**79th SESSION of CEDAW: GENERAL DISCUSSION ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS**

**“*Effective participation, consultation and consent of indigenous women and girls in political and public life”***

Greetings to all!

In India the concept of indigenous people as provided in **Article 1 para (b) of the ILO Convention 107 and Article 1, para (b) of Convention 169,** does not apply as India believes that all Indians are indigenous.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Government of India has taken a stand wherein the concept of indigenous people is not relevant to India, but the State instead recognizes ethnic groups under the category of ‘Scheduled Tribes’.

The Scheduled Tribes account for 8.6 percent of total population of India out of which, women population is around 49 percent. In tribal communities, the role of tribal women is substantial and crucial. They are equally responsible for public activities involving social, economic and political obligations.

The tribal women have been taking active part in political structure of India. They not only turn out to vote but also contest and win elections. The participation of tribal women in local bodies election or Panchayati Raj elections has increased due to the landmark step taken by Government of India through **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** that provides reservation of one-third of total number of seats for women in local bodies.

However, there are some challenges that need to be addressed to ensure their effective participation in public and political life. health, education, economic conditions, basic amenities, access to government Schemes & Resources, violence and discrimination against them, land and property rights, patriarchal mindset etc. are some of the key areas where more attention needs to be paid to ensure their meaningful participation in political and public life.

As a protector and promoter of Human Rights, National Human Rights Commission, India, ensures that the rights of tribal women and girls are protected. The Commission also takes Suo-Moto cognizance in heinous cases of violence or atrocity against tribal women and girls. The Commission on 3rd June, 2021, issued advisory to Government and other stakeholders for ensuring the protection of human rights of all 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the country in context of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Last year also on 7th October, 2020, the Commission while issuing the “Human Rights Advisory on Rights of Women in context of Covid-19”, directed the States & UTs of India to ensure prevention of the spread of Covid-19 in tribal regions and also to ensure that there is no discrimination against the tribal women and girls in accessing to health care.

Indigenous women in India are often excluded from equal representation and participation in political and governance processes. This is re-enforced by the apathy of state/government to fulfil its obligations. The impact of patriarchy and issues of land ownership and inheritance of resources, including participation and representation in political and public life is a continuing issue of concern.

1. [Special Report: Good Governance for Tribal Development and Administration](https://ncst.nic.in/sites/default/files/documents/ncst_reports/special_report_of_ncst/Part-I%20Spl%20Report%20Eng938372792.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)