relationship with the land.

Relationship of land to the Kui indigenous people is close to the hearts and based on an unique philosophy of life, culture and cosmovision which evolves from the Earth. Our ancestors have preserved and improved upon the bio-diversity, culture and innumerable knowledge system relating to healing, naturopathy, agriculture, water harvesting, animal and bird protection

Bura Penu (Bura God) is worshiped before starting the agricultural operation in the land. Before sowing the seeds, chickens and eggs are offered to the Mother Earth for her fertility in abundance of flora and fauna and evergreen coverage. There are many 'Danda Dabas' (sacred grooves) in Eastern Ghats where Indigenous people worship to be protected from wild animals and no human being is allowed to the spot in order to keep the nature in its clearest form. Land is the free gift of nature. It is neither bought nor sold.

'Pider Pita', the spirit of the ancestors, guard the water, land, territories, corn fields, pasture lands and also controls the balance utilisation of these resources and produces. Thus the land is the centre of socio-political, economic, spiritual system of the Indigenous life. We cannot think of survival and development of the indigenous people around the world denying the right over land, territory and resources to which they are spiritually attached.

Land has been the basis of education system of the Indigenous peoples in India while there was no formal education system. The community passes on the knowledge and intellectual skills to the next generation. The trees and animals becomes the integral part of the community.

All colonising powers have disregarded the rights of the colonised. Whatever little freedom and rights were given during the British rules by the formation of scheduled areas further curtailed and squeezed after the land settlement in 1970. Further the process of Globalisation pushed back the Indigenous People of India. The land acquisition act 1999 empowers the Dist. Magistrates to acquire any

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land for Govt. purposes. Thus most multinationals get a scope to enter into the rich forest areas of Koraput, Kondhmal and Kalahandi. They have started Bauxite, Aluminium mines without taking the consent of the indigenous people. In spite of many constitutional provisions, like article 46, the 5th and the 6th schedules of the constitutional laws to control the alienation of the Indigenous land by the non-indigenous people, the realities differ. Development projects, coffee plantation projects are on increase. People are displaced from their natural habitats. Hundreds of families are to be displaced from Kotagarh, Tumudibandh and Daringbadi areas from their ancestral lands for a purpose of national sanctuary.

One of the major cause of disintegration of Indigenous people is non recognition of the Indigenous spirituality as a religion. As a result of which all the hill tops and Indigenous land are encroached by constructing worship structures leading to a serious cultural subjugation. To divorce the indigenous people from their land is ethnocide and subsequent genocide. Development programmes are imposed on them without taking any account of the socio cultural diversity and local sustainable development system.

In conclusion I would like to draw the attention of the esteemed chair to impress upon our Govt. to restore the land and cultural rights of the indigenous peoples by taking the proper measures basing on the standards of Human Rights.

Thank you once again madam chair person.