

Statement from the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group

Online United Nations Environment Assembly 5.1

Opening Plenary

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Statement read by Mr. Prem Singh Tharu

Thank you Chair for this opportunity to speak.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Prem Singh Tharu from Nepal representing Indigenous Peoples' Major Group, an Indigenous person from Asia indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Thailand. I am well honored speaking today on behalf of Indigenous Peoples' Major Group.

The Online UNEA 5.1 is an important opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to participate virtually and remotely and welcome the UNEA theme 'Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals'. We are very keen on listening to the commitments of the government delegates to make contributions towards strengthening actions for nature to achieve the sustainable development goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the world and saddened the situations across the world. We would like to join the condolences to all who lost their lives caused of pandemic as well as we would like to wish and pray for the fastest recovery who are still suffering from it.

We, Indigenous peoples are always known for our inherent relation with nature and environment. We nurture the nature and environment not only for our health and wellbeing but also most importantly for our culture, self-determination, collective survival and for our future generations as enshrined by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It is fact that the 80% world's biodiversity are on Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories which are being conserved, protected and promoted by us, the Indigenous Peoples, as our way of lives and culture in peace and harmony with nature. The Indigenous Knowledge based actions for nature being undertaken by Indigenous Peoples including Indigenous Women since ages have been proactively and significantly contributing to the sustainable natural resource management and development even during the deadly pandemic. It is because, we, Indigenous Peoples have our own natural, collective, and traditional systems of food sovereignty, health safety and treatment measures, livelihoods, preparedness and good practices of resiliencies which help us to mitigate and address the challenges resulted by the pandemic. The innovative Indigenous Knowledge and technologies friendly to the nature and environment have been contributing to protect us from pandemic and its caused challenges.

However, we, Indigenous Communities so far have able to mitigate and kept ourselves safe from the amidst of the pandemic, but the threats and criminalization at us-Indigenous Peoples got

multiplied by imposing discriminatory policies, killing, false allegations, abductions, grabbing our lands and resources. The threat of deforestation, biodiversity loss, climate change and land grabbing due to concessions for mining and the extractive industries, large hydro-power dams, monocrop plantations and industrial agriculture have increased which are alarming challenges for nature and environmental destruction and degradations. Further, Indigenous Knowledge and practices dedicated and committed to environmental protections are completely undermined, weakened, and disregarded as critical elements in our sustainable natural resource management systems benefitting to humanity, nature, biodiversity and ecology, as we lose our lands, resources and our food systems. When we oppose these unsustainable systems, actions and projects and assert our rights to our lands, territories, and resources, we are subjected to different forms of human rights violations including arbitrary arrests and detention, and political killings. According to Global Witness, majority of those killed (40% victims are only from Indigenous communities- out of which, one is an Indigenous Woman among 10 victims) for defending the environment are Indigenous Peoples. We didn't ask for these, more so, have not been part in decision making which makes us victims of unjust development and systemic discrimination.

The Indigenous Peoples Major Group recommends the following to the UNEA 5.1 towards Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals:

1. Recognize nature and environment friendly Indigenous Knowledge, innovations, and good practices as equal to scientific knowledge and technologies including recognition of the most valuable roles and contribution of Indigenous Women and Knowledge Holders in actions for nature as agent of change and manager of resources.
2. Recognize customary land and resource tenure rights and sustainable resource management systems of Indigenous Peoples including Indigenous Women and integrate these as essential elements in addressing climate change, environmental degradation, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, plastic, marine and chemical pollution, loss of biodiversity and other environmental stressors and in achieving sustainable development for all.
3. Strongly call for the inclusion of our Indigenous Knowledge and indicators as contributing elements in the assessments of actions for nature in achieving the sustainable development. Indigenous Knowledge and indicators can be instrumental in monitoring and setting indicators to address multiple environmental issues.
4. Recognize the significant contribution of Environmental Defenders in environmental protection and take necessary action to ensure the protection of environmental defenders and the establishment of effective redress mechanisms and rights-based approach to guarantee the accountability of human rights violators including the private sector.
5. Address the systemic causes of destructions of the natural resources and its linkages to economic domination and the adverse socio-cultural impacts, marginalization and disempowerment of the majority including Indigenous Peoples and respect the effective implementation of Free Prior and Informed Consent while taking any actions.
6. Governments need to provide opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to inform policy agendas and priorities including our meaningful and effective participation throughout the processes of policy formulations and executions.

7. Last but not least, we stand in solidarity with civil society and the Indigenous Peoples of Myanmar and call for:

- Immediate restoration of civil rule in Myanmar and dialogue between civil leaders and the military.
- Immediate release of political leaders, and civil society activists arrested during the coup.
- Commitment from the military to full and verifiable compliance with International Human Rights Law, and finally;

We want to wish the assembly for a fruitful deliberation.

Thank you

On Behalf of Indigenous Peoples' Major Groups

And

Indigenous Representatives to MGFC

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