



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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Statement on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, 9th August 2020

It was on the 9th of August 1982 that the first session of the Working Group on Indigenous Population was held. Subsequently, this same day (9th August) was declared as the **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples** on 23 December 1994.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate our Indigenous brothers and sisters for successfully observing and celebrating the **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**. It took hundreds of years of struggle to set international agenda on the issues of Indigenous Peoples. And we have managed to set the UN standard on the Rights of Indigenous (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) through rigorous negotiations. Yet, our battle is far from over.

States in Asia have failed to demonstrate their commitment despite the call by the UN to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Every year, the number of human rights defenders killed are highest amongst Indigenous Peoples. And during this pandemic, we have seen that several states in Asia have become even more repressive. COVID-19 has been used as a trojan horse to intimidate, arrest, plan false charges and conduct military campaign. It has also been used to weaken or suspend safeguards and rights regarding Indigenous Peoples. It will not be surprising if we see more attacks on Indigenous human rights defenders and plunder our resources in the name of economic recovery for the sake of national interests following the pandemic.

In observation of this symbolic day, AIPP organized a three days webinar series to assess and reflect about Indigenous Peoples' situation in Asia. **It was attended by more than a thousand participants from across the globe** which shows that we are growing in strength. I share with you the pertinent conclusions drawn from the webinars.

The rise in extreme right-wing populism and authoritarianism in the region has severely curbed the civic space. As a result, the ability of CSOs to use political institutions to resolve conflicts and to access justice have become ineffective. Therefore, **deepening of democracy that accounts for Indigenous Peoples' conception of self-government** has become more urgent than before.

UNDRIP encapsulates self-determination as an essential condition for groups of individuals whose lives are tightly integrated to determine for themselves how their collective life develops. This requires not only collective decision making, but also the ability to make that decision making effective – a point about practically managing interdependence. This implies that every member in the community is counted, especially the women who have been partially denied of their rights, including decision making. But we are proud that women's leadership is growing and by being inclusive, Indigenous Peoples' movement will be strengthened by many folds. Therefore, **“Indigenous women's power is Indigenous Peoples' power.”**

Further, **it is from our lands and territories that our knowledge and freedom sprang from**. The continuity of our identity, spirituality and survival depend on it. Therefore, **it is the basis of our capacity to be agents of change** to the local and global crisis such as climate change, biodiversity loss and food and nutrition problems.



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Finally, it is Indigenous wisdom that it is **only through the unity of the past, present and future that we can make meaning in our life**. It means that we must have stories to tell so that the youth and future generations remain united with the past. So that they take on leadership role gracefully and become the backbone of our society and march into the future. We heard from the youth not only of their challenges but that they are also beginning to find their place in the Indigenous movement. This gives hope and confidence because **the youth represents the resiliency of our communities and movements**.

Today, on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, **AIPP congratulates the leadership of our women, youth, and persons with disabilities**. They have given us new hope and strength!

On this day, we also **call on our ancestors for blessings, wisdom, love, and strength**. Long live to our struggle for peace and justice!

Gam A. Shimray
Secretary General,
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact