

ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DECLARATION ON THE 21ST SESSION OF THE UNFCCC-CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP21)

INA House, Chiang Mai, Thailand
18 September 2015

Indigenous peoples from 12 countries in Asia held a Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 21st Session of the UN Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP21) from 16-18 September 2015 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The countries include Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Thailand, Lao PDR, Taiwan/China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, The Philippines and Vietnam.



There are at least 260 million indigenous peoples in Asia, making it the most culturally diverse region in the world. We, the Asia indigenous peoples, whose homes are in the mountains and forests, the coasts and small islands have the least contribution to the changing of the climate system yet we are severely impacted by climate change. The flooding in Myanmar, the typhoons in the Philippines, the earthquake in Nepal, the drought in Thailand, the haze in Indonesia are some of the catastrophes in the recent past that have resulted to greater food insecurity, destruction of our livelihoods, lands and resources, displacements, serious health problems, increased number of indigenous peoples with disabilities and grave suffering for millions of indigenous peoples in Asia. Further, climate change impacts are exacerbating the difficulties already being faced by our communities including discrimination, displacement, political and economic marginalization, lack of social services and unemployment, among others.

We are aware and we experience an alarming increase in diseases associated with increasing temperatures and vector-borne and water-borne diseases like cholera, malaria and dengue fever; extreme and unprecedented cold spells resulting to health problems (e.g. hypothermia, bronchitis, and pneumonia, especially for the old and

young), loss in biodiversity including indigenous species of seeds and plants due to worsening drought and more forest fires. These indications of climate change also adversely affect the traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples such as subsistence agriculture, shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering, and aggravate crop damaging pest infestations (e.g. rats, giant earth worm), and increase food costs due to competition with the demand for biofuels.

Likewise, we are alarmed and concerned over the increasing cases of human rights violations, displacements and conflicts due to the implementation of so-called climate change solutions being imposed on indigenous peoples without our participation and consent such as the expropriation of ancestral lands and forests for biofuel plantations (sugar cane, palm oil, jatropha, corn and others) as well as for carbon sink, and renewable energy projects (dams, geothermal plants).

We assert that indigenous peoples have so far, been able to manage and protect our resources sustainably throughout the generations. There is no denying the close connection between nature as the source of our life, culture and livelihoods which we indigenous peoples safeguard for our grandchildren's future. We should not be looked upon as just "vulnerable people" but peoples who have invaluable knowledge, values, systems and practices that can provide solutions to climate change.

Aside from our reliance on collective principles, values and worldviews, we have developed coping strategies such as practice of resource-sharing and use of traditional knowledge to locate resources for community use like water; use of traditional self-help methods during disaster; crop diversification to minimize risk of harvest failures; discerning varieties of crops with different susceptibilities to droughts, floods, and pests, or knowing varieties adapted to different locations such as river banks, high mountains, and close to primary forest; improving forest protection and conservation activities, watershed protection and restoration of already degraded ecosystems; adaptation of climate-resilient crops; and awareness-raising and solidarity actions to address the concerns of indigenous peoples.

We are concerned that the global climate change we are now experiencing is the result of the failure of a development model which is contingent on using up natural resources with no consideration for sustainability and social equity. Corporate greed and control over resources have rendered our national decision-makers powerless in the face of pressure from industrialised nations.

Highlighting the indivisibility and importance of political, cultural, social, and economic rights, these consequences especially underline the discrepancy between human rights and environmental governance. It also demonstrates the political divide in approaching the issue of development. It is time to reverse the course of development: to adhere to mutual support, collectivism, spirituality, subsistence and sustainability to which indigenous peoples have always subscribed.

We demand the full and effective implementation of the right to consultation, participation and free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples in all negotiation processes, and in the design and implementation of measures related to climate change.

Affirmation to the solutions to address the effects of climate change must be holistic, coherent and respectful of the rights of indigenous peoples. It also should not be limited to Western scientific knowledge, but must include indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge, innovations and practices, which have historically contributed to the efforts of conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity in our territories.

We challenge States to abandon false solutions to climate change that negatively impact on indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, air, oceans, forests and territories. These include nuclear energy, large-scale dams, geo-engineering techniques, "clean coal," agro-fuels, and market-based mechanisms such as carbon trading, the Clean Development Mechanism, and forest offsets.

Any outcome of the negotiations currently being held and the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) should include indicators on the extent to which indigenous peoples' rights and safeguards are respected, and non-carbon benefits are ensured.

We urge Parties to establish a specially dedicated fund to be directly accessed and managed by indigenous peoples from developing and developed countries to enhance and further develop our adaptation capacities and to strengthen our traditional knowledge and livelihoods, which we have sustained for generations but are now threatened by climate change. Parties should also ensure direct access to already existing climate funds including the Green Climate Fund.

Finally, we call on the States to have the political will to commit to identified targets that will keep the temperature increase below 1.5 C degrees. The common but differentiated responsibilities must be upheld with clear commitments and actions by all parties. This is the time for action! The protection of indigenous peoples and sustainability of the planet are not up for further negotiations.