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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Prajachaitanya Yuvajana Sangam, 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.

[18 May 2017]

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

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Chenchu primitive tribal indigenous group- diminishing life expectancy

India has the largest concentration of Tribals in the world population and is considered an Anthropological laboratory because of its regional, religious, ethnic, racial and linguistic diversities. There are nearly 427 types of Scheduled tribes in India, while only 35 types of Scheduled Tribes in states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, nearly 83 % of Chenchus population is found in the districts of Kurnool, Prakasam and Guntur which adjoin the ancestral land of Nallamalai. In the Kurnool district, the Scheduled Tribe population was 69,635, of them Chenchus are 7,915. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has categorized the Chenchus and identified as Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) along with the twelve other groups.

Chenchus are one of the extremely backward Scheduled Tribes in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The Chenchus are Telugu speaking people. These people origin some legend through animals and vegetation. It is stated that the name Chenchu is derived from a person who was under a tree i.e. chettu in Telugu. Very little is known about the history of the Chenchus. The epics (Manusmriti) and other popular stories revealed that the Chenchus are the first dwellers of the Andhra region, much earlier than the Dravidian stock. Thurston (1909) quotes different accounts to delineate ethnic affinity with the Irulas, the Sugalis and the Yanadis. However, the Chenchus of Nallamalai hold no such connection with these tribes. The Chenchus of A.P. are one of the ethnic splinter groups were left behind by the material advance of great majority of the south Indian populations and are one of the extremely backward Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

Introduction About Chenchu Tribes-The Chenchus (Indigenous Primitive Tribal Group) are a designated Scheduled Tribe in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha. They are an aboriginal tribe whose traditional way of life has been based on hunting and gathering. The Chenchus are referred to as one of the Primitive Tribal Groups that are still dependent on forests and do not cultivate land but hunt for a living. The Chenchus are a Telugu speaking food- gathering tribe living in the Nallamalai forests of Andhra Pradesh in India spread over the districts of Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool, Prakasam and Guntur. They are a conservative tribal group and have not made many changes in their lifestyle or tried to adapt to modernity. They live in the enclosed space and geography, leading a life of an unbroken continuity.

The Nallamala forests are deciduous and deep. They cover mountain side, and are full of treacherous pathways and dangerous ridges. The Chenchus are undaunted by their natural surroundings and set out to gather food or hunt animals. The bow and arrow and a small knife is all the Chenchus possess to hunt and live. They hunt wild animals like boar and deer, but with the increasing interest in wild life conservation, they are content to hunt small animals like lizards, rabbits and wild birds.

Their meal is fairly simple and usually consists of gruel made from jowar or maize, and boiled or cooked jungle tubers. They mix tamarind fruit with tamarind ash and eat. This is especially good for pregnant women. They normally eat before setting out to gather food in the morning and eat again when they return home in the evening. This speaks of the enormous stamina of the Chenchus who trek on foot through jungle paths all day long. The slender build of their bodies is deceptive and express little of their strong and resilient nature.

The Chenchus collect jungle products like roots, fruits, tubers, beedi leaf, mohua flower, honey, gum, tamarind and green leaves and make a meager income of it by selling these to traders and government co-operatives. The Chenchus do not care much for money or material wealth. They have hardly developed any technique of preserving food. Their care for future is marginal as they are used to living on a day-to-day basis. As a result they have not cultivated much interest in agriculture. Though at times they work as forest laborers, they mostly prefer to fall back on their native skills to hunt and gather food. But the inroads of modern development have found their ways to the Chenchu homeland. Today, the forest region no longer belongs to the Chenchus. It has been declared as a tiger reserve sanctuary. The government has been motivating the Chenchus to adapt to agriculture, but has failed. The Chenchus refuse to be displaced from the forest and continue to live in harmony with the tigers in the sanctuary.

Centuries of life in the forest have deprived the Chenchus of an ability to adapt easily to external situations. Though some of their children are sent to government schools, there are very few instances of educated Chenchus finding their way into mainstream modern society. The Chenchus are struggling to adapt to new patterns of life as the forest resources dwindle with time.

The roots are strong and the bonding to an age-old tradition is deep and abiding. The Chenchus continue to live contently in their ancestral homeland as true sons and daughters of the forest to celebrate the joys and gains of life. A Chenchu village is known as "Penta". Each penta consists of few huts that are spaced apart and are grouped together based on kinship pattern. The close relatives live nearby and the distant ones farther away. Their homes comprise of few belongings and are generally sparse and spartan in appearance. "Peddamanishi" or the village elder is generally the authority to maintain social harmony in a family or a village. Generally, his counsel and word are final in all matters of the village.

Chenchus have not been able to develop socially, educationally, and economically along with religious circumstances on par with other tribal groups of A.P. due to their isolation and habituation to live in hilly and in accessible forest areas. The Government has been making a lot of efforts for the overall development of these primitive tribes over decades. Different developmental programs have been introduced by the Government for the development of these tribes such as ITDA, GCC, FD, IKP and MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) which influenced the Chenchus and changed their attitude, behavior towards family, health and education, secularism, democracy, social image and group identity in terms of new ecology

Developmental programmes

ITDA (Srisailem PTG-Chenchu Project) (Integrated Tribal Development Authorities), a Government of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States organisation was created for implementing the developmental programmes for Chenchus such as agricultural subsidy, free oxen, agricultural implements, seeds fertilizers, irrigation facilities, health and education etc. The Integrated development agency (ITDA) is coordinating the efforts of government agency and the non government schemes to the maximum extent.

Ten major problems faced by Chenchu population due to lack of awareness on basic health, education, sustainability and other aspects of importance-itda srisailem jurisdiction:

- Illiteracy and Unemployment
- Prone to major health issues –malaria,swine flu,HIV,TB,Cancer etc
- Victimisation by Corruption
- Prostitution
- Child labour and Child marriage
- Improper sanitation and Unhygienic environment
- Gender inequality and discrimination
- Poverty and hunger starvation
- Malnutrition
- Child and maternal deaths
- Decreased life expectancy

Our Organization has been closely working for the welfare and development of Chenchu tribals who are living in the deep forest areas of Nallamalla forest under Srisailem area. I would like to bring to your attention of the following issue that needs to be addressed

There is a village in the deep forest area of Nallamalla where 2000 to 2500 chenchu indigenous tribals live in that forest village named as Pallutla chenchugudem. Till date, there is no electricity, road connectivity, communications network, health facilities, proper education facilities, in that village. These tribal people have to walk for 40 kilometres to fetch rice and other groceries amidst the dangerous forest. In the recent times, many chenchu tribals who are sick have died in the half way while transporting them from their village to district hospital by walk. As there is no road connectivity and the way to that village is full of rocks, medical and health and other department persons are not reaching to them, as a result many people are dying due to small ills and dysfunctions of health.

Laying of a proper road to their village will almost solve all problems related to education, health, poverty, sudden deaths, economic growth etc.

During the times of election, political party representatives come to this forest village in Helicopters and canvas about their party and request for votes and also make promises that next time the roads will laid to their forest village.

In this regard, the civil, political, cultural, educational, health, development rights are deeply violated and there is an urgent need to protect and promote the rights of these indigenous chenchu tribals for achieving sustainable development as their life expectancy is decreasing .

I am sincerely urging for a General debate on this issue so that a sustainable development solution can be processed out for these Indigenous Tribal Chenchu group.
