

INDIAN COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL PEOPLES

28, Mahadev Road, New Delhi-110001

United Nations
Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights
Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations, sixth session, August 1-5 1988,
Geneva, Switzerland

E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/AC. 4/1988/1
24 May 1988
Provisional Agenda, Item 4

Presentation of Indian Council of the Indigenous & Tribal Peoples (ICITP)
by Prof. A.K. KISKU, (Hony) Secretary general ICITP

WGIP 88/SAS. IND/7

Madam Chairperson,

From our organisation in India, we congratulate you on your re-election and we pray the God for your health for the completion of the work which you have undertaken for the liberation of the Indigenous Peoples throughout the world.

We also thank the Trustees of the U.N. Voluntary Fund for making it possible for the Indigenous Peoples delegations to come to the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations session to ventilate their agony.

The news of the activities of the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations especially the standard setting activities concerning the rights of the Indigenous Peoples - together with the activities after ILO with regard to the revision of the ILO Convention No. 107, for the Protection and Integration of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, has reached our people in India. Having gone through centuries of oppression, suppression, exploitation, deprivation and eviction on a large scale from their traditional habitat and having been almost totally bewildered at the failures or even violation of the constitution of India and the protection or safeguards guaranteed therein during the last 40 years of our Independence, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in India are going through a regeneration of their spirit of freedom and awareness, with more activity and vigour in a collective and organised way for the fulfillment of their aspiration in the direction of their right to self-determination.

An unprecedented wave of popular movements is visible in the various parts of India, namely for Udayachal, by the Bodo tribes in Assam, Jharkhand in Central India, comprising West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya-Pradesh, Uttarkand in U.P. etc. etc. to cite only a few examples. Favourable support is being obtained through the Press, and there are more and more exposures through research and documentation.

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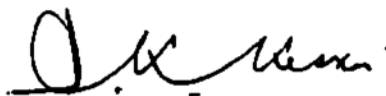
These factors, along with the widespread drought throughout almost the whole of India last year - or the loss of ecological balance because of destruction of forest have almost compelled the Government to take note of such a situation. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has himself travelled into the remotest parts of the country where our Indigenous and Tribal Peoples live and have seen their distress. But these popular movements of our People are basically on peaceful and democratic methods - or on Gandhian lines - through hartals or bunds, blocking of rails and roads, rallies and processions etc. Our people seldom adopt methods of violence, unless provoked. Such provocation generally comes from mobilisations of large contingent of armed police or very often by paramilitary forces to obstruct their rally or demonstrations. But our people are undaunted.

Further, the Government is also coming to realize the acuteness of the situation and adopting revised new Policy and Programmes especially to ameliorate the economic conditions. Lately, in the beginning of the year, after an All India Conference of the State Minister of Tribal Welfare, a declaration has been made by the Union Minister of Welfare, Government of India, to evolve a national policy for the protection from land alienation of the land of the Adivasis and for the restoration of land and rehabilitation of the displaced Adivasis for the Government projects.

A new look into Forest Policy is also being taken. The Government has already established a "Tri-Fed" (Tribal Federation) in order to offer marketing facilities for minor forest products of the Tribal People and in order to give protection from the money-lenders or the monopoly of the middlemen or the merchant guilds. The Tribal Advisory Committees, at various levels, are being revised, which were lying dormant or non-functional. These are hopeful signs to begin with. But these are mainly for the economic development of our People. A long way is still to go in the direction of recognition, respect and implementation for the social, educational, linguistic, cultural or ethnic identity of the various groups of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in India.

ICITP has started to play a role of channel of communication between our people at the grass-roots and the Government to campaign for the economic, social or political justice, and especially to orient the Government towards the philosophy or concepts of the Indigenous and Tribal People, for their distinct identity, and to orient and obtain the right to self-determination of the Indigenous Peoples. The demand for separate "homeland" within the constitutional framework of India has to be achieved, but through democratic and peaceful means. It gives us some hope when we find that the Government has been giving enough indications for negotiations across the table. Lately, the Government of India has played a positive role in the affairs of Gurkha land in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. We can see that the activities of the International Forums - like the Human Rights of the UN, the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the ILO - are creating an environment for favourable steps forward in the direction of Indigenous Peoples rights.

Thank you, Madam ChairPerson.



A. K. Kisku
(Hon.) Secretary-General
INDIAN COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS &
TRIBAL PEOPLES