

Agenda Item 3

Discussion on the theme: Enhancing Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination in the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: emphasizing the voices of Indigenous youth

Conference Room 4 | Tuesday 16 April 2024

Joint statement by Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Delivered by Joe Baxter on behalf of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Respected Chair and Distinguished Delegates,

This statement is made on behalf of the Asia Caucus. We would like to raise two principal issues that point to the root causes of grave human rights violations, land dispossessions and indiscriminate looting of resources in our territories.

The first principal relates to self-determination conflicts. The UN Charter of 1945 has recognized self-determination and self-governance of all peoples as the main means for achieving decolonisation to facilitate justice and peace, yet it remains far from being realized for Indigenous Peoples. The Charter seeks to remove the evils of colonialism involving political suppression, economic domination, and social and cultural subjugation. However, despite the adoption of UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, we are dismayed that much of the commitments made by the UN e.g., the System-wide Action Plan of October 2015 aimed at ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the UNDRIP remains largely unimplemented.

The lack of clear institutional arrangement at the UN for facilitating the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-government at the UN for Indigenous Peoples, and the lack of a democratic space to negotiate peace arrangements contributes greatly to major human rights violations. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), about 8,000 civilians have been killed since the coup in Myanmar; and approximately 2.3 million people¹ have been displaced.

The second principal cause of human rights violations are the onslaughts on civil liberties that has severely curbed public space for the freedom of expression, association and access to justice. According to Global Witness, in 2022, 36% of defenders killed around the world were Indigenous persons. Thirty-six of the concerned killings took place in Asia with 11 in the Philippines. In Manipur, India, several hundreds have lost their lives due to communal violence and no effective State intervention since May 2023.

The prevailing situation has led many of our Indigenous Peoples, especially the youths, to flee or migrate. Further, our youths have been forced into following national-curricula education that do not include our indigenous histories, knowledges and wisdom. The absence of peace, rampant violation of human rights, dispossessions and destruction of our distinct heritage and languages are seriously undermining the future generations.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-three-years-devastating-under-reported-war>

It is pertinent that the UN system takes serious note of the following recommendations and act with urgency:

1. The Secretary-General and other high-level UN officials should use their good offices to encourage states to incorporate the provisions of the UNDRIP in national laws and policies and take measures to effectively implement the System-wide Action Plan of the UN for the implementation of the UNDRIP
2. Prioritize supporting national partners in reform and implementation of legal frameworks, policies, strategies and plans that further the UNDRIP process, through joint programming and other initiatives.
3. For the UNPFII to explore the potential for the Security Council to address conflicts in indigenous territories under the peace and security agenda with the full and effective participation of indigenous women and youth in peace processes
4. For the UNPFII to engage with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to have an active role in monitoring the implementation of peace accords involving Indigenous Peoples; and
5. For the UN Agencies, funds and programmes to establish a regional inter-agency working group on indigenous issues in Asia to enable a coherent regional approach, as has been done in Latin America and Africa.

Thank you, Chair.