



Mr. Parshuram Tamang

Nationality: Nepal

UNPFII Portfolio: Economic and Social Development, Environment and Traditional Knowledge

PROFILE

"We are all aware that the Permanent Forum cannot meet the entire aspiration of all indigenous peoples but it is the only body within the United Nations where indigenous peoples are being represented," says Pashuram Tamang, the indigenous peoples representative from Asia. He is from the Tamang indigenous people of Nepal. They are one of the fifty nine indigenous peoples recognized by the Nepalese Government.

For many years Pashuram has been an indigenous activist. He has worked not only in his country but around the world for 25 years. A graduate of Tribhuvan University, he has been both a high school teacher, senior university lecturer of economics, manager of a cooperative agricultural development bank in his hometown, and an executive secretary of an International indigenous peoples Organization. He is a founding member of indigenous peoples organizations both in Nepal and in other parts of Asia.

As a scholar, Pashuram is the author and editor of many publications on indigenous issues in his country. He was for many years a political activist and has tested the arm of the law in his country for his struggles for democracy and a multi-party system with the hope of bringing changes to help indigenous peoples.

How does Pashuram feel after all the struggle for the cause of indigenous peoples now that he has been appointed as an expert representing his peoples? "I feel privileged to serve the indigenous peoples of my country and my continent and also the rest of the world. But despite our joy we still have challenges and many problems ahead of us. For example while we are meeting here within the United Nations family, so many of our indigenous brothers and sisters and children are facing the adverse impact of racial discrimination, religious persecution, economic marginalization, globalization, political oppressions and all forms of ethnocidal attacks. Fifty percent of the world's languages -- mostly indigenous languages -- are dying within 20-30 years. The accelerating speed of poverty is causing displacement from our lands. The present environmental degradation has direct and adverse impact on indigenous peoples, especially the indigenous women and children. The wars and the armed conflicts in the indigenous territories are costing the lives of many indigenous peoples."

Pashuram says that it is high time we maximize our opportunities as indigenous peoples. indigenous peoples are now at the United Nations and they should use their talents, wisdom and be creative. Pashuram came to the United Nations system in 1993 after participating in a human rights conference in Vienna. Since then he has never looked back. He sees a similarity in all indigenous peoples from his travel and work experiences. These similarities are the ones that have earned us the Permanent Forum and all we have to do now is work together. The problems of identity and the question of who is indigenous and who is not, in both Africa and Asia, is an issue that Pashuram would like to see tackled. Governments from both continents should recognize the existence of indigenous peoples and allow them to participate effectively in decision-making.

It is important also to acknowledge that the Governments of Nepal and the Philippines have already recognized the existence of indigenous peoples in their countries. This should continue in other countries. However, Pashuram encourages indigenous peoples from these two regions to work together and form strong organizations and networks to help to advocate and lobby for their rights. The struggle has to continue. We are reminded that the International Decade of the World's indigenous peoples proclaimed that the goal of the decade is to develop cooperation between the international community and indigenous peoples, a partnership in action to solve the problems faced by the world's indigenous peoples. The United Nations and international organizations must be constantly reminded that these people exist and have to be recognized and treated like other citizens. It is also important for indigenous peoples to work together in order to prove their ability. The nation states have created an ideology which encourages one language-one nation and this causes a big problem that denies indigenous peoples a right to their language and culture.

There is no great job without challenges. Pashuram believes some of the challenges are:

- The institutionalization of the Forum, establishing a separate secretariat.
- Securing adequate funds and developing a strategy for the Forum.
- Mainstreaming of indigenous peoples in the United Nations system and in the local, regional and national governments by formulating policies and programmes.
- Developing a mechanism to address social, economic, political development of indigenous peoples world wide.

"All these can be achieved if there is support from all. It's a collective responsibility to make the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues succeed."