



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 9

**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

### **Written statement\* submitted by CIRID (Centre Independent de Recherches et d'Initiatives pour le Dialogue), 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.

[29 January 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Empowering Indigenous Communities in North-East India for a Sustainable Future**

India's journey towards empowering the indigenous communities of the North-East is a story of resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment to cultural preservation.

North-East India, nestled amidst soaring mountains and verdant valleys, pulsates with the diverse rhythms of hundreds of distinct tribes, each with its own unique language, customs, and traditions. It is a region where alongside modern aspirations, the ancient wisdom and spirit of community thrives.

However, the journey of these communities has not been without its challenges. Historical marginalization and geographical remoteness have posed significant obstacles to their socio-economic development. Recognizing these challenges, the Indian government has placed the empowerment of indigenous communities at the heart of its development agenda.

Guided by the principles of inclusivity and sustainability, India's efforts are grounded in a deep respect for the unique cultural identities of these communities. This respect is reflected in the establishment of autonomous councils, empowering them to chart their own development trajectories. It manifests in the protection and promotion of tribal languages, ensuring they are not lost to the winds of time. And it shines through in the celebration of indigenous festivals like Hornbill Festival in Nagaland and Chapchar Kut in Tripura, where ancient customs come alive, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

However, recognizing culture alone is not enough. To truly empower these communities, India has embarked on a multi-pronged strategy, aligning its efforts with the global goals enshrined in the SDGs 2030.

Firstly, the focus is on eradicating poverty and hunger. Microfinance initiatives like the Self-Help Group program are providing communities with access to credit, enabling them to launch small businesses and become self-reliant. Skill development programs are equipping individuals with the tools to access better employment opportunities, while agricultural initiatives like the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture and Mission for Development of North-East are transforming subsistence farming into profitable ventures.

Secondly, education is seen as the bedrock of progress. Residential schools are bringing education to the remotest corners of the region, while scholarships and affirmative action policies are ensuring equitable access to higher education. These efforts are already bearing fruit, with literacy rates in North-East India steadily rising above the national average.

Thirdly, India is committed to ensuring good health and well-being for all. The Ayushman Bharat scheme, the world's largest healthcare insurance program, is providing comprehensive healthcare coverage to millions, including those in the remotest tribal villages. Additionally, efforts to improve sanitation, hygiene, and access to clean water are yielding tangible results in reducing communicable diseases and improving maternal and child health.

Finally, India is committed to preserving the ecological heritage of the region. The North East India Biodiversity Act, 2002, empowers local communities to conserve and manage their natural resources, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come. This commitment is further exemplified by the creation of numerous national parks and protected areas, safeguarding the region's unique flora and fauna.

These efforts are not merely statistics on a page; they are stories of transformation unfolding across the hills and valleys of North-East India. As a nation, India is not complacent and recognizes that the journey towards empowerment and well-being of people of North-East India is an ongoing process and believe that empowering indigenous communities is not just about fulfilling obligations under the SDGs, but about upholding the fundamental right to cultural identity and a life of dignity for all.

As Mahatma Gandhi, the architect of India's independence, famously said, "A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." It is by nurturing these hearts and souls, especially those belonging to indigenous communities that the idea of building a truly inclusive and vibrant world will come to fruition.