

Declaration of Indigenous Peoples of North-East India

“In Unity with our Ancestors, for the Rights of our Children”

9th August, Dimapur, Nagaland

We stand here today because of our ancestors who have walked before us, and we hold our responsibilities to those who will follow us as sacred, and we recognize and thank the Indigenous People on whose land we meet today. We have withstood untold sufferings from pre-colonial to the postcolonial era and have survived even near annihilation of our homelands. We have rose time and again and we stand proud refusing to perish because of the undaunting spirit of freedom that we have inherited from our ancestors.

We commemorate the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, as a common symbolic victory and in acknowledging our appreciation towards States and international community in recognizing the equal importance of extending the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action¹, and affirming the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

We are convinced that the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the States and Indigenous Peoples and with all societies, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith. Thereby, we the members of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP): Indigenous Women’s Forum of North-East India (IWFNEI), Naga People’s Movement for Human Right (NPMHR), Karbi Human Rights Watch, Borok Indigenous/Tribal Peoples Development Center (BITPDC) and Zo Indigenous Forum solemnly proclaims the Declaration of Indigenous Peoples of North-East India to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect:

1. That our struggles to restore our right to self-determination through self-governance is a social necessity and for the free determination of our political status and pursuance of our economic, social and cultural development. We stress that our struggle for self-determination is for democratization that encompasses our communitarian forms of democratic governance, indigenous worldview and universal human rights principles.
2. That our customary institutions, governance systems and customary laws, which are firmly rooted in our worldview and ethos underpinned by the values of justice, fairness, and inclusiveness, have been greatly weakened by the imposition of State structures and alien legal systems, and the influence of foreign cultures.
3. That the continuity of our relationship with our lands, territories, and resources, and the preservation of our identity through our own language, religion and customs is continually under threat by means such as militarization, unjust laws, unsustainable development programs, displacement, cultural domination, and imposition of alien education systems.
4. That despite the heroic struggles and contribution of indigenous women against militarization, in peace making, and in the preservation and propagation of indigenous societies, inroads that have been made in empowering and advancing the rights of indigenous women have not been adequate and there continue to

¹ A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III

be significant challenges in securing their equal treatment, particularly in land rights, and decision-making processes within our political spheres.

5. That the challenges posed by the loss of biodiversity and unprecedented rate of climate change is spurring erratic widespread events spanning borders that potentially threatens peoples' lives, welfare and world peace. We, as peoples with intimate symbiotic relationship and directly dependent on environment, our survival is at grave risk. The crisis wrought by biodiversity loss and climate change implicates moral and political responsibility for all States and peoples to come together to ignite transformation from local to global levels.
6. That despite the headway and opportunities provided with the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we are concerned that not much progress has been made in achieving the rights enshrined in it and that governments in India are reluctant to embrace it.

Having committed ourselves to the above, and affirming that all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust, we call on the Government of India:

1. To acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples in the country have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their conquest, colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to self-governance and self-determined development in accordance with their own needs and in service to the larger society as well.
2. To undertake prompt review of the peace accords, agreements and other arrangements made with Indigenous Peoples of North-East India for rectifying its inherent weaknesses and defects to comply with the minimum international standard as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other human rights instruments. Such peace accords, agreements and arrangements include, inter alia, with the Boroks of Tripura, the Karbis and other Indigenous Peoples of Assam; the Indigenous Peoples of Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh.
3. To evoke its commitment to the Indo-Naga peace process that has dragged on for 25 years without solutions at sight. It has lost its momentum and a break down will be detrimental to the peace in the region and the potentiality of boosting a meaningful democratization process in the region towards a transformative resolution of political conflicts will be derailed. The Government of India must refresh its memory and learn the lesson that the current peace talk is the result of the hard efforts of committed leaders and intellectuals from both sides which was brokered 25 years ago after more than five decades of bloody armed conflicts with heavy casualties on both sides.
4. To recognize the contribution of demilitarization of the lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples to peace, economic and social progress and sustainable development, understanding and friendly relations among different communities and the larger society of the country and the world; and urgently repeal all extra constitutional laws, especially the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, and initiate withdrawal of its armed forces from the region.