

INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

13th August, 2008

A one day Regional Seminar on The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Indigenous Peoples of North East India" was organized by Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, North East Zone (ICITP-NEZ) and its 52 member organizations supported by allies on 9th August 2008, at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Panjabari, Guwahati-37, Assam in India from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. The Seminar provided a first ever public and open platform for the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the region to mark and celebrate the 9th August – the International Day of the World's Indigenous People collectively for the first time in the region.

Amid cultural extravaganza, the Seminar was attended by over 300 delegates representing more than 20 different tribes of the North East which includes- Tangkul Nagas, Sema Nagas, Konyak Nagas, Boros, Kukis, Khasis, Dimasas, Rabhas, Deoris, Jayantias or Pnars, Karbis, Boroks (Tripuris), Meeteis, Khamis, Adis, Nishis, Hmars, Sonowal Kocharis and Koch-Rajbongshis. The inaugural function was graced by Shri Shivcharan Mathur, the Governor of Assam as the Chief Guest and Chaired by Mrs. Jarjum Ete, Former Chairperson, State Commission of Women, Member of Central Advisory Committee, Ministry of Pachayati Raj, Governing member Board, Rashtriya Mahila Koch, Ministry of WCD, Government of India and President of IWRC, Arunachal Pradesh. Mr. Dilip Nunisa, Chairman, DHD and Dr. Motilal Nunisa, participated as the guest of honour in the inaugural function.



Shri Shiv Charan Mathur, the Governor of Assam, who was welcomed and facilitated with traditional dance and gifts, released the translated Boro version of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (DRIP) to mark and to aware the International Day of the World's Indigenous People and greeted the Indigenous Peoples of the region. It is to be mentioned here that the cost of translation of DRIP was financially supported jointly by Mr. John Boroyary, Programme Officer, UNDP, New Delhi; Mr. Kamal Narzary, MLA, Bijni, Assam; Dr. Geeta Basumatary, Chairperson, APSC, Guwahati, Assam; Mrs. Rahila Brahma, Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar, Assam and Mr. D. Basumatary, Kokrajhar and translated jointly by Mr. Satyanath Basumatary, Mr. Ananda Basumatary and Mr. Nathanael Basumatary. Shri Mathur assured his commitment to ensure that the interest of the Indigenous Peoples would be protected as per the constitution of the country.

Mr. Jebra Ram Muchahary, the President of Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples North East Zone (ICITP-NEZ) in his key note address elaborated about the background of the Indigenous Peoples' movement beginning from 1984 under the aegis of United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) and United Nations Working Group on Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNWGDD) leading to the final adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 13th September 2007 by the 61st General Assembly. Citing examples of ongoing adverse impact due to massive illegal influx of **Bangladeshis** in to the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples land and territories, he cautioned the Indigenous Peoples of the North East of further threat of becoming minority in their own domains and to remain united and alert in safeguarding their land, territories, forest, culture, tradition from all possible threats to their existence. He also appealed the Government of India to fully implement the spirits of the 46 articles enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for the welfare of the 100 millions Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of India.

Following 13 panelists spoke during the seminar moderated by Mr. B. B. Hagjer, the Commissioner of Forest, Assam:

Naga People	: Mr. S.Varah, Member, Peace Monitoring Group, NSCN (IM), Nagaland
Boro People	: Mr. Motindra Daimary, President, Manas Agrang Society, BTC, Assam
Kuki People	: Mr. K Chongloi, Kuki People's representative, Kangpokpi, Manipur
Rabha People	: Mr. Sabda Ram Rabha, General Secretary, ICITP-NEZ, Guwahati, Assam
Borok People	: Mr. Lowerence Hrangkaw, Borok People's representative, Agartala, Tripura
Dimasa People	: Mr. Uttam Chand Barman, Chairman, Dimasa People's Council (DPC), Silchar, Assam
Deori People	: Mrs. Amrit Probha Deori, Former Chief Executive Member of Deori Autonomous Council, Assam
Khasi People	: Mr. Bah H Skhemlon, Sirdar Mawdon State- the Assembly of Hynniewtrep Nations, Meghalaya
Meetei People	: Mr. S.K. Apangbam, Member of Threatened Indigenous Peoples' Society (TIPS), Imphal, Manipur
Khanti People	: Mrs. Mong Maw Dharmawoti, President Arunachal Women's Welfare Society, Itanagar, AP
Hmar People	: Mr. Lal Choisang, Member, Hmar Peoples' Union, NC Hills, Assam
Karbi People	: Mr. Mirjeng Kro, Secretary, Karbi Student's Association (KSA), Karbi Anglong, Assam
Koch- Rajbongshis	: Mr. Biswajit Rai, President, All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU), Bongaigaon, Assam

The panelists shared their experiences, focused their attention to recognize their historical ties and expressed their positions as well as commit themselves to work together unitedly for their honourable survival and just peace in the region to ensure to fulfill their aspirations and need.

Nagas: The Nagas reiterated that they have been independent since time immemorial and therefore, their struggle is to oust Indian occupation of their land. They only demand that **India leave them alone**.

