ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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Stand up for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Statement of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) for Human Rights Day 2017*

Despite the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948, violations against human rights remain unabated and for indigenous peoples, we continue to face the systemic, structural and cultural barriers. Our rights were finally recognized through the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 after more than half a century after the adoption of UDHR.

But these advancements in international human rights standards for indigenous peoples have not led to effective legal protections at country level in most Asian States. Indigenous communities continue to face daunting human rights challenges even to this very day. Even more concerning, indigenous peoples' human rights defenders (IPHRDs) are facing significant risks and reprisals, including on their lives when they speak up against violations of their rights. In 2016 alone, nearly 150 indigenous rights defenders were killed trying to protect their ancestral lands.[1] Currently, many cases of killings of IPHRDs across Asian countries remain unsolved. In February 2017, an indigenous Lumad leader, Renato Anglao, was shot dead in front of his wife and child. That was already the third recorded killing of indigenous Lumad leaders in the Philippines in 2017 in relation to palm oil plantations and mining operations. In March, Chayaiphum Pasae, a Lahu youth activist of Thailand, who was engaged in promoting rights of indigenous communities to citizenship, education and healthcare, was shot dead by Thai military for alleged drug possession. In April, indigenous Jumma student activist of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Romel Chakma died after reportedly being tortured by Bangladesh Army.

Killings and disappearances are not only the threats against indigenous human rights defenders, including community leaders and activists. There are large number of indigenous human rights defenders across Asia who are criminalized, jailed, tortured, harassed, threatened and face other reprisals for legitimately defending their rights and those of the communities. Lack of understanding and recognition of indigenous rights also result in those defenders not being acknowledged accordingly. Their remote geographical location away from the watchful eyes of organizations in the cities and differences in language, culture and worldviews add to the challenges.[2]

Among those facing threats and reprisals are also indigenous women human rights defenders (IWHRDs). Five women human rights defenders belonging to organizations in Cordillera people's movement in the Philippines, who are currently facing trumped charges for alleged

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[1] Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2016, Front Line Defenders:
https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/annual-report-human-rights-defenders-risk-2016

[2] AIPP and Asia Caucus Statement on "Future work of the Expert Mechanism, including focus on next annual study", 10th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 10 – 14 July 2017: https://aippnet.org/aipp-asia-caucus-statement-future-work-expert-mechanism-including-focus-next-annual-study/

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association with Communist rebels, is a recent case in point.[3] In many struggles where IWHRDs confront corporate and State power, they become the target of grave gender-based violence and threats ranging from sexual harassment to exclusion from decision-making processes, smear campaigns to criminalization and assassinations.

Challenges remain and rapidly emerging as indigenous peoples are becoming more aware of their rights and continue to strengthen their solidarity and struggle for the recognition and protection of their rights. Due to lack of proper recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, particularly land rights, many Asian governments continue to fail in bringing justice to the families of the IPHRDs targeted of State reprisals.

Together with more than 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide, AIPP remains strongly committed to strive for the realization of indigenous peoples' human rights as stated in the UDHR and UNDRIP, among other international human rights instruments and standards, without leaving anyone behind. Further, through the *Land Rights Now!* campaign, AIPP, along with nearly 600 organisations and land rights champions across the world are amplifying our collective power to demand for secure land rights for indigenous peoples and local communities. This campaign includes a particular call for recognition and protection of indigenous peoples including indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities who put their lives at risk to defend their rights.

It is a difficult road ahead, but we believe that if we remain strong and collective we will achieve our common goals to create a just and sustainable world, which is worth living for our future generations.

In solidarity,
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* AIPP is a regional organization of indigenous peoples in Asia with 48 member organizations and movements in 14 countries. For more information, visit www.aippnet.org. For information on Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders (IPHRD) Network in Asia, visit www.iphrdefenders.net

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[3] See Petition to President Rodrigo Duterte by Women Against Tyranny: https://www.change.org/p/president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-women-resist-tyranny-drop-all-trumped-up-charges-against-women-human-rights-defenders