



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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AIPP's Statement in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao

Thank you and greetings from AIPP.

I am sharing solidarity with the people of Mindanao, particularly to the Moro and Lumad Indigenous groups.

We are very keen to learn the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao. We have reached out to our partners and members in the Philippines namely, CPA, BAI and Katribu and got some information from them. So, AIPP is grateful for this opportunity to speak to you and express our solidarity. I am hopeful for some collaboration on COVID-19 emerging out of this initiative because this has serious implications for Indigenous Peoples.

In Asia, issues and trends seem to be quite similar in all the countries. For example, access to medical services and infrastructure are beyond the reach of most communities. There is no modern health system in most of our areas to tackle problems arising from diseases such as this pandemic. Our problems are not only about food security and issues of health. Returnee migrants across Asia is an example. Thailand is one of the hubs for Indigenous migrant labourers in the Mekong region and thousands of them are stranded. Now, they are beginning to return (across Asia) home, and it is posing serious health threat to communities who are in the interiors as there is no infrastructure and health systems to address the issues of COVID-19, including greater food shortages.

Our communities are receiving the returnees from urban areas and taking the risk as governments across Asia have terribly failed in their efforts of providing food relief, medical supplies, or assistance to the suffering migrant workers.

In some countries, the situation is more severe because of intensified racism against Indigenous Peoples that has come about with COVID-19.

However, rather than the failure of the governments in tackling this pandemic, the greater concern is the erosion of democratic fabric of several countries. Governments are talking advantage of COVID-19 and conducting military operation, targeting activists, red tagging activists and leaders, attacking freedom of speech and so on. With intensified militarization in some parts of Asia such as Bangladesh, Northeast India, Myanmar and Thailand, several people have been tortured and killed, and women have been raped.

In a lockdown situation, we are not able to go to the court or come out to protest, and governments are effectively using this situation to suit its own designs and vested interests. We are seeing that governments are rolling back protective laws and policies, weakening environmental safeguards,



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and diverting forestlands for large-scale development projects and agricultural purposes. AIPP is extremely concerned about these developments in Asia.

We are making efforts at our level, and we should be proud that Indigenous communities have responded very well to the global call to fight against the pandemic. However, we must find ways to continue our campaign and advocacy work against the authoritarian actions of the governments in Asia. We are trying our best to find new ways and methods of campaign and advocacy to adapt according to the context that should become part of the new normal. We must not give up! AIPP will do all that is possible from our end.

AIPP is on its way to prepare a regional report on the impact of COVID-19 from different countries. I hope our survey have reached you and we request your support to reach out to more people. In June, we are planning for an International Webinar targeting the mandate holders of the UN relating to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to start our global campaign based on ground situation, especially on human rights, militarization and health issues that will have long-term impact on Indigenous Peoples.

Apart from expressing solidarity, I would like to appeal for your cooperation and collaboration in this regard. AIPP is highly appreciative of your effort and initiative.

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity.

Thank you

In solidarity,

Gam A. Shimray
Secretary General
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact