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Forced Incursion of Multinational Corporations and Militarization among Borok Minorities in Twipra (Tripura), India

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to take the floor. I am Kabita Jamatia representing the Borok Women's Forum of Twipra. My Organization works for the rights and recognition of identity of minority people who are known as Boroks and Kok Borok is their mother tongue.

The present Twipra is the smallest hilly state in the north east region of India which is bounded by Bangladesh on three sides, north, west and south. The former princely state of Twipra was one of the most ancient princely states of the world. According to the "Rajmala" or the chronicles of Twipra the princely state was ruled continuously by as many as 184 Borok kings with sovereign and independent states prior to its merger with Indian union in 15th October 1949.

After the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, there had been continuous influx of foreign nationals into the state particularly the Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh. Consequently, the foreign nationals systematically began to dominate all spheres of life like political machineries, economic centers, administration etc. in Twipra. This is the root cause of the unrest of the Borok people in their own ancestral homeland today. In fact, due to all these reasons the right of Borok peoples to development are being violated by the Government as well as by majorities. There has been no protective measure taken either by the state government or the central government. Today the Borok peoples, once the absolute majority ruling their own kingdom, have been marginalized and outnumbered by the refugees and immigrants from across international borders. From 99% before the merger, today the indigenous population constitute only about 31% of the total population of the state.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to bring two important concerns of the Borok people. One is the forced entry of foreign Multinational corporations and, second is massive Militarization and human rights violations perpetrated by the paramilitary forces specially Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Tripura State Rifle (TSR).

The encroachment of foreign corporations have caused the Borok to lose their identity as new culture also come in and our indigenous name of places and concepts are erased and replaced by foreign names. This is a clear violation of Article 1.1. of the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities.

A particular example is the Dumbur Nagar Hydro Electric project which has caused massive displacement of Boroks on the pretext of development. Dumbur is a misnomer, its original kokborok name is "Dongor". It was one of the most fertile lands in Twipra and was called the granary of Twipra. The peoples in this area were self sufficient and were contented with the way they lived. But in 1971 under the Chief ministry of Late Sachin singh during the congress regime in Twipra a dam was constructed over the rivers Raima and Saima junction (Gumti) for hydro electric project. As the dam was set up over the rivers the water level raised and gradually the entire area of Raima and Saima valley, including Borok villages, submerged. The Borok peoples inhabiting in the area were forced to leave their homes. To drive away those who chose to remain, the government dispatched police, central reserve police forces, armed forces with elephants and committed all sorts of atrocities including burning villages, summary execution, illegal detention upon the innocent Borok inhabitants. Borok Peoples Human Rights Organisation (BPHRO) have documented these cases.

It is true that there has been a rehabilitation and resettlement of evicted residents. But these are only token measures, as people were relocated to hilltops without water and no means of livelihood. Human rights figure noted at least 20,000 Boroks as victims. Most of them have become landless labourers and internally displaced in their own homeland and some of them had migrated to neighboring north-eastern state of India i.e. Mizoram and Assam and even to Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Massive scale of displacement in the name of developments have been happening to Borok people. The construction of airports in Khowai, Komalpur, Kailashahar; the building of a defense colony and air force base for emergency landing at Sardhu Karkari; the wildlife sanctuaries in South Tripura Districts; the Gas Thermal projects and cattle farming in Agartala Sub division of Tripura, are just a few instances.

Militarisation in Twipra (Tripura)

The Tripura state government has declared all Borok inhabited areas as “Disturbed Areas” since 16th February 1997. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958 has been enforced and the National Security Act (NSA) is also in operation. Due to the imposition of the Black Laws in the Indigenous peoples inhabited areas, socio-economic lives of the people have been adversely affected. The Borok people by nature mostly depend upon forests and forest produce as their sources of livelihood. But now they cannot move freely into the forest as they are often branded as extremist or sometimes even being killed by the security forces. The security forces are also stationed in the government school building and health centers. An immediate instances of these is the Twidu Bari Primary School and Health center in Amarpur Sub-Division of South Twipra.

To date, hundreds of innocent people have been killed due to armed conflict and thousands are in jail and police custody. All sorts of military oppressions from arbitrary arrest, extra judicial killing, rape cases, arsons and enforced disappearances are very common in Twipra. It has created psychological effects on the people and particularly on the minds of the young children.

Mr. Chairman, the Declaration on the Rights of minorities is clear and specifically provides that States shall ensure the protection of minority peoples including the preservation of their culture. Relevant articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) especially Article 27; the International Convention on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR); Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) all protect the rights to non-discrimination of minorities.

Therefore, I appeal to you, Mr. Chairman, that the government of India be pressured to take the following actions.

1. The immediate cancellation of licenses of foreign Multinational Corporations and the return of Borok lands to the rightful claimants, the Borok peoples.
2. The immediate cessation of government military offensives in the Borok territories and rehabilitation and reparation for victims of military abuses.
3. Stop further migration of foreigners to Twipra (Tripura).
4. Call on the relevant UN Committees and agencies to take up the issue of the Borok people as urgent. Further, calling on the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous People to take urgent action and launch a fact finding mission to Tripura.

Thank you.

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