

**Statement by South Asia Indigenous Women Forum, SAIWF  
4<sup>th</sup> Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,  
United Nations Headquarter, New York,  
May 16<sup>th</sup> till 27th, 2005**

**Item 3 (a)**

**Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals: "Eradicate extreme  
poverty and hunger".**

*Presented by Stella Tamang*

Madam Chair, members of the Permanent Forum, distinguished delegates and dear indigenous brothers and sisters,

In Nepal, when we meet each other in our villages, we greet each other by asking question. How are you? Have you eaten? Good health and food is very important.

Madam Chair, if we ask the indigenous people on earth these two questions, the answer would be astounding and for sure more than 40% of our peoples are starving and are not feeling well and it is not because of natural phenomenon but due to human error, the denial of their rights and depriving them of their resources. The situation is getting worse and instead good food and good medical services for good health, we are urgently in need of pure water to drink and fresh air to breathe for our children.

Many world conferences, conventions and summits have taken place, but the situation of majority of indigenous people remained unchanged. For us, millennium development goals are not the question of development but it is the question of survival of our peoples.

We are very aware of the negative impact of the present development pattern has on our peoples and have been saying that we do have our own concepts and practices of development based on our Cosmo visions and knowledge but unfortunately it has been rejected and refused by governments who think western modernization is the only way to go.

Madam Chair, I come from a community where our staple food is potatoes. Now with the modern development model, we have been made to feel that eating potatoes is degrading and that we must eat rice.

We have been farming from generation to generation and now we have been told that our farming system is primitive. Our traditional seeds are rejected and are forced to rely on imported seeds. Same is with the fertilizers. The introduction of Genetically Used Restricted Technology (GURT) is pushing the indigenous peoples into the ditch of poverty.

For us therefore, millennium development goals should mean,

- Redefining poverty,
- Redefining and redesigning development,
- Re-delegating responsibilities.
- Reallocation and redistribution of resources,
- Ensuring of our rights: our basic rights to lands and resources, language and culture, our identity and our right to self determination.

Denying and depriving of our rights mean destroying of biodiversity, damaging of environment and denying of development and promoting of poverty rather than eradicating poverty and hunger.

Armed conflicts taking place in the indigenous territories in many parts of South Asia are affecting adversely our economic activities, health services and education for our children. Forced displacement of indigenous peoples from our ancestral lands is a major cause of impoverishment and threatens our very survival as indigenous peoples.

The worst victim of armed conflicts as always is the women and children. Indigenous women and children are the most seriously harmed. Most of the households are now becoming women headed household which add to the already burdened women. The internal migration due to armed conflict is contributing to the already poor family.

UN Bodies and Agencies still lack awareness about Indigenous Issues and the wonderful policies and programs developed by the few UN Bodies and Agencies lack effective implementation.

Indigenous culture is based on sharing and not selling. Indigenous peoples' production and economic systems which is based on sustainable agriculture and sustainable consumption and production systems are seen as inefficient. The Neoliberal economic prescriptions of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO is another problem indigenous peoples are going through.

We are concerned that MDGs should not be contributing to the feminization and indigenization of poverty. Millennium Development Goals should definitely be a blessing for indigenous peoples but it would happen only if indigenous peoples, including indigenous women too **own and control** all the decision making processes. Unfortunately, we are invisible in the MDGs and we have been witnessing that preparation of "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper" excluded indigenous peoples and are not consulted.

South Asia Indigenous Women Forum strongly supports the recommendations of the Indigenous Women Caucus, Indigenous Caucus and the Asian Preparatory Meeting and would like to present the following recommendations for Permanent Forum:

1. Urge all Governments to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights as distinct peoples,
2. Ensure participation of indigenous peoples, including women in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) documents and national reporting of MDGs,
3. Ensure the development of gender sensitive mechanisms and processes for the active and meaningful participation and role of indigenous communities including indigenous women,
4. Respect their right to have access and control of natural resources,
5. Recognize the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples including indigenous women before any development project and policy which directly affect them,
6. Call for the Permanent Forum to provide indigenous peoples the evaluation of compliance with the recommendations of the first three sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
7. Protect and promote indigenous development concept and sustainable livelihoods based on indigenous values and Cosmo- visions,
8. Recommend that UN agencies, governments and international funding agencies allocate sufficient fund for the capacity building for the indigenous peoples' including indigenous women for the effective contribution in poverty reduction and elimination of hunger.

Thank you Madam Chair.