



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

112 Moo 1 Tamboon Sanpranate Amphur Sansai, Chiang Mai 50210, Thailand

Tel: +66 53 343 539 Fax: +66 53343 540

Email: aippmail@aipnet.org Website: www.aippnet.org

Message from AIPP on COVID-19

On behalf of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, I want to express that our deepest thoughts are with everyone who is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and everyone working tirelessly to contain the disease.

Like others, the team in the AIPP Secretariat has also taken preventive measures by cancelling all our major missions and are working from home.

While this means inconveniences for the Secretariat, we are deeply concerned that most Indigenous communities are left behind with no access to health services, medical support and reliable information. This is particularly true for those located in geographically challenging areas where even emergency relief work had hardly reached (in the past) and where administrations are in shambles.

Such communities are at highest risk if they are contracted with COVID 19 or when food supply runs out. Therefore, governments must give priority to such areas as well in the preparation on the containment of the disease.

AIPP has received information from some Indigenous communities expressing anxiety regarding the development of COVID-19. In Philippines, as AIPP's member organization Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (Katribu) has reported that Aeta villages of Nabuclod and Mawacat in Floridablanca town in Pampanga is under lockdown after two Aetas became positive to COVID-19.

"We are deeply disturbed since indigenous peoples are one of the most vulnerable sectors in our society. If the virus spreads to other communities, they are not fully equipped to combat infectious diseases like COVID-19," writes Katribu on March 16.

Several Indigenous communities are taking their own initiatives with reference to COVID 19. Reports have come in that several Indigenous communities have revived their age-old rituals that were used when epidemics occur. They have declared self-quarantine and village lockdowns. For example, the Karen community in Thailand has performed a ritual known as kroh yee (village closure) even before the government took the initiative. According to Karen elders and scholars, the last performance of Kroh yee was 70 years ago when they were attacked by cholera.

"Such rituals performed by Indigenous communities are important because it is a declaration of collective commitment by the community to restore the balance of nature and to support one another in most crucial times", said Gam A. Shimray, Secretary

General of AIPP. He further added, “this is how the community draws their spiritual strength when they are confronted by the unknown.”

We praise the heroic sacrifices of the health workers. We praise the Indigenous communities who have taken the initiatives to collect food and make masks and are distributing to those in quarantine and those in need. We praise all those taking similar initiatives for living up to the universal humane values.

But we are also deeply concerned that misplaced perceptions and misinformation have also resulted in spurts of racism across the world and that Indigenous peoples are made a target too. We are particularly concerned about the number of reports of racial abuses in Asia, particularly in India where students and residents from Northeast India have been targeted.

We appeal to all to refrain from such untoward actions and get real with the issue so that we move forward in this challenging time. It is not the time to show our ugly side but our humane face that makes are worthy.

It is important for the Government and the society to recognise and uphold the humanitarian principles and invoke Constitutional principles and international human rights standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We appeal that brutalities are avoided by both the state and society at large and ensure that all preventive measures and actions are equitable, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and dignified, including relief packages, livelihood support, and financial assistance for informal sector workers, etc.

We also see the need for governments and relevant agencies to take the CSOs and community workers into confidence and work with them to be more effective.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gam A. Shimray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gam A. Shimray
Secretary General
26th March, 2020