

## **Indigenous representatives from Asia stress on guaranteeing land rights for achieving Sustainable Development Goals at the High-Level Political Forum 2017**

New York, 10 July 2017 – Fifteen indigenous peoples’ representatives from various Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Malaysia are participating in the HLPF this year taking place at the UN Headquarters in New York from 10 to 19 July 2017 under the theme “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”. They are among the 2000-plus participants from various sectors, including governments, private sector and civil society.

“We recognize the potentials of the SDGs in addressing the issues of sustainability and inclusion of those who are at the furthest end of the social spectrum and also acknowledge the **high relevance of the 2017 theme for indigenous communities,**” said Kanlaya Chularattakorn of Indigenous Women’s Network of Thailand (IWNT). “In goodwill, we therefore hope that **we will be heard and provided opportunities to build partnership with governments and all other relevant actors from this early phase of the SDGs.**”

Poverty levels have dropped considerably in the past decades in Asia but there are great differences among and within countries with respect to the level of economic development and thus poverty. Countries such as Malaysia and Thailand are now considered middle-income economies while others, like Nepal and Bangladesh, are still classified as low-income economies.

However, like elsewhere in the world, indigenous peoples in all Asian countries have disproportionately higher poverty rates than the national average. For example, while India ranks in the middle of the UNDP Human Poverty Index of countries, the index for India’s indigenous communities as a group is comparable to that of Sub-Saharan countries that are ranked among the bottom 25. National data in many countries fail to reflect indigenous peoples’ situation on the ground, which is mainly caused by the lack of data disaggregation.

One glaring reason for indigenous peoples to remain among the poorest of the poor is because, all over Asia, the vast majority of indigenous communities have lost control over their land and resources and their own development. Many continue to be victims of historical discrimination, which is worsened by development aggression of States resulting in unceasing cycle of human rights violations. Assimilation pressure has been steadily increasing and for some groups their continued existence as distinct peoples is under threat.

“In Nepal, many development projects, such as hydropower and road expansion, taking place on our ancestral lands without our Free, Prior and Informed Consent **destroy our sacred places, cultural heritage and livelihood security,**” stated Tahal Thami of Lawyers’ Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP). “In a [report](#) submitted by Indigenous Peoples’ Network for SDGs in Nepal on the implementation of SDGs in Nepal, we have **emphasized the need for changing development patterns and the need for recognizing our land rights** if we are not to be left behind again.”

## Public Statement

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Recognition of land rights, including through native customary rights, is also a recurring recommendation that indigenous peoples have [made](#) on the National Roadmap of Malaysia concerning the implementation of the SDGs.

“Unfortunately, the SDG indicator 1.4.2 on **land tenure security is currently classified under Tier III**, which means that there is no standard methodology for gathering data and is still being developed,” commented Gam A. Shimray, Secretary General of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP). “This **reflects the severity of the status and situation regarding collective land tenure security** worldwide.”

“Setting goals can simply be setting something at the far end of the post which is difficult to be reached and keeps on multiplying as we have seen it in the case of the shift from MDGs to SDGs,” Shimray added. “Therefore, it is equally **important to set the system that will allow us to reach the goals** with institutions, policies and programmes in place, which are most favorable and accessible to indigenous communities and other marginalized groups.”

During the HLPF 2017, 44 countries including 11 countries from Asia have volunteered to be part of the Voluntary National Review process. These countries will be presenting the progress of SDGs planning and implementation at their country levels. Indigenous peoples in Asia are using the opportunity of the HLPF to assert their land rights and be included in the planning and implementation of the SDGs, particularly at the national and sub-national levels.

*For more information, please contact:*

**Patricia Miranda Wattimena**, Advocacy Coordinator, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, [patricia@aippnet.org](mailto:patricia@aippnet.org), +66902689020

**Pallab Chakma**, Executive Director, Kapaeeng Foundation, [pallab.juju@gmail.com](mailto:pallab.juju@gmail.com), +880 1717 3322 99

**Tahal Thami**, Executive Director, Lawyers’ Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), [thamitahal@gmail.com](mailto:thamitahal@gmail.com), +9779851177681

**Kanlaya Chularattakorn**, Coordinator, Indigenous Women’s Network of Thailand (IWNT), [kanlaya2005@gmail.com](mailto:kanlaya2005@gmail.com), +66 62 593 8399