Madam Chair,

Indigenous knowledge is a complex body of wisdom, skills and practices developed over the ages from our distinct relationships with land and nature and our understanding and respect for biodiversity and human nature. These body of knowledge has been transmitted from one generation to the next through our education systems, self-governing institutions, songs, stories, dances, weaving and other customary art and practices that is both sacred and practical. Though mainstream western knowledge has dominated the global discourse, we believe that indigenous knowledge is key to arrest the rapid loss of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and in good governance and democratization.

In Asia, where more than two-thirds of world’s indigenous population lives, with around 411 million people, many States and mainstream societies recognize the contribution of indigenous peoples such as their cultural, health and medicinal practices despite the fact that many States do not and are yet to officially recognize indigenous peoples and our rights in line with international human rights standards, particularly the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

However, livelihood practices such as shifting cultivation are not only misunderstood but even criminalized. As a result, many indigenous communities face legal problems like eviction, imprisonment and other penalties. Legal impositions have also been placed on our food security through restrictions on seeds and traditional liquors, which affects our ways of food sovereignty. Our justice system and idea of crime and punishment is very different from the State system. Our customary laws and governance systems, including dispute resolution methods are not recognized and accepted and often is contradicted and challenged by State mechanisms.

As a result, our justice system, indigenous knowledge in Asia, including languages, resource management systems and food sovereignty, is under great threat.

Indigenous women’s role in maintaining, preserving and developing indigenous knowledge, particularly relating to natural resource management, cultural and health practices and food security, among others is key to restoring and resolving the environmental challenges the world face today. Thus, restrictions on traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples greatly affect the rights and well being of indigenous women.

Nonetheless, indigenous peoples and organizations have undertaken various initiatives to maintain, conserve, protect and develop our knowledge infernally and in cooperation with government authorities and development partners. Many of those initiatives have produced significantly good results. Such initiatives aim at preservation and promotion of indigenous languages and cultures, food systems and livelihoods, traditional medicines and healthcare practices, natural resource management and customary governance, among others. Some examples are the Sekolah Adat (indigenous schools) in Indonesia, cultural revival and alternative education works in Thailand, codification of conservation taboos of the Chakma people in Northeast India and Bangladesh, customary institutions of Naga people in northeast India and native courts and customary laws in Malaysia, among others.
We thus urge the Permanent Forum to call on the States to:

1. Undertake comprehensive examination at national and local levels, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women, and their organizations, on the importance of indigenous traditional knowledge for indigenous communities as well as for the broader societies and the challenges faced for the preservation and promotion of such knowledge.

2. Immediately halt restrictions placed on the practice of indigenous traditional knowledge in laws and in practice.

3. Recognize and support the initiatives undertaken by indigenous peoples for preservation and promotion of their knowledge.

4. Last but not least, on the Food Sovereignty, we would like to encourage the UN to start the real action by providing and or allowing Indigenous culinary as the daily menu on the UNHQ at least during the UNPFII. It will reflect our cultural diversity and help to promote variety of diets from various indigenous peoples and will support our course on the protection of our land and territories. We are willing to work together and support the UNHQ in the realization of this recommendation. Let's start the real action on the food sovereignty from the UNHQ!"

We urge the Permanent Forum to encourage the UN system to make more efforts to facilitate implementation of the above recommendations.

Thank You

Delivered by: Abdon Nababan