



# CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY, MANIPUR

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## PRESS RELEASE

The Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur in collaboration with the Affected Citizens of Teesta, Sikkim and the Borok Peoples Human Rights Organization, Tripura and Civil Society Women Organization, Meghalaya organized the North East India Consultation on protection of Indigenous Peoples' Land and Human Right from 4<sup>th</sup> till 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023 in Imphal, Manipur.

Mr. Jiten Yumnam, Secretary, CRA, Manipur shared that there is increased targeting of the land, rivers, forest and natural resources across North East for dam building, energy projects, extractive industries, false climate change solutions with increased financing of international financial institutions and undermining indigenous peoples rights.

Mr. Gyatso Lepcha of the Affected Citizens of Teesta, Sikkim, shared that indigenous peoples land, water, rivers is sacred. Sikkim already experienced disaster and social impacts due to large dams. Dams entail building multiple infrastructures, roads and high voltage transmission and distribution lines that added to the disaster potential and social impacts. Corporate bodies while benefiting from dam building remains unaccountable for the violations.

Ms. Agnes Kharshiing of the Civil Society Women Organization, Meghalaya shared that extensive mining in Meghalaya caused massive environmental destruction and impact on people. Beautiful hills and forest are being destroyed and plundered in Meghalaya for mining. Traditional decision making process has been undermined. Policies on mining has been framed without the people. Uranium mining plan in Meghalaya will destroy land and forest. Mining does not benefit the people, but the corporates and elites. Community leaders are attacked for raising the unsustainability and myriad impacts of mining.

Robin Moran, Environmentalist from Assam shared that Dehing Patkai National park has been source of livelihood of indigenous communities. Mining concession and oil exploration has been pursued inside the park without the consultation and consent of the indigenous peoples. Pollution due to coal mining caused health disease, heart diseases, lungs, cancer and other skin diseases. Oil pipelines pursued through Dehing Patkai area will destroy forest.

Niranta Gohain, Environmentalist from Assam shared that the Baghjan Oil spill in Assam in 2020 affected the wetlands and community livelihood sources and land rights in Dibru Saikhowa National park. Oil India Limited is exploring oil in core zone of Dibru Saikhowa national park. The oil spill has caused massive environmental destruction and the Oil India Limited continues to fail to rehabilitate and compensate for the damages.

Ms. Bhanu Tatak of Dibang Resistance, Arunachal Pradesh shared that the proposed 2880 MW Dibang Hydroelectric project and 3097 Mw Etalin Hydroelectric project will destroy forest and fragile biodiversity in Arunachal Pradesh. Emergency laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 and National Security Act, 1980 are applied to promote unsustainable energy projects and to create fear within affected indigenous peoples.

Mr Anthony Debbarma, Borok Peoples Human Rights Organization, Tripura shared that several memorandum of agreement were signed with the Government to push for oil exploration and creation of oil pipelines in Tripura without recognizing the rights and consent of indigenous communities. Indigenous human rights defenders are targeted to attacks and arbitrary arrest for defending their land and resisting corporate expansion in indigenous land.

The participants resolved the following statement and resolutions:

We, the indigenous representatives from the States of Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur in North East India affirm our inalienable rights over our land, forest, river and resources. Our land is fundamental for our livelihood, culture, identity and future. We call upon the Government of India to recognize indigenous peoples' self-determined rights over our land and resources in North East.



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We call on the Government of India to revoke plans to build the 520 MW Teesta IV Hydroelectric Project in Sikkim, the 2880 MW Dibang dam, 3097 MW Etalin Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh, Umngot dam in Meghalaya, 1500 MW Tipaimukh dam, 190 MW Pabram dam, Irang dam etc in Manipur. We are concerned with mega dams built and proposed over the rivers for submerging our land and displacing our people, for desecrating our cultures, causing flood and loss of biodiversity. We call to stop all false projection of large dams as climate change friendly in North East India.

We call to stop mining and oil exploration in entire North East pursued without peoples consent. The intensification of mining in North East including to mine coal, chromium, uranium in protected areas such as Dehing Patkai National Park in Assam is alarming. Stop illegal coal mining in Meghalaya and Assam.

The oil and gas exploration involving multinational companies unleashed environmental impacts, such as due to Baghjan Oil spill in Assam. The Oil India Limited should rehabilitate all affected communities and provide reparation and compensation for the damages inflicted by its Baghjan Oil spill.

We call to stop palm oil cultivation due to potential impact on forest, water, biodiversity, undermining food sovereignty and even worsening climate change. All Agri business with involvement of corporates and International financial institutions should be regulated to ensure accountability of corporations.

We call up on to stop all forms of forced eviction and to end all form of threats to indigenous communities living and depending on forest. We urge upon the government to solve the problem of land resettlement of the indigenous people of Laika-Dadhia forest village in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Assam.

We express our concern that mega infrastructure projects, high voltage transmission and distribution lines, Trans-Asian railway and road projects are pursued in fragile geology, high seismic and biodiversity rich area in North East, which induced disaster, such as Marangjing Landslide of 29 June 2022. The Northern Frontiers Railway should compensate for the land damaged and lives lost due to Marangjing Landslide.

The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, KFW, Germany and other international financial institutions that financed sectoral projects in North East etc should uphold indigenous peoples' rights and adhere to their safeguard policies and human rights standards.

The corporate bodies are benefiting from the destruction of indigenous peoples land and resources in the pretext of development even as the land are destroyed and people suffer. We call to establish mechanism to ensure corporate bodies accountable for their violations and to uphold transparency and human rights.

We call on to recognize the role of indigenous human rights defenders campaigning for just and sustainable development in North East. We call for a desist targeting all indigenous human rights defenders in North East to arbitrary detention, threats, intimidation, torture and to ensure their safety.

Unsustainable development also intensify the militarization process in the region. We call on to stop militarization in North East. Repeal Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967, National Security Act, 1980, that are applied to target Human Rights Defenders in North East. Rescind neoliberal development policies, New Land Use Policy, Draft Forest Policy etc. We call upon the Government to ensure the full functioning of indigenous human rights organizations.

We call upon the Government to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 and recommendations of all UN human rights bodies in all development processes affecting their land. We will appraise all indigenous human rights mechanisms on indigenous peoples' situation in North East.