Boros: The Boros expressed serious concern over the continued flooding of outsiders/illegal migrants in their land and territories. They said their very survival is threatened due to continued dispossession from their land, forest and water resources. They drew serious attention of ongoing conflict over the protection of their forest and natural resources and urged the house to support their movement to protect their land, forest and natural resources, particularly appealed to support to protect and conserve the famous Manas National Park from the illegal influx and their massive encroachment.

The Boro People also said that their culture, religion, language, tradition and custom are greatly influenced adversely by the systematic assimilative administrative policies and repressive measures taken by their unfriendly governments and their agents who are all bent to further marginalize by encouraging and protecting the interest of the flooding illegal migrants from Bangladesh, West Bengal, Nepal and other parts of the country in their heartland. They warned to launch the democratic mass movement to free their occupied land and territories, particularly to revive all the 48 Tribal Belts and Blocks in Assam. They strongly criticized the government for patronizing the outsiders rather than protecting the genuine interest of the natives in India only for their political gain. They also demanded that the political solution be made to solve the Boroland movement at the earliest to prevent from further escalation of violent activities in the region.

Kukis: Kuki People expressed solidarity in the Indigenous Peoples' movement to protect their distinct identities, culture, land and territories. He said that Kuki like any other tribes in the region would continue to struggle to defend their peoples' interest.

Hmars: Hmar People reiterated their demand for creation of **a separate administrative unit for Hmars in N C Hills** to safeguard, promote and protect their socio-culture and political rights. They said that they have been suffering in the hands of majority communities around them.



Karbis: Karbi People from Karbi Anglong reiterated their demands for separate **Autonomous State** for the Karbis under Sixth Schedule. They said that they are discontented by the non execution of the provisions as promised in the Sixth Schedule and also step motherly treatment meted out to them in every sphere. They also expressed their unhappiness for dividing the Karbis in the manner – only the Karbis residing on the hills are recognized as Scheduled Tribe. They thus demand for recognition of plains settling Karbis as Scheduled Tribe (Plains).

Meetei: The Meetei people from Manipur expressed concern over the failure to uphold the Indigenous Mongoloid character of the Indigenous Mongoloid Peoples of the region leading to fading of their identities, culture and tradition and strongly recommended to form an **Apex Body of the North Eastern Region** of India for their common cause and survival as distinct Mongoloid Peoples.

Dimasas: Dimasa People said that India's 'Divide & Rule' policy has scattered Dimasas in more than 9 districts of Assam. They are unhappy about some sections not being recognized as Scheduled Tribes. Influx of outsiders and neglected by State and Central Government in developmental fields are another factors of their resentment. Their chief demand is protection of their identity, culture; assurance of political rights (representation in the assemblies). They also strongly demand the government to create a separate Dimasa State –**DIMARAJI** under the leadership of **Dima Halam Daoga (DHD)**.

Khamtis: Khamtis from Arunachal Pradesh expressed their solidarity with the rest of the Indigenous Peoples of the region and vowed to fight against injustice meted against the natives of the region. They also appealed the august gathering to extend their support to strengthen their linkage not only within but also with the neighbouring Indigenous Peoples scattered in different modern states.

Deoris: Deori People greeted, expressed their gratitude and extend their full support to the solidarity movement of the Indigenous Peoples of the North East India and assured that Deori People will fully cooperate in the Indigenous Peoples movement for protection and promotion of their identity, culture, tradition and socio-political interest.

Khasis: Khasi representatives alleged that Government of India betrayed its National commitment to **the Assembly of Hynniewtrep Nations** which includes the federation of 25 Khasi States, the Sirdarships, and Ka Dorbar ki Doloi. They demand that **urgent**

constitutional flexible safeguards are required to ensure true “**Unity in Diversity in this country of multitude Nations**” who have united together some willfully and some by brute force, it is this forceful annexation of these small Independent Republics that is today engaging society made clear that any attempt to explore “**Facilitation of Partnerships**” should be based on understanding in- depth the **Historical, Social, Cultural and Political** structure past and present of the Indigenous Nations. Failure by successive Central Governments for the past 57 years coupled with cosmetic policies till date to address these issues individually is in their view the reason for present upheaval and frustrations erupting in different forms leading to disastrous consequences facing them today. They recommend to re-visit the Indigenous treaty rights to respect the Indigenous peoples and their institutions. They also criticized the Government of India for their successive failure to correct the Constitutional Anomaly to recognize the Indigenous Institutions since Independence to be a part of the governance. They also further affirmed that the right to self -government is an Indigenous right and there should be substantial re-ordering of powers, because human rights also includes the right of people to self-determination. They demand immediate Constitutional Political Autonomy and space for **Indigenous Hynniewtrep Nations** in accordance with the **Standstill Arrangements of 1947** and to desist from a unitary policy of approach.

Rabhas: Rabhas reiterated their demand for 6th scheduled status of their Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with immediate effect for the protection of their land and territories.

