

Working Group on Indigenous Population Twenty-Fourth Session, 31st July-4th August 2006, Geneva.

Statement of Dr Dhuni Soren, World Adibasi Council (WAC)

4. (b) Principle theme: Utilisation of Indigenous Peoples' lands by non-indigenous authorities, groups or individuals for military purposes.

Mr. Chair person, delegates, ladies and gentlemen. Please accept my very humble greetings for the day. I wish to bring to your kind attention to some of the important points regarding utilisation of Indigenous Peoples' lands for military purposes and its effect on the cultural, spiritual, mental and physical well being of indigenous peoples and their natural habitat. The majority of military establishments of countries are located at far flung hilly and mountainous areas away from the well developed and populated areas.

1. These areas are the natural habitat of the Indigenous Peoples of the world and they depend on these lands for their livelihood.
2. They are culturally, spiritually and historically linked with the environment and natural resources of these areas. They live, work, worship, enjoy their lives and die on these lands.

There is abundant and growing evidence of the damage to human health and the environment caused by military munitions and ranges. They pose danger at each step of their life cycle.

Production and testing sites, firing ranges and disposal sites contaminate the environment and threaten the public health and natural habitat.

I would like to give you some examples of these in different parts of the world;

1. The army have trained in the Makua Valley of Hawaii since before world war two and appropriated the entire Valley when the war broke out evicting families and damaging over 40 endangered species including one found nowhere else in the world. The training and disposal operations have caused fires destroying homes, the local churches and indigenous Hawaiian temples, contaminating soil and groundwater and denying the community access to their sacred lands.

2. Eagle River Flats Impact Area in Alaska has been used since 1949 affecting the natural habitat of rare birds and the health of the people living there.

3. Netarhat Firing Range in Jharkhand, India has been used since British Raj days and is still used displacing the poor tribal people without adequate compensation and rehabilitation.

- 4 Similarly there are many other sites in the rest of the world affecting the livelihood and wellbeing of indigenous people. Measures recommended;

1. All nations to recognise and respect the indigenous people, their culture, language and the way of life,

2. Restoration and reparation of their lost ancestral lands.
3. Proper rehabilitation and adequate compensation in similar natural habitat, where restoration is not possible.
4. To establish conflict arbitration committees in all states
5. The international institutions should monitor and supervise military activities and use of indigenous peoples' lands.

I thank you Chair person, ladies, gentlemen and fellow delegates for you kind attention.

THANK YOU