

Indigenous Peoples' Position Paper in the Press Meet

7th Asia-Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment Bangkok, Thailand

6 September 2017

There are around 260 million Indigenous peoples in Asia. We, indigenous peoples, mainly depend on land, water, sea and forests which is not only the source of food security, livelihoods and well beings but also is an important part of our culture, values and identity. 80% of the planet's biodiversity is found in the territories of indigenous peoples. We, indigenous Peoples, together with local communities have been protecting environment and promoting biological diversity. We are also at the forefront of addressing challenges of climate change by developing community based adaptation and mitigation measures.

Despite our significant actions and contributions, we have still to pay a very high price for pollution and environmental degradation as our territories are made production sites of corporate farming where agro-chemicals are excessively used, as mining areas. Environmental pollution puts additional burden on the poorest, most marginalized and, forest and ecosystem dependent communities.

In many countries of the region, we face gross human rights violations including arrests, detention, harassment, brutal repression, and filled fabricated cases against us when we stand against land grabbing and protect our forests and habitat

For example, in Thailand due to the policy to increase forest cover up to 40% and restriction in access to natural resources, many indigenous communities were forced to leave their ancestral land where they have lived there for hundreds of years. Some of them were arrested on charge of encroaching protected forest. This has severely affected their life and livelihoods and. Another policy on air pollution (60 days no burning policy) , this has an impact to many indigenous and local communities as they could not practice their traditional farming "shifting cultivation" which is the main source of their food, livelihood and culture.

In response, we are taking up our struggles through various means including advocacy for legislative changes, taking our governments or private companies to court, mobilizing our networks. We openly confront dominant power structures-political, economic, social, and financial but in doing these, some of our members die.

But we have successes as well - one of the result is access to land for woman has increased and include community participation in preventing pollution, which needs to be encouraged and strengthened.

A pollution free planet requires concerted, systematic and genuine efforts on removing systemic barriers and holistic approach. Indigenous peoples' perspective of holism, traditional knowledge to protect forest, to conserve biodiversity and natural resources would significantly contribute to

the solution of climate change. Which is why, indigenous peoples' full and effective participation in the SDGs implementation processes is important and will significantly contribute to the solution of climate change and attainment of the goals of Agenda 2030.

For the vision of free pollution planet and restoring the health of environment, we urge government and other stakeholders to:

1. Ensure indigenous peoples and local communities participation in the decision making bodies and respect our right to Free, Prior, Informed and Consent as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
2. Recognize, respect and promote indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge relating to forest protection and biodiversity conservation and enhancement.
3. Provide greater attention to research on the impact of increasing militarization and its impact to the environment, unequal trade treaties and illicit financial flows on environment.
4. We demand policy coherence, enforcement and coordination mechanisms and establishing a policy framework creating synergy in the prevention of pollution and achieving agenda 2030.
5. Provide security to indigenous peoples' human rights and environmental defenders who are relentlessly struggling to defend our homes and territories
6. Guarantee our collective rights to lands, territories and resources in order to ensure the protection of customary forests that are playing vital role in the purification of the polluted atmosphere.
7. Develop partnership with indigenous peoples and local communities in creating pollution free planet and in restoring health of the environment.

We cannot separate human from the ecological system. Without human rights based approach there won't be achieved sustainable development goals.