



**South Asia Forum For Human Rights**

G.P.O. Box 12855, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: +977-1-5541026 Fax: 5527852

E-mail: [south@safhr.org](mailto:south@safhr.org) Website: [www.safhr.org](http://www.safhr.org)

## **New Delhi Resolution, September 30th, 2006**

**{This Resolution was drafted and finalized at the final workshop on Europe-Asia Exchange Project on Experiences of the Politics of Recognition, held at Jamia Hamdard University, New Delhi, September 27-October 1, 2006}**

### ***Resolution***

Recognizing, that the situational problems and challenges of ensuring Minority Rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the region are common; that our constitutions provide very weak safeguards and that the rights of minorities enshrined in our constitutions are primarily in the nature of negative guarantees,

Noting that in several of the South Asian states the lack of religious freedom, and rising religious fundamentalism often supported by the ruling elite, has put members of minority religions at great risk;

Noting that members of minority communities are at times seen as enemy agents by the states because of their cross border ethnic linkages

Realizing that Indigenous Peoples are systematically deprived of their right over their homelands, livelihood and life enhancing resources.

Noting that women remain the most discriminated and excluded both by law as well as by social and customary practices

Aware, that the Minority Rights question has a significant trans-border dimension, in that, these are 'kin states' with co-ethnicities, co-religious and co-linguistic communities, and that developments in one country induces a reaction in another;

We, the representatives of various organizations working with minority groups and indigenous peoples, academicians and media practitioners at the Delhi Workshop demand that the governments of South Asian states must take responsibility for their role in creating and perpetuating this situation.

Building upon the resolution of the SAARC Council of Ministers to create South Asian Council on Minorities and seizing this opportunity to engage with the Council of Ministers and the SAARC Secretariat in defining and shaping the objectives and scope of the proposed Council, we the participants of this workshop express our strong support to our governments to set up a South Asian Council on Minorities. We insist that this Council



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must include indigenous peoples in its mandate and be renamed South Asian Council on Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. The Council should consist of not only the representatives of the governments, but independent NGOs and experts, minority and community groups and indigenous peoples must be given a voice and a role in any formulation.

And, at the civil society level, we commit ourselves to creating a regional mechanism for

An early warning system on the violation of the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, and the emerging crisis of minorities/indigenous peoples at risk, with a view to activating cross border civil society solidarities and putting pressure on our governments;

Intervention: field missions- regional fact finding missions, monitoring teams, regional media missions and peoples' tribunals.

Challenging the 'racial profiling' of 'terrorists' which has encouraged racism and xenophobia and put minority groups at risk, this group recommends celebrating and cherishing Diversity as a fundamental value; organizing at the regional level people to people exchanges and dialogue to strengthen the cross border cultural, linguistic, religious and social ties and strengthening the understanding that different community identities are central to the self-understanding of the state's identity;

Preparation of a minimalist **compendium of best practices** in the region on the basis of which a **Charter of Minority Rights and Indigenous Peoples**, can be formulated;

An Advocacy Campaign with decision makers to influence the adoption of benchmark standards; and strategizing to make our governments deliver on the promise of a SAARC Council on Minorities.

### PART III: Operationalizing the Resolution

#### **Tapan made the following points:**

- It is important to have an organization frame. Although, for the last three years, SAFHR has provided a facilitator's role along with partners, it does not have partners in Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. So there is need for a wider network and therefore for formal partners in other countries.
- It is also important to link up with other initiatives/NGOs in this region, and to initiate a dialogue with UN Rapporteurs on Religious Minorities, so that it gives us a frame in which we work.



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- All those involved in this effort need to think about the structure of the network, and then the strategy: (1) What will be the linkages between this network and the government? (2) Can we approve on a structure on the basis of which this network will function? (3) Who will provide secretarial type of facilities, and commitments we get from other organizations? People have to volunteer so the resolution is circulated and the project circulated in other countries. It is also important to note that participants and other organizations have to be involved in this process.
- Prioritisation and strategization: Where are we looking for funding? EU or some other sources? Ethical issues also related to funding—who do we take funding from? Steering group has to be appointed and they need to be given a deadline.

### Assigning of Steering Group

Tapan suggested that organizations from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka should be represented in the steering group as well as one indigenous peoples organization. SAFHR would provide secretarial and communication facilities.

In response to the query of how the Steering Committee would engage with SAARC secretariat, Tapan responded that SAFHR could interact from its Kathmandu office, but partners would have to engage with national governments. Moreover, the network should take responsibility of promoting this project. He suggested that a listserv could be created for this group (initially) and then a web page could be created.

### Organizations that formed the Steering Group were:

1. ASAR, Pakistan (Nighat Said Khan)
2. Nari Pokho, Bangladesh (Gita Rani Das)
3. Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), Sri Lanka (Peter Sinclair)
4. Adivasi Forum, Bangladesh (Binota)
5. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
6. SAFHR, (Tapan Bose)
7. INSEC, Nepal
8. The Other Media, New Delhi (Ravi Hemadari)
9. All India Coordinating Forum of Adivasi and Indigenous People (APEX)



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**Mandate:**

- The Steering Committee will meet within six months and come up with a document on how to functionalise the resolution and finalize organizational structure.
- At the national level, activists need to get together to get input and feedback from other organizations about the resolution.
- The current mandate is to prepare a document, based on the resolution, and circulate it to partners. This document will contain the following:
  - (1) Organizational structure and network
  - (2) Proposal for fund-raising
  - (3) Project of action and prioritisation
  - (4) Proposal for organizing at national and regional level.
  - (5) Mapping of available networks and resources on minorities and indigenous peoples' issues
  - (6) Identifying various UN and other multilateral agencies with which the group should network.
  - (7) Interaction and dialogue at the national level.

**Deadline** for Document including the Mandate: **March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007.**

**Venue:** Bangladesh. Nari Pokho will be host.