

PRESS RELEASE

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A regional workshop-cum-seminar on Peace & Development

January 10& 11, 2009 at Guwahati, India



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NORTH EAST EXPRESS STRONG DETERMINATION FOR PEACE

Representatives from a cross section of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the North East made a declaration about their strong determination to make an effort to finding an amicable and lasting peace for the region and bring an end to the uncertainties that cause pain and sufferings to the people. This was the outcome of the two-day Workshop-cum-Seminar that was hosted by the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples North East Zone (ICITP-NEZ) that was held in Guwahati on January 10 & 11, 2009.

Inaugurating the workshop, Shri R.S. Mooshahary, Governor of Meghalaya said, "Human society is conflict-prone and not conflict-free, due to clash of interests. No chapter in history is free from wars and skirmishes. But if we have to get the best out of life, then we must realise the importance of peace."

Earlier Shri J.R. Muchahary, President, ICITP stated that the aim of the WORKSHOP-CUM-SEMINAR was to provide Civil Society Leaders, Peace Workers, Peace Practitioners, Social Thinkers, Journalists, Academicians, Students, Religious Leaders, Government Agencies and Decision Makers from India's Northeast an opportunity for a collective platform to interact and share their views and strengthen their collective efforts to:

- Create a common space for meeting of various civil social leaders, civil societies activists, advocates, scholars, entrepreneurs, leaders of business communities, journalists, peace workers and practitioners, religious leaders, academicians and students of different states in the region to share their opinions to collectively contribute in awareness campaign on disadvantage of violence in the region;
- Aware on the futility of violence;
- Explore collective views on developing and building pathways to peace in the region through effective participation in dialogue with the concern party/parties including government and to evolve culturally appropriate policy recommendations to the government to realise the sustainable development activities.
- Enhance in exploring to identify the root causes of the internal conflicts and evolving mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution for lasting and meaningful peace building processes;

- Enhancing capacities for evolving culturally appropriate development policies for effective & sustainable development in the region.

That the objectives of the workshop was fulfilled to a great extent is evident from the fact that two eminent Gandhians of the region, Padmashri Natwar Thakkar and Padmashri Ravindranath Uphadaya were present at the event along with representatives of diverse civil society organizations such as Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, All Rabha Students' Union, All Dimasa Students' Union, All Adivasi Students Association of Assam, Kuki Students Organisation, Birsa Commando Force, Peoples' Consultative Group, Twipra Students Federation, All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union, Ao Baptist Church, All Minority Students Union, Dimasa Peoples' Council etc and outfits like Dima Daoga Halam and Birsa Commando Force. Front ranking academicians, journalists and social workers were among over hundred delegates who participated in the workshop -cum -seminar.

Dr Ram Dayal Munda, Former VC of Ranchi University, who chaired the inaugural session, expressed happiness over the fact that the civil society in the North East was waking up to the problems faced by the indigenous communities.

Addressing the valedictory session, eminent journalist Shri D.N. Bezboruah stressed on the need for non-alienation of the indigenous people from their ancestral land and good sensible education which can give them 'real security.' He expressed his confidence that the two-day workshop-cum-seminar had achieved a great deal in that direction.

The two-day event was addressed by eminent speakers, which includes: -

1. Smt. Jarjum Ete, State Commission of Women, Member of Central Advisory
2. Committee, Ministry of Pachayati Raj, Governing Member Board, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Ministry of WCD, Government of India and President of IWRC, Arunachal Pradesh;
3. Dr. Nani Gopal Mahanta, Reader, Political Science, GU, Coordinator, Peace and Conflict Studies, GU, Guwahati;
4. Padmishri Natwar Thakkar, Founder General Secretary, Nagaland Gandhi Asharam, Guwahati;
5. Padmishri Rabindra Nath Uphadaya, Director, TAGS, Baksa; BTC, Assam
6. Dr. T.T.Haokip, Professor, Dept of Pol Science, NEHU, Shillong; Meghalaya
7. Dr. Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Preofessor, GU, Guwahati, Assam;
8. Dr. Kameswar Brahma, President of Boro Sahitya Sabha, Gossaigaon, BTC, Assam;
9. Dr. Ranoj Pegu, the President of MMM, Dhemaji, MAC, Assam;
10. Mr. D.N Bezboruah, the founder Editor of the Sentinel, Guwahati, Assam;
11. Mr. Brindaban Goswami, MLA & Former President and leader of opposition, Assam Legistlative Assembly, Guwahati;
12. Mr. Thaneswar Boro, former Education Minister of Assam, Guwahati, Assam;
13. Mr. Samudra Gupta Kashyab, Chief of Indian Express Bureau, Guwahati, Assam;
14. Mr. Wasbir Hussain, Director, Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Guwahati and Former Member, National Security Advisory Board,

India.

Among other non- state actor stakeholders the following leaders of different civil societies and armed groups on ceasefire agreement attended the workshop cum seminar to express their views on the peace process, which includes:

