**Oral Statement Under theme:**

**“Equality and non-discrimination with a focus on indigenous women and girls and intersecting forms of discrimination”**

On behalf of the Inter State Adivasi / Indigenous Women’s Network from mainland India, I Alma Grace Barla, (an Oraon Indigenous Woman) would like to emphasis on few important issues and recommendations:

Firstly, we the indigenous peoples of India, generally known as the tribes, or collectively known as the ‘Adivasis’ (meaning the original or first settlers) and Scheduled Tribes as recognised by the Govt. of India, represent the largest indigenous population of the world (104 million). We indigenous women make around 51 million population; we have glorious past history (unwritten), significantly contributed in the nation building; we are leaders by inheritance, we are educated, yet, rarely get opportunity to represent us in the UN Forums like this. Our issues and concerns are often represented by the non-IPs therefore I must thank you for giving us this opportunity. **This also relates to CEDAW Article 8, i.e. equal opportunity to represent and participate at national and international forums.**

Secondly, the govt. of India has been taking up lots of efforts to improve the socio-economic situations of IW through its various programmes and policies – but it seven decades of country’s independence and development, thousands of our adivasi/indigenous women and girls not yet reached to schools, health centres, do not have social and economy security. We are the guardians of the forest and biodiversity, yet we become encroachers in the hand of the govt.; we are uprooted from our own land and identity; forced to migrate to cities for livelihood; physically, sexually, and economically exploited on the hand of employers, by the human traffickers, including the State’s repression in the name of Naxalism and Extremism. Thousands of IW are tortured and killed branded as ‘Witch’ just to suppress their power. Thousands of our women continue to bore the brunt of Domestic Violence. Both the formal justice system and the customary / indigenous institutions have failed in providing fare justice to IW.

For the Adivasi/indigenous women in India, gender-based-violence and atrocities are shaped not only by gender based discrimination within and outside community, but also in the context of ongoing caste-class struggle, militarization, racism, social exclusion, poverty, hegemonic power dynamics etc. which often remains invisible and make it extremely challenging for us to access the legal system and receive justice.

We recommend the committee:

1. To improve legal and justice system of the country with proper consultation with the indigenous communities with equal participation of women and girls. Also examine customary institutions and strengthening them.
2. To emphasis on the cultural rights of indigenous women inherently tied to their land, territories, and resources
3. To promote and strengthen traditional knowledge, skills to ensure indigenous women’s health wellness.
4. To ensure equal representation and meaningful participation of IW in all decision making process concerning their issues and development
5. State should conduct survey / document cases of violence against indigenous women and girls and create dis-aggregated data to assess their situation and take necessary measures to improve the legal system.

Thank you.

On Behalf of the Inter State Adivasi Women’s Network

Mainland India