

INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

4 APRIL 2007

The Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples – North East Zone (ICITP-NEZ), member organisations, associated indigenous peoples' organisations and CORE Manipur supported by allies cooperated in and completed a South Asia Regional Indigenous Peoples' Training on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Capacities, 24-31 March 2007 at Guwahati and Haflong, Assam, India. The training provided a first ever public and open platform for the indigenous and tribal peoples of the region to draw closer together, recognize historical ties, share experiences and positions as well as commit themselves to work united together for lasting, honourable and just peace in the region.

The training, which was attended by more than 100 indigenous activists, leaders including women and youth delegates from 68 representative Indigenous Peoples Organisations, including organisations of women and youth from India, Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, was held in the backdrop of continuing decades-long violence, armed repression, hostilities, and peaceful protests by women against state terrorism and human rights violations and indecisive partisan peace negotiations in the Eastern Himalaya region of India, encouraging efforts for the inclusion of Indigenous leaders in the emergent republic of Nepal following one of the most violent conflicts of the region, a prolonged impasse for the displaced indigenous refugees from Bhutan seeking justice and reparation, a new effort to strike a peaceful deal by the Chin people in Burma, and the targeting and escalation of state violence against indigenous activists and leaders in Bangladesh.



The week-long comprehensive programme was highlighted by technical sessions by experienced resource persons, including from United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and South Africa, and analytical sessions led researchers, review sessions of the international and regional advocacy processes for the rights of indigenous peoples in Asia. The event was characterised by culturally affirming camaraderie, sharing of resources and exchange of experiences among communities, many of whom are still embroiled in on-going hostilities and mutual suspicions, that emphasized the multifarious contours of conflict in the region, and the recognition of peace as not just a goal but a pathway to be familiarly trod by

everyone together and founded on the power of dialogue, listening to each other, inclusion, consultation, consent, empathy, fraternity and love.

Indigenous delegates committed themselves and declared their resolve through the DECLARATION OF SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ON CONFLICT AND PEACE at the closing function attended by over 7000 indigenous persons representing all communities in the remote town of Haflong, capital of the North Cachar (NC) Hills District of Assam in India. The closing function was also attended by Prithibi Majhi, Minister of Assam (Planning & Development, Labour & Employment and Tea Tribes) and Subodh Kant Sahai, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) of India who announced a Rupees 7.5 million purse for the conflict torn NC Hills District.

The Haflong Declaration is also particularly significant in the context of the formation of an Indigenous Peoples' self-governing alliance in Asia – the FEDERATION OF INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL PEOPLES IN ASIA (FIPTA) and the establishment of the ASIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SOLIDARITY FUND which will be administered by FIPTA for regional and international advocacy, and capacity sharing activities of the Asian indigenous peoples.



Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP)
Zonal Office, ICITP-NEZ
Banphool Nagar, Namghar Path, P.O: Assam Sachivalaya
Dispur, Guwahati 781006, Assam, India
Tel/Fax: +91 (361) 2611293
Tel: +91 (361) 2233298, +919854006314 (M)
Email: icitp_nez@rediffmail.com

CORE Centre for Organisation Research & Education
(Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Policy and Human Rights in India's North East)
NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC
Loisanglen: Palace Compound,
Imphal 795001, Manipur, India
Tel/Fax: +91 385 222 81 69
Email: coreloisanglen@gmail.com

**DECLARATION OF
SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ON CONFLICT AND PEACE**

Haflong, India

31 March 2007

We, the indigenous peoples' leaders and activists representing 68 indigenous peoples organizations from Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, and India, including indigenous leaders from all the seven sister states of the Eastern Himalaya region of India who are gathered here in Guwahati, Assam, India for the South Asia Regional Training on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Capacity, under the aegis of Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, North East Zone and its member organizations and allies,

Recognise that the root causes for conflicts involving the indigenous peoples in the Eastern Himalayan region and other regions of South Asia are:

