

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ASIA

Common Experiences and Issues

identified by the participants at the Workshop on the Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia
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We are the indigenous peoples of Asia. We have lived in our territories alongside other peoples who in the course of history have come to dominate us. Our history has been questioned and our identity as indigenous peoples has been denied. As a result, our land, territories and resources have also been appropriated or made vulnerable.

We, the indigenous peoples of Asia, draw our unity and solidarity from experiences and issues that we have in common. We have jointly identified these as follows:

History and Identity

- We identify ourselves as indigenous peoples and see ourselves as being different from others.
- We have our distinct lifestyles, languages, cultures, customs and community-centric, non-centralized social and political institutions, which we inherited from our ancestors, and which we want to transmit to our future generations.
- We have a strong collective identity which is rooted in our history and territories, which are the foundation of our self-respect, dignity, and freedom, and which emphasizes collective rights over those of the individual.
- We are referred to by governments and outsiders by various terms like tribals, hill tribes, highland people, ethnic minorities, indigenous ethnic minorities, aboriginal people etc.
- We are today colonized and dominated by others. We have been politically, culturally, and economically marginalized and pushed into a subordinate position, especially in the wake of the formation of nation states and globalization.
- We have experienced a history of injustice, with our individual human and collective rights and fundamental freedoms being denied, and our people and resources continually exploited.
- We are looked down upon by the dominant population, who misrepresents and distorts our way of life, and insists that we assimilate into their culture. As a result, some of our cultures

and languages have disappeared and many have become endangered. Many of us are made to feel ashamed of our indigenous identity and try to assimilate to avoid stigma.

- Likewise, our political and justice systems have not been recognized and alien systems have been imposed on us that destroy our decision-making institutions and holistic indigenous systems and at the same time exclude us from the dominant political system.
- Most importantly, our right to self-determination has been denied. Yet we are conscious of our resilience and our dynamic adaptability that have allowed our societies to persist and we are determined to maintain our identity and regain control over our lives, land and destiny.

Land, Territories and Resources

- We have a unique historical collective connection with, and ownership of, a territory over which we maintain complex and diverse customary systems of land and resource use
- We have lived in our territories prior to the arrival of other, now dominant people, and before the formation of modern nation states. Some of us however may reside in new lands as a result of forced displacement or other circumstances.
- Our livelihoods strongly depend on natural resources and as such we have a close spiritual relationship with, and rich traditional knowledge of, our environment
- Our indigenous systems and practices are not static but flexible and dynamic; and our land and resource use systems show a high degree of adaptivity.
- We are experiencing continuing non-recognition of our rights over territory and of our customary land ownership and use systems leading to dispossession and exploitation of our land and resources.
- The imposition of land and forest laws leads to loss of our traditional lands to state forests, protected areas, commercial plantations and other uses outside our control.
- As a result, we are experiencing increasing economic marginalization and poverty.

These common experiences we share not only among ourselves but with all indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world. And as for all indigenous peoples, our situations and our problems will not be solved unless we are first recognized as indigenous peoples and thus able to regain control over our lives, land and destiny.