

Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus
Opening Joint Statement
7th United Nations Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, Asia-Pacific
17 September 2025, UN Conference Center (UNCC), Bangkok, Thailand.

Distinguished Panelist, Participants, and My Indigenous Fellows,

Indigenous greetings!

I am Toni Chiran, belonging to the Garo Indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh, speaking on behalf of the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Caucus together with my colleagues in this Forum. We meet at a moment of reckoning. Crises and conflicts across the world and in our region are shaping how businesses operate and how States respond. Governments are expected to close gaps in human rights protection, scale up accountability, and implement their commitments. However, instead of progress, we witness backsliding - States promoting harmful business practices while treating voluntary National Action Plans, with little regard for Indigenous Peoples' rights, as great achievements even a decade after the UN Guiding Principles were adopted.

Across Asia and the Pacific, Indigenous Peoples face threats of erasure. In Bangladesh, the Santal and other indigenous communities, both in the Plain and CHT regions, are at risk of losing their lands to an Export Processing Zone and rubber plantation and development projects undermining food security, cultural identity, and self-determination. Similar ordeals are reported from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines - stories of dispossession, criminalization, violence, and impunity linked to mining, dams, plantations, and so-called development projects. Under the banner of "just transition," our lands are being targeted for more mineral extraction and energy projects, while our right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is routinely denied. Dams and large-scale mineral extraction are false climate solutions - continuing a model that prioritizes profit over people.

But Indigenous Peoples are not only victims - we are solution bearers. For generations, our knowledge, governance systems, and stewardship of lands and waters have sustained life. We offer tested and just pathways for biodiversity protection, climate resilience, and a truly sustainable energy transition. What is needed are direct partnerships with Indigenous-led institutions, direct financing for our initiatives, and genuine recognition of Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders and decision-makers.

We therefore urge:

For Business:

- Respect Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and our right to self-determination.
- Establish transparent, gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms, provide effective remedies, compensation, and restitution.

- Disclose full environmental and social impacts, with gender-disaggregated data.
- Conduct human rights due diligence across the entire value chain.

For States:

- Recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights, including customary land tenure, and align national laws with UNDRIP and CEDAW GR 39.
- Move beyond voluntary measures - require mandatory human rights due diligence, with civil and criminal liability for harm.
- Ensure effective remedies, legal aid, and protection for Indigenous defenders.
- Reform policies and strengthen enforcement to eliminate rights violations, ensuring coherence across laws and regulations.
- Integrate Indigenous Peoples' rights into National Action Plans.
- Respect and protect Indigenous data sovereignty, and document violations systematically.

For Donors, Investors, and Financial Institutions:

- Provide direct funding to Indigenous-led initiatives for sustainable development and energy solutions.
- Suspend or withdraw investments where credible evidence shows harm to Indigenous Peoples, our lands, waters, and defenders.

Finally, Indigenous Peoples continue to advance in leadership roles. We call for partnerships built on respect, inclusion, and justice - toward a future that is truly sustainable for all.

Thank you.

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