1. External influences and interventions, such as culture contact and cultural assimilation deeply undermining the closely held traditional values among the indigenous peoples particularly young persons;
2. The flawed and destructive system of ethnic demarcation for political and administrative convenience by both external and internal colonialists;
3. The weakening of traditional trust and unfortunate strengthening of the traditional inter-tribal distrust;
4. Lack of conviction regarding the progress of indigenous peoples both by the government and governments - backed elements professing to be the indigenous peoples' agents;
5. Absence of indigenous conscious / owned / oriented approaches in indigenous peoples' development;
6. Exclusion of and disregard for the indigenous peoples and their thoughts and aspirations in the decision making process concerning their own interest and future;
7. The dependency syndrome that has resulted from these influences, policies and factors;
8. Domination and discrimination, the loss of the right to self-determination and rights to one's own lands and forests, disparity, inequality, exploitation, injustice, disunity, identity crisis and corruption, which brings disillusionment, anomie, frustration and anger that have led the indigenous peoples and communities to be in conflict among themselves and with others;
9. The emerging threats of aggressive development thrusts, plans and projects driven by the neo-liberal economic paradigm and the global financial institutions and arrangements have also led to violent confrontations and conflicts;
10. Lack of genuine and sincere, inclusive negotiations for reconciliation, lack of the cultural and traditional dimensions in conflict resolution processes leading to more confusion, chaos and stalemates in the peace process.

WE RESOLVE THAT

1. We have explored together and learnt the root causes of the conflicts in our region and the linkages between the different causes.
2. We have learnt the tools and methods required to address the conflicts for a just resolution through peaceful ways and means that include the power of love, friendship and listening to each other; the power of dialogue over debate; the power of sharing our experiences, views, positions, feelings, culture and creativity in an inclusive manner that welcomes the constructive role of women and young persons of our peoples and communities.

3. We have also learnt to trust each other, to put ourselves in each others shoes and empathize with each other's situations and problems in order to act in unity, mutual trust and respect.
4. We can change our situations of conflict by helping each other, by dialogue that includes all parties and entities that are affected by or involved in the conflicts, by our quick responses to violent situations / events and appeals by affected communities, groups or individuals; by initiating effective dialogues, organizing motivation, sensitization and documentation, visits to each others' territories and areas, promoting unity and positive role of the media.
5. We also need further help in strengthening and improving our skills in conflict resolution and peace building, particularly the skills of listening one another, dialogue, cooperation and coordination, mobilizing additional resources such as new ideas, experiences, new tools and funds, networking amongst ourselves and to help each other to build our capacities.
6. We recognize and affirm that the power of our traditional and customary peace building and reconciliation practices and the vital role of our elders and women in resolving our conflicts in peaceful ways towards a just and enduring peace.
7. We will resist all kinds of externally influenced development designs and plans that will undermine, destroy and change our lives, lands and future forever, and we will engage ourselves to create and adopt our own self-determined life-plans based on our local and traditional genius and resources in harmony with Nature.
8. We need the active help of the international community including the United Nations and its various organs and mechanisms to strengthen, facilitate and further consolidate our conflict resolution initiatives and action.
9. We also need the sincere and active cooperation and facilitation of governments and expert practitioners of conflict resolution and peace building.
10. We need governments, central and states, to acknowledge and respect our needs, aspirations and rights, to actively participate in the initiation of dialogues that are inclusive of all affected groups including women's and youth groups to bring about just and lasting solutions.
11. We urge governments of both central and states to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, ethic and national minorities, cessation of aggressive and oppressive military action, repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 in India and other similar discriminatory, militarist legislation, and establish policies that are developed through wide and inclusive consultations among our peoples, and to put a halt to the prevailing divide and rule policy.
12. We recognize the importance of witnesses who are impartial, fair and knowledgeable to our conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace building efforts; and governments should facilitate the witnessing of these processes without giving obstacles and impediments.
13. We shall act unitedly, and with respect for one another and all Nature, so that our resolve will be turned into practical plans and actions to bring about lasting peace and honorable resolution of the conflicts of our region.