

Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus Statement on Development with Culture and Identity

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Thank you for this opportunity to present to the Permanent Forum the major points reached by the Asia Indigenous Peoples' caucus on the theme development with culture and identity during its preparatory meeting held last March 1-3, 2010 in Baguio City, Philippines. We will be submitting a complete report of this preparatory meeting as well as the results of a series of conferences on indigenous development in Asia.

Development with culture and identity is a practice that indigenous peoples in Asia have long upheld and demanded. For us, development with identity means that, throughout the development process, indigenous peoples' rights to land, territories and self-determination are recognized, including our right to free prior informed consent for any development project affecting us. This also means that the development should address the particular needs and problems of indigenous peoples and that indigenous perspectives are considered in the formulation of government development strategies.

Sadly, in most countries of Asia, development comes at a price for indigenous peoples. Our experience with development is in the form of logging, plantations, dams, tourism, mining projects, land conversion and the declaration of national parks and protected areas that have displaced us from our ancestral lands, destroyed our traditional livelihoods, commercialized our cultures, sold our lands to capitalist developers, eroded our indigenous values and cultures, degraded our biodiversity, and brought on militarization, criminalization and political repression of our indigenous leaders and organizations.

At the same time basic social services we direly need for our genuine development such as education and health are at levels way below national standards and that of the general non-indigenous population. This is a result of a long history of discrimination, marginalization and neglect by our governments. Meanwhile, viable traditional practices and indigenous cultures are not recognized, nor do they receive the support they deserve for their protection and perpetuation for future generations. Migration from rural to urban areas and population transfer of non-indigenous people to indigenous communities contribute to the weakening and disintegration of our traditional governance systems, culture and community solidarity. It also leads often to the theft of our lands.

We assert that development with identity should uphold the positive indigenous values of sustainability, collectivity, spirituality, subsistence, respect for customary law, harmony with nature and mutual support. These core values of indigenous peoples are necessary if we are to overcome the urgent threats of the global economic crisis and climate change that we all face today.

We now forward the following concrete recommendations for consideration by the Permanent Forum, indigenous peoples, States, UN agencies and international financial institutions:

1. Strengthen respect for indigenous perspectives and core values and integrate these into prevailing development models and strategies. Enhance and promote sustainable indigenous livelihoods. Support community-driven development initiatives, technology and innovations of indigenous peoples.

2. Strengthen the revival, documentation and transmission to younger generations of indigenous culture, knowledge and practices. Support institutions and universities working for the preservation and transmission of the culture and traditions of indigenous peoples. Conduct cultural exchange with and among indigenous communities, within and outside their countries of origin, in order to strengthen solidarity and learning among various indigenous groups.
3. Recognize and implement the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous communities in development and ensure their effective participation in all development projects affecting them. Develop mechanisms for efficient and credible documentation and monitoring of indigenous peoples' experiences with FPIC in order to prevent further violations of FPIC processes. The UNDP should take a lead in ensuring that it follows the principle of FPIC in its own projects and working with governments to develop procedures for implementing FPIC. And, for the UNPFII to take up FPIC as the theme of its next session.
4. Document case studies of good practices of development with identity, as well as violations committed against indigenous peoples in the name of development. Establish a strong mechanism where indigenous peoples can complain and seek justice for the violation of their rights, especially in situations where indigenous peoples' rights have been integrated into the policies of the state, UN agencies and intergovernmental bodies.
5. Strengthen the use of multi-media such as community radio and video for community education on development with identity and on the rights and concerns of Indigenous peoples.
6. Review laws and policies on development to be consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the overall development framework for indigenous peoples. Recognize customary rights of indigenous peoples, especially on land, territories and resources.
7. Stop destructive mining operations, dams, logging concessions and biofuel and other plantations, mega-agricultural projects, especially palm oil plantations, with specific attention to the disproportionate impacts on indigenous women and children. Provide restitution and just compensation to indigenous peoples affected by development aggression and recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples to own and manage our lands, territories and natural resources.
8. Stop political repression and militarization of indigenous communities as these violate their rights and threaten the security, livelihoods, and development with identity of indigenous peoples.
9. Ensure that any climate change-related projects on the lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples are conducted according to the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent and Self-Determination.
10. Take urgent steps to end ethnocide of indigenous peoples, such as ethnocide of the Suy people of Cambodia, the peoples of Jarkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh in India, the Khow and Kalash peoples of Chitral, Pakistan and others resulting from "modern development" and migration of non-indigenous peoples into their territories.

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