Baguio City Philippines– June 16, 2008 – sixty one (61) participants from 11 countries all over Asia met for an Asia Workshop for the Promotion of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Camp John Hay, Baguio City from June 7-11, 2008. The participants came from different IP organizations, various non-government organizations (NGOs), UN agencies and other multi-lateral agencies. It was made possible through the efforts of the Tebtebba Foundation, Cordillera Peoples Alliance, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN).

The activity opened the eyes of the participants on the actual state of the Indigenous peoples in Asia with regards to the implementation of the UNDRIP, the declaration that is supposed to safeguard their rights.

It is the main objective of the activity to know how the international mechanisms work in relation to the UNDRIP and to come up with realistic strategies on how to promote its implementation.

In the sharing of current situation of IPs from participating countries, it appeared that majority of the Asian countries have yet to implement the UNDRIP in their countries. Aside from the Philippines who have the Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA), only Nepal has a legally binding instrument that focuses on the right of indigenous peoples by ratifying the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169.

It is common among the country reports presented that there are problems regarding the control of indigenous peoples over their lands, territories and resources. Indigenous peoples in many Asian countries experience lack or no access to quality education, health and other basic social services. These are aggravated by human rights violations, development aggression, resettlement problems. The same factors are leading to increasing poverty incidence among the majority of IPs in Asia.

The four-day activity ended in simultaneous workshops where the groups were tasked to do an action planning on particular themes in relation to the promotion of the UNDRIP. These groups focused on 1) Gender: Empowering Indigenous Women, 2) Status and Distinctions of IPs and Challenges for the recognition of their Collective Rights by States, 3) IP Struggles NS 4) Solidarity and Networking and Building Partnerships with UN Agencies and Advocate Groups.

The last and maybe the most important part of the activity was a plenary on action planning by level (local, national and regional) and by theme (health, education, Land and resources, Human Rights, Socio-economic development and self determination. There was a strong clamor for more research on the status of implementation of UNDRIP and the actual situation of IPs in Asia, for policy advocacy/and stronger lobby on reviewing existing laws on IPs and making new ones if needed.

While majority if not all countries (except Bangladesh) signed the UNDRIP, there is still a need for wider dissemination and advocacy of the declaration and other related policies that safeguard IP rights to the local communities, to national and international agencies, NGOs, church and academic institutions and other related organizations. This strategy aims to build awareness on the local, national and regional level.

It was also reiterated in the action planning the need to include health and education of IPs in all the Millennium Development Goals of all countries. As such, there is a possibility of a stronger lobby for higher budget allocations for the said government services. As climate change is being identified as exacerbating factor to livelihood and other socio-economic problems of IPs, the participants suggested that climate change should be included in all local, national and international forums.

Lastly, the need for further strategies to strengthen IP communities was deemed very important. Being subjected to more vulnerability of harassment and other kinds of violations,
IP women need empowerment too. Part of the strategy in empowerment is the establishment and strengthening of traditional IP practices to be recognized by the States like traditional healing practices and judiciary system. Connected to this is the expressed need for a vigorous transmission of indigenous knowledge and practices to younger generations.

The workshop ended with a resolution as a summary of the four-day workshop and as signed petition in support of the UNDRIP as an international tool in the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples rights. It ended with fervor as all the participants were hopeful for a wider and stronger network of Indigenous peoples who will work hand in hand for the promotion of not just the UNDRIP but the rights of IPs as part of the human race.