

16th session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

17th to 21st July 2023, Geneva, Switzerland

Joint Statement on

Agenda Item 9: Interactive dialogue with UNPFII, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

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Mr. Chair,

I appreciate the work of the UNPFII, the Special Rapporteur, EMRIP- especially on their timely reports on important issues. and the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, for making participation to UN accessible for Indigenous Peoples.

In this intervention I want to bring attention to:

1. The deepening crisis on the borders of the Indian and Myanmar, in Northeast India, home to more than 200 Indigenous Peoples that have lived under militarized regimes throughout the post-colonial period.
2. The ongoing conflict in Myanmar, and expansion of economic regimes in India, has created new arenas of disputes among Indigenous Peoples in the North East of India, and South-South East Asian region in general.
3. A conflict front has opened up, for instance, in the North Eastern state of Manipur since May 2023. Communities have become contestants to indigeneity claims, leading to armed confrontation over land, resources and rights.
4. Chair, the government of India has not conducted a country wide census since 2001 which has contributed to flaring suspicions in the region. The focus, instead, has been on exercises like the national register of citizens that encodes biometric data, disenfranchises vulnerable minorities, seeks to create new indigenous citizenships without commensurate guarantee of rights to fair political representation, distribution of welfare and development, etc. This gap has produced new competitions that defy Indigenous Peoples' approach to collective action, leading to armed conflict, and infringement of the rights of individuals, journalists, academics and collectives.
5. Several peace agreements have either been made in the North East, or are in the making. They have successfully created new borders without resolving the root contradictions that Indigenous Peoples have raised through their movements.
6. EMRIP is recommended to call upon member state India to use Articles 40 and 42 of the UNDRIP to guide ongoing investigations of conflicts, and Articles 30 and 36 to forge robust political agreements in the region.