Boroks: Borok People from Tripura drew serious attention over the ongoing massive illegal influx, state sponsored population transfer and domination of outsider Bengali settlers in their home where they have been turned to be a clear microscopic minority of 20% today. They re-affirmed that Tripura belonged to Borok Indigenous People which was independent state till 14th October 1949. They revealed that only on 15th of October 1949, Tripura merged with India on the basis of the Instrument of Accession. They made it clear that the sufferings of the Borok Indigenous people can be addressed only by creating a **separate State for them through suitable amendment under article – 244 (A) of the constitution of India** under the leadership of National Conference of Tripura and therefore appealed the house to support and intervene in favour of their demand for safeguard of the Borok Indigenous People.

Koch-Rajbongshis: Koch-Rajbongshis claimed that they are Mongoloid Indigenous People scattered in present Assam, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal. They said that historical injustice occurred with them as they have been deprived of their rightful status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) and turned to be minority in their own soil. They reiterated their on going demand of creation of **Kamatapur State** comprising the Koch-Rajbongshis dominated areas of Assam and West Bengal and Scheduled Tribe status.

Summing up the whole deliberation, Mr. B.B Hagjer, the moderator of the seminar said that ICITP has an onerous task ahead of working against all odds to ensure the basic in the declaration of the United Nations be available to the Indigenous Peoples in the region and the country.

The following resolutions were adopted after the prolong deliberations:

Resolution No 1: The House resolved to form an **APEX BODY** of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the North East India to safeguard the interest of the Indigenous Peoples of North Eastern Region unitedly facilitated by **ICITP**.

Resolution No 2: The house resolved to submit a memorandum to the Government of India to ratify the ILO Convention 169 and to implement the 46 articles enshrined in the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Resolution No 3: The house resolved to support the ongoing movement initiated by various groups of local peoples to stop flooding of illegal influx of Bangladeshis and other parts of the neighbouring countries in the region.

Resolution No 4: The house resolved to extend support to all the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples democratic socio-political movements to fulfill their need and aspirations.

The seminar finally came to an end with the proposal of vote of thanks by Mr. Sabda Ram Rabha, General Secretary of Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples North East Zone.

**Regional Seminar on
The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and
The Indigenous Peoples of North East India"**

9th August 2008

Venue: Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Panjabari, Guwahati, Assam (India)

Scheduled programme

8 th August	Arrival of Delegates to Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra / SHILPGRAM, North East Cultural Centre, Panjabari, Guwahati-37
Evening 06:09 pm	Registration Orientation to the venue/ Campus tour to Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra/Shilpgram
9 th August	Inaugural Session: Chairperson- Ms. Jarjum Ete, Former Chairperson, State Commission of Women, Member of Central Advisory Committee, Ministry of Pachayati Raj, Governing member Board, Rashtriya Mahila Koch, Ministry of WCD, Government of India and President of IWRC, Arunachal Pradesh
10:10am	Arrival of the Chief Guest & Dignitaries taking seats
10:15am	Lighting of lamp:
10:20am	Welcome Dance & Felicitation
10:25am	Greetings and Welcome address: Jebra Ram Muchahary, President, ICITP-NEZ
10:30am	Inauguration of the Seminar and Release of Translated versions of UNDRIP and Address by- Chief Guest - His Excellency Shiv Charan Mathur, the Governor of Assam Speeches by the Guests of honour: Dr. Motilal Nunisa, Director of Health Services, Former President, Dimasa Sahitya Sabha and Vice President, Assam Football Association, Guwahati, Assam Summing up by the Chair
10:40am	Vote of Thanks: Mr. Sabda Ram Rabha, General Secretary, ICITP-NEZ The Inaugural function will be conducted by Mr. Francis Kikon, Assistant Treasurer, Nagaland Committee, ICITP
10: 50am	Cultural Expression
11:00 am	Plenary Session: Key Note Address: UNDRIP and the IPs of North East India-Mr. Jebra Ram Muchahary, President, ICITP-NEZ Moderator : Mr. B.B. Hagjer, Commissioner of Forest, Assam
	Views of the IPs of North East India on their issues in relation to UNDRIP
	Naga People : Mr. S.Varah
	Boro People : Mr. Motindra Daimary
	Kuki People : Mr. K Chongloi
	Rabha People : Mr. Sabda Ram Rabha
	Borok People : Mr. Lowerence Hrangkaw
	Dimasa People : Mr. Uttam Chand Barman
12:30 PM	LUNCH BREAK
01:30 PM	Views of the IPs of North East India on their issues in relation to UNDRIP (Cont)
	Deori People : Mr. Amrit Probha Deori
	Khasi People : Mr. Bah H Skhemlon
	Meetei People : Mr. S.K. Apangbam
	Khamti People : Mrs. Mong Maw Dharmawoti
	Hmar People : Mr. Lal Choisang
	Karbi People : Mr. Mirjeng Kro
	Koch- Rajbongshis : Mr. Biswajit Rai
	Questions/Comments/Responses
03:00 pm	Tea Break
03:30 pm	Questions/ Comments/Responses /Recommendations (Contd.)
04:30 pm	Summing up: Chair
05:30 pm	End of session.