

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

Joint Statement by Asia Indigenous Youth Caucus to 23rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Honorable Chair and distinguished delegates, jojolappa and Indigenous greetings!

We, the Asia Indigenous Youth Delegates, stand before you with a joint statement on agenda item no. 3, i.e., “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.”

Our world today faces a critical phase where Indigenous communities continue to grapple with systemic challenges that undermine their right to self-determination. Failing to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination enshrined in UNDRIP is akin to perpetuating modern-day slavery, and this neglect is evident in the actions of those who continue to assert colonial control over Indigenous lands and communities. Historical injustices, land dispossession, cultural marginalization, and economic disparities persist, creating barriers that hinder the full realization of Indigenous peoples' inherent rights. This reality is especially poignant for Indigenous youth, who bear the dual burden of navigating these complex issues while striving to preserve their cultural heritage and identity.

From an early age, indigenous youth encounter intergenerational trauma and confront the harsh reality of being alienated from their ancestral lands as a result of forced relocation. Issues such as the absence of inclusive, culturally appropriate education in their mother tongue, discrimination in employment, trafficking, and exploitation of indigenous girls and women continue to contribute to significant human rights violations against Indigenous youth.

Despite the formidable challenges before us, Indigenous youth across Asia stand united in our determination to safeguard our rights, reclaim our narratives, and shape our collective future. We refuse to be silent observers of our own history; instead, we choose to be active agents of change, catalysts for progress, and champions of justice. As a result, we, as Indigenous youth, are not in flight mode but in fight mode, positioned as frontline advocates to reclaim stolen lands and assert our rights to self-determination.

To bridge this gap, our ongoing advocacy takes various forms, from grassroots mobilization and community empowerment initiatives to policy engagement and intergenerational dialogue. For instance, cultural revitalization in Nepal and the homecoming movement in Indonesia and Bangladesh involve youth calling their colleagues from the cities to return to their communities to help defend, protect, and manage their territories.

In light of the above, we put forward three key recommendations to advance Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and amplify the voices of Indigenous youth:

1. Ensure inclusive decision-making processes and the meaningful participation of indigenous youth in high level discussion and decision making bodies. This entails creating environments where Indigenous youth can freely express their perspectives and contribute their insights.
2. We urge the UN and member states to prioritize and support initiatives that ensure the recognition and protection of Indigenous land rights. This includes strengthening legal frameworks that guarantee Indigenous communities' ownership and control over their ancestral lands, free from encroachment and exploitation.
3. The UN should encourage member states to formally acknowledge and legally recognize the self-governance systems of Indigenous Peoples. These systems hold historical precedence that predates existing governance structures, underscoring the significance of states upholding and respecting these historical governance systems.

Thank You!