1. Mr. Dilip Nunisa, the Chairman of DHD, Haflong, NC Hills, Assam;
2. Mr. Birsing Munda, the C-in-C of Birsa Commando Force, Bongaigaon, Assam;
3. Mr. Joseph Minz, the General Secretary, AASAA, Dibrugarh, Assam;
4. Mr. Prafulla Hafila, President of All Dimasa Students' Union, Haflong, NC Hills, Assam;
5. Mr. Tankeswar Rabha, President of All Rabha Students' Union, Dudhnai, RHAC, Assam;
6. Mr. Upendra Debbarma, President of Tripura Students' Union, Agartala, Tripura;
7. Mr. Abdul Aziz, the working President of All Minority Students' Union, Dhubri, Assam;
8. Mr. Biswajit Rai, President of All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union, Bongaigaon, Assam;
9. Mr. Thoren Boro, Former Vice President of Boro Sahitya Sabha, Guwahati, Assam;
10. Mr. Yangerlemba, Vice Principal, Peoples' College, Mokokchung, Nagaland;
11. Mr. Dipon Thaosen, Vice President, Dimasa Peoples' Council, Haflong, NC Hills; Assam;
12. Mr. Jiten Borgoyari, Director of Welfare of Plains Tribals, Guwahati, Assam;
13. Mr. Tongthap Tauthap, Advisor, Kuki Students' Organisation, K Along, KAAC, Assam;
14. Mr. B. B. Narzary, Senior Advocate, Guwahati High court, Guwahati, Assam;
15. Mr. Goerge Swansi, Principal, St. Xavier's Education Foundation, Howly, Assam;
16. Mr. Mrinal Kanti Phonglosa, Vice President, Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, NC Hills, Assam
17. Mr. K Changloi, Imphal, Manipur

The first out come of the workshop-cum-seminar was the historic coming together of different civil societies' leaders and arms groups to share their views on the PEACE process and to contribute through cooperation to find amicable peaceful solution to their various problems. The workshop resolved that the stakeholders of ICITP are the soldiers of peace who have to consolidate their efforts for peace cutting across social, cultural and religious barriers.

ICITP-NEZ also announced that the 2nd phase of the Workshop -cum-Seminar on the same theme would be held in Imphal in the 2nd week of March 2009.

CONSENSUS STATEMENTS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Time has come to declare our strong determination to make an effort for finding an amicable and lasting peace for the region and bring an end to the uncertainties that cause pain and sufferings to the people.
2. The stakeholders of ICITP are the soldiers of peace. They have to consolidate their efforts for peace cutting across social, cultural and religious barriers.

3. Violence is greatly avoidable. Gandhian non-violence, which has stood the test of time, could be a strong tool towards achieving peace in the region.
4. While public opinion should be generated in support of peace process, greater patronage should be extended to efforts of UN and other bodies engaged in the process.
5. NGOs have a role in accelerating the peace process.
6. Peace cannot be enforced by force. The political aspect of the movements should be taken in to consideration. Self-determination should be on the basis of people's right to their own land, culture, tradition, language, freedom of speech and enjoying all other fundamental rights without obstruction from others.
7. Human society is conflict-prone and not conflict-free due to clash of interests. Hence, peace is a relative term. There is no doubt that peace is essential for every one to enjoy their life.
8. Violence could be open or in disguise. Tolerance is required to curb violence. It is a good sign that of late the civil society in the region is waking up to the issue. But words need to be translated into action.
9. Peace is one of our major concerns of the day. Communities must have power to negotiate peace through political, cultural and social discourses.
10. Peace making process also needs to address the long-standing issues of self-determination simmering in the region.
11. Good governance is imperative to peace. Rule of law, tolerance, and transparency of political process, fair judiciary, impartial police force, and vibrant civil society ensure good governance. This should be supplemented by an efficient administration and delivery system.
12. Let insurgency be treated separate from development in order to eliminate the nexus among politicians, bureaucrats and contractors and the resultant corruption. Criminals be kept away from the corridors of power.
13. Cease-fire with militant groups does not always guarantee peace. Even cease-fire is misused by vested interest groups. Civil society needs greater awareness and empowerment to tackle this problem.
14. Development process too should not be imposed. People must have an option to choose the development schemes beneficial for them.
15. The State is obsessed with 'military security.' It should, in stead, focus on 'security of the people.' In our efforts to achieve peace, the leaders of the civil society must educate the government, political leaders, after all development and peace to a great extent is in their hands.

16. People take to violence when they are harassed and exploited.
17. In many NE states, indigenous people have been reduced to marginalized groups. They have no alternative choice but to take to agitation.
18. State alone cannot bring peace. Real key lies with the people. The Church's initiative in Mizoram and Nagaland are good examples of this.
19. While trying to define civil society, it was clarified that anything that is not related to the State may be called civil.
20. Government may sometime try to divide the groups in conflict but they should remain united in dialogue and convey their views in clear terms to the government without fighting over it. Mutual respect, trust and emotional integration must be created amongst various ethnic groups in the region to bring peace and tranquility among multi-ethnic society like that of ours in the region.
21. One view expressed by a participant was that peace and development come only after violence.
22. In Tripura, one of the NE states many development projects like dams, wild life sanctuaries are being set up by removing indigenous people from their own lands. Protecting the rights of indigenous people should be given priority.
23. Adivasis comprise of a large portion of Assam population. If they remain backward the State cannot progress.
24. Naming communities as "tea-tribes" etc. is not correct. Communities should be addressed by their ethnic identity and traditional names.
25. The Government at one time had even denied the existence of Indigenous Peoples in India. It is only when funds were coming from abroad, this existence was confirmed. Nevertheless, the funds got diverted for uses other than that for Indigenous Peoples. Government of India should ratify the ILO convention 169.
26. Middle class unemployment is another reason for conflict. This needs to be addressed appropriately.
27. Exchange of students, civil society organisation members for tours and study; welfare of orphans and underprivileged children, victims of conflicts to be encouraged.
28. Open dialogue should be organized in Assam between different demanding and opposing groups of Indigenous Peoples in the matter of scheduling of six different tribes in Assam.
29. The scheduling of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples should be uniform throughout the nation and their benefit should be enjoyed uniformly all over the country.
30. Peace workers, peace practitioners and peace activists in the region should be recognized and their initiatives should be encouraged.