



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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“Leaving no one behind: Indigenous Peoples and the call for a new social contract”

*Statement on the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples,
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The COVID-19 pandemic and rapid shrinking of democratic space in Asia have exposed the underlying deep fractures in human society. The fragility of our world and the risks we have ignored for decades have been laid bare. It is for us to realize the urgent need to address the pre-existing inequalities, gaps in social protection, the climate crisis and the meaning crisis that has resulted from democratic deficit.

The COVID 19 crisis has hit some social groups significantly harder than others. [A report](#) by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [and a report](#) by Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples suggest that, ‘Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable to the direct (health) and indirect (economic, food security) effects of COVID-19, with generally higher infection and death rates than the overall non-Indigenous populations. The impact on Indigenous women and girls, and Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities is even more severe.’

The Chief of the United Nations, António Guterres also urged for collective efforts in [“Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era”](#).

The need for re-examining our mode of being in our world had been raised, especially by Indigenous Peoples, since the start of the pandemic. Indigenous Peoples for a long time have been exposing the risks we are imposing on our planet, and advocating for solutions based on pluralism that includes Indigenous ways of living and relationship with the land.

However, the Indigenous Peoples have always been in troubled relationship with the state and historically have been dispossessed of control over their lands and territories, including plundering of their resources, militarization and occupation to facilitate state agenda.

During this pandemic too, states have been using the state of emergency as a cover to further repress civil liberties, promulgate detrimental laws and solutions, intensify development aggression, and attacks on our defenders, communities and organisations who are relentlessly fighting to defend their lands, territories and resources and self-determination. Known Indigenous Peoples’ leaders and IPHRDs have been specifically targeted and are criminalized, harassed, imprisoned, and killed.

Political conflicts and gross violation of human rights have intensified in several countries, the recent being the military coup in Myanmar. Rather than create equitable solutions towards achieving inclusive and transformative change, we are observing the continuation of short-sighted environmental destruction and the alienation of those who have the ability to create territorial peace and environmental stability.

Most Asian governments have adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the core purpose of which is to initiate reforms and usher in peace and justice. Many reforms have been initiated within the UN system in human rights standard setting and in developing mechanisms in addressing our rights and to transform conflicts across the world.



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However, nothing much has changed in the respective member states of the UN within which Indigenous Peoples are encapsulated and we continue to live on the margins of the states. Further, the people are not able to use political institutions and civic space to negotiate pressing political issues and resolve conflicts. Rule of law is getting derailed, and political agreements are not implemented or are subverted. Agreements are worth nothing if they cannot be implemented or be honored and accepting this principle is a precondition of making meaningful agreements. This is the principle of natural law.

We are in a meaning crisis and our struggle for self-determination is in part a response to this meaning crisis. As we struggle, we are also participating in meaning making and peace making with the global society. Equality and governance, equitable, just and sustainable societies are important perspectives, and it is important for us, Indigenous Peoples and other societies, to articulate what this means. This meaning making must inform the 'new social contract' between Governments, Indigenous Peoples, civil society, and business in re-structuring politics, society and economy in the creation of a more just and peaceful world.

There are some fundamental aspects that we must not fail to consider:

- Firstly, there is a need to embrace the principle of making meaningful agreements without which we will fall deeper into the abyss of chaos.
- Secondly, a new social contract must explore new foundations of duties and responsibilities beyond the present. Because our consciousness of life and time encompasses the past, present and future. Our ancestral wisdom guides us and we draw our strength from our children. Our future is also tied to the sustainability of the planet, so Indigenous Peoples say that we are an interrelated community with the environment. Therefore, we need an understanding of a new foundation of social contract that informs our duties and responsibilities towards our ancestors, the environment, and the future to recover our wholistic mode of being and governance.
- Thirdly, build better knowledge on the understanding and nurturing of individual and collective agency for redefining democratic civic space that encompasses pluralism and self-determination of peoples.

We have embarked upon an important journey of remembering and reconstituting our mode of being! There is a deep unexplainable longing in this journey where many want to give their life to resolve it forever.

Indigenous brothers and sisters, your audacity awakens the spirit of this journey. Your resilience and your persistent journey in pursuit of self-determination that respects your lands and territories, institutions, Indigenous knowledge and systems rooted in the symbiotic relationship and respect for nature, inspires us every day.

So, continue to share your struggles and stories of courage for peace, justice and reconciliation!

Gam A. Shimray

Secretary General

Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact