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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 August 2014]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Indigenous Peoples on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The indigenous peoples of the Andaman Islands are in danger. The different groups, the Great Andamanese, the Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese belong to the oldest indigenous peoples of the world. The particularity of them is that for more than 50,000 years they have lived nearly without connection to the rest of the world. Most of the time this isolation spared them from being threatened. The contact with settlers or poachers had a negative influence on the indigenous peoples. Because of their separation they do not have an immune system suited for contact with outside influences and cannot repel simple and common infections like the flu or measles. Alcohol or drugs were introduced to the peoples and led them into addiction. Lawfully, the peoples are protected by the Indian “Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes regulation” (ANPATR) from 1957. In reality, not even the Indian government cares about that decree, since the islands became more interesting in matters of tourism and economical exploitation. For long time, India isolated the islands on purpose because of their strategic importance. Close to Thailand and Myanmar, India built several military bases. Suspecting spying, they encapsulated the islands. Fortunately for the indigenous peoples.

Threatening political changes in India

This year, the situation of the indigenous peoples of the Andaman Islands became even worse. Two members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the elections, one for prime minister and one for the seat of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Parliament. Before it, Narendra Modi and Bishnu Pada Ray both announced that they want to open up the islands for tourism even further. Bishnu Pada Ray stated in his campaign pledges that he plans to remove the Buffer-Zone of the indigenous territories and wants to integrate the peoples into the mainstream. He also wants to enlarge the Andaman Trunk Road that goes through the territories of the Jarawa people. The Andaman Trunk Road was in the headlines in the past two years for being the way of “human safaris”. Tourists will be taken through the jungle in huge cars to monitor and photograph the members of the Jarawa. Allegedly, there are hundreds of vehicles on a daily basis. The alternative sea route around the islands, which was planned for 2015, is in a stalemate. It would be cheaper, faster and more comfortable, but there are supposedly not enough boats. Presumably, a remedy by the administration to stop the building of the sea route and to maintain the lucrative Andaman Trunk Road, that the indigenous peoples are protected by law comes not even up.

Exploitation of the Jarawa

Early this year, the British newspaper “The Observer” printed an interview with a Jarawa man, who came out of his jungle home to talk to the editor of the newspaper “The Andaman Chronicle”, Denis Giles, about the sexual exploitation of Jarawa women and girls by settlers and poachers. They would enter their territories, he said, and they would use drugs and alcohol to make the girls compliant. He also complained that the outsiders are not respecting the territorial borders and that they would traffic with the Jarawa. All of this activities are strictly forbidden by the decree of 1957 that should guarantee the protection and isolation of the indigenous peoples. After the publication of the crimes of the “human safaris”, the Indian Supreme Court banned them, but canceled this ban because of affirmations of the Andaman and Nicobar administration. As said before, neither the new Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, nor the holder of the parliament seat for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have any interest in protecting the indigenous peoples. The conservation of the way of living

of this groups stands in contrast to their political intentions. The BJP is not known for its engagement for the ethnic minorities in India. So they are still held responsible for the violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in the federal state Gujarat in 2002.

Dangerous contact

For the indigenous peoples of the Andaman Islands, it is absolutely necessary to stay isolated from the civilized world. It is furthermore essential for their survival. At the time the British conquerors took a step on the white sand of the islands for the first time there where nearly 10,000 members of indigenous groups alive. Today, there are not more than a few hundred. Ever since, they were decimated by infectious diseases and sexually transmittable diseases, like syphilis and HIV, by drug and alcohol addiction, abuse and violent conflicts with the settlers. Their territories are shrinking every year. The environment, on what the indigenous peoples are dependent, is more and more destroyed by deforesting, fishery and poaching. Their birth rates are already very low. Besides all that, there are the wretched “human safaris” and the sexual exploitation and an island administration that tries to hush up all the intrusions. If the Indian government realizes its plan to open up the islands even more and to expand the tourism, the indigenous peoples will probably be exterminated very soon.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of India to:

- Ban the “Human Safaris” on the Andaman Trunk Road and close the road completely,
- Finish the construction of the alternative sea route and bypass the traffic in this direction,
- Widen out the Buffer-Zone around the territories of the indigenous peoples and secure there is no contact to them,
- Enforce the “Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes regulation” (ANPATR) in practice and furnish proof about it.