

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.”

Date: April 16, 2024

A joint Statement by Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association and Cambodia Indigenous People Alliance to 23rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Madam Chairperson,

Cambodia is composed of 24 indigenous people’s groups in 15 provinces and equal to 1.11% out of the total 17 million population. We are living depending on natural recourses, rotational farming, and small-scale cash crops.

Over the last thirty years, the lands and territories of Cambodia’s Indigenous Peoples have faced threats from large-scale logging, economic land concessions for the development of industrial plantations, mining, fortress conservation, large-scale in-migration of non-indigenous populations, hydropower development, highway construction, among others, resulting in large-scale loss of our lands and fragmentation of our territories.

Our communities have been displaced and we are now surrounded by non-indigenous people. Our social systems and systems of local administration have been replaced. Political control has been imposed on us. Materialist non-indigenous ways of life are spreading. Our right to self-determination has been thoroughly undermined.

It has resulted in increased landlessness, poverty, and drug use among indigenous peoples. Further, the imposition of the national language has resulted in large-scale loss of the ability to speak our languages.

The Cambodian legal system has enabled these developments. Cambodia is one of the few countries in Asia to recognize Indigenous People in law, but it does not recognize Indigenous Peoples or our collective rights as peoples and to our lands, territories, and resources. Environmental Code have taken out the term of Indigenous Peoples from the law and replaced with the term of Local Community. These lead to a more marginalized and affected to the community who are already affected by the current development trend in practicing our traditional livelihood practice on traditional rotational farming and the accessing to the Non- Timber Forest product and the natural resources.

The 2001 Land Law allows communal land titling of the lands of individual communities, but it does not allow for collective titling of our lands and territories. This has resulted in

fragmentation of our territories, conflict within the communities and made easy for land grabbing and manipulation by governments and outsiders. The land titling process is working against our interests and is not leading to the protection and promotion of our well-being.

Cambodian law does not recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect and promote our languages, cultures, and administrative and social systems. Our peoples do not have a voice in government because our right to participation in decision making and FPIC on matters affecting us is not guaranteed nor encouraged.

We seek recognition of our rights to our territories and of our right to self determination in accordance with UNDRIP. We also seek recognition and support of our indigenous youth in rebuilding our communities and leading our people in exercising our right to self determination.

We, the indigenous communities draw our strength from our youth and depend on them for sustenance and propagating our way of life. They are also the future leaders and guardians of our communities and heritage. Our culture and knowledge systems are eroding fast because school systems and programmed of the government do not recognize our histories and worldviews. The policies and programs of the government of Cambodia should, instead, protect and promote our communities and youth in accordance with our way of life so that they become good leaders and custodians of our identity in the future. Our youth are losing their pride and good sense of their identity, but they have the ability to contribute in rebuilding our societies given opportunity.

Yet currently government, donors, and international organizations pay insufficient attention to the serious problems of our youth.

We call for:

- UN agencies to support indigenous youth education in Cambodia, both within the government system and indigenous systems, through inter-cultural education system that effectively promote indigenous histories, knowledge system and worldview.
- The government of Cambodia and UN Agencies must make provisions for and support indigenous youth's participation in decision-making in developmental programmed and processes at all levels.
- Government encourage and increase the number of the indigenous youth leaders into the leadership structure at all levels of the government structure as well community structure and open space for the self-determination on our land and territory.
- UN Agencies and donors to fund initiatives by indigenous youth in the development that reflected the needs by them as well as to rebuild the indigenous economic systems and youth entrepreneurship.

- The Cambodian government should have included indigenous language classes in the formal education curriculum at all indigenous areas and communities from kindergarten to grade 12 and as well as the program at the higher education.
- Donors, Partners, and Government should take serious action to stop the drugs trafficking at the indigenous people's communities effectively.