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Technical assistance and capacity-building

### **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.

[21 May 2017]

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

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## **Koya indigenous tribe- integrated tribal development agency, Eturunagaram forest area**

### INTRODUCTION

The Koya Indigenous tribes mainly inhabits the hilly areas of West Godavari, East Godavari, Khammam and Warangal districts and are sparsely found in Adilabad and Karimnagar districts. The Koya population as per 1991 Census is 4, 56,496 in Telangana. The Koya live in the forests, plains, and valleys on both sides of the Godavari River, which lies in the central Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Many also live in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The Koya are one of the few multi-racial and multi-lingual tribal communities in India. Most Koya speak either Gondi or Telugu.

Since India's independence from the British in 1947, the Indian government has increased its influence over the Koya. As a result, the Koya have rebelled numerous times. The Koya resent the restrictions that have been placed on their use of reserve forests and distillation of liquor. They also resent the hydroelectric projects and rehabilitation of refugees in their land.

### OCCUPATION

The Koya are primarily farmers. They once shifted from one plot to another, farming various areas. However, the government has now restricted their movement and has encouraged them to farm on fixed plots. They showed the Koya how to farm coconut and coffee. They also granted the Koya permanent ownership rights to their land if they would grow rice there.

Because the income from farming is very low, many of the Koya who do not own land work as hired farm laborers. Others weave bamboo baskets and sell them at the weekly markets to Hindu merchants. They also are excellent hunters. Good hunters are regarded as heroes. Hunting is valuable to provide food and protection from wild animals. Many still use bow and arrows for hunting and to attack their enemies. Koya gather forest produce to supplement the vegetables grown in their home gardens. Cattle are symbols of wealth, and they are kept for their dairy products, meat, fertilizer, and trade. They are also used in religious sacrifices.

### BELIEFS

The Koya practice their own ethnic religion, but also worship a number of Hindu gods and goddesses. Many Koya deities are female, the most important being the "mother earth." Sacrifices are carried out by the village priests. The Koya do not believe in heaven, hell, or reincarnation. When a person dies, his body is carried on a cot which is covered with grain, liquor, new clothes, money, and a cow's tail. At the appropriate place, the cot is faced towards the West, and the body is burned. The ashes are placed in a clay pot. The Koya believe that their spirits either linger about the clay ancestor pot, patrol the sky over the village, or wander about the village disturbing daily life.

On all social and religious occasion, liquor plays an important role among the Koyas. The "Ippa Sara" or the mohuva drink is purely an intoxicating beverage. The Koyas consume mohuva liquor to get relief from the physical hardship of the day and to withstand extreme variations in the climate

The sense of supernaturalism is strongly rooted in the Koya's concept of nature. They worship personal spirits which are thought to animate nature. They also believe in evil spirits that are dangerous to the harmony of group life. The traditional medicine man "Buggivadde" and the sorcerer "Vejji" are supposed to ward off all kinds of evil spirits

The customary law of the Koyas ensures communal ownership of natural resources administered by the village headman known as "Pedda". The pedda is the senior-most person who first settled in the village and established the village Goddess. The position is held by descendents of the same family. Pedda controls the social, political and religious activities in the village. The village panchayat consisting of the other members (Pina pedda, Vepari, Pujari, etc.) deals with minor problems.

The political system of the Koyas is slowly accommodating the process of colonization of agency tracts by non-tribals. The traditional systems of mutha and panchayat are slowly losing their autonomy. Among the Koyas there has been an

increase in landless population in recent years. Many of the landless are becoming agricultural labourers. In Chinthur mandal, about ten percent of the population work as wage labourers in the forest for more than six months a year. Though the Koyas have the tradition of safeguarding their forests, due to the conditions of alienation from the land and forests, they are now slowly being reduced to wage labourers, engaged in cutting and loading of timber, firewood and bamboo for industrial requirements. This work is purely temporary and does not provide any steady income. There are several changes occurring in the subsistence pattern among the Koyas. The changes in occupational pattern from agriculture to wage labour are leading to changes in their social traditions.

There are also severe disturbances in marital life due to non-tribal exploitation of women. The panchayat system now is generally weak in arresting non-tribal intrusion and exploitation. There is a process of low productivity trap in agriculture of the Koyas which is a consequence of a complex set of phenomena. The population pressure, the limited availability of land for cultivation, total dependence on rain for irrigation, industrial deforestation and the modernization and "development" process have all affected the autonomy of the Koyas and the integrity of the traditional social system is fast being broken down and is rapidly fading away.

But through generations of trial and error in the face of adverse conditions of the climate and the cultural contact with non-tribals, the Koyas have evolved a unique pattern of adaptation to the environment through their various internal social arrangements and belief system. With every change in the productive technology and economy there will be a corresponding change in man's dependence on nature and with every change in the relationship between man and his environment there is a change in the man to man relationship.

#### MEDARAM JATARA-KOYA INDIGENOUS TRIBE RELIGIOUS FAIR

Sammakka Sarakka Jatara- Koya Indigenous Tribe Fair, is the time for the largest tribal religious congregation in the world, held every two years (biannually), with approximately ten million people converging on the place, over a period of four days, which is 90km from Warangal city. The Sammakka Sarakka Jatra is a State Festival of Govt. of Telangana. Many tribal Devotees from different states of India (M.P, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka and parts of Jharkhand) reach to the festive place to celebrate the Jatara. People offer bangaram/gold (jaggery) of a quantity equal to their weight to the goddesses and take holy bath in Jampanna Vagu (stream). It is a festival with no vedic or brahmanic influence. An estimated 10 million people gathered in 2016. It is celebrated in Medaram during the time the goddesses of the tribals is believed to visit them. Medaram is a remote place in the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of Dandakaranya, the largest surviving forest belt.

Koya indigenous tribals are still following the ancestral beliefs especially in women child delivery times, health disparities and also follow black magic and superstitious rituals to cure basic and serious health problems, due to which any of them are dying. This is happening due to lack of basic awareness of information knowledge on health, education, poverty eradication, sustainable development etc.

The famous Medaram Jatara-Koya Indigenous tribal fair attracts more than 10 million people which is held for every two years in the Medaram Forest area and this is the best platform for raising awareness among the koya indigenous tribal community on health, education, welfare schemes, agriculture and development issues.

The next Medaram Jatara Fair will be held in January 2018. Our organization have conducted various awareness programs in the past fairs and I am requesting you to provide our organization, Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Etrunagaram, Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Telangana with Technical Assistance and also strategies that will be useful for the capacity building of the Koya Indigenous Tribals who are still very backward in economic, socio-political and cultural condition.

In this regard, I am requesting to provide Technical assistance and other Capacity Building support frameworks to our Organization and Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Etrunagaram, Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Telangana, India as the Collaborated Information education Communication activity will have drastic and remarkable impact and change on the Behavioural Communication Change on the lives of Koya Indigenous Tribal People in various aspects of development and welfare.