

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Eight session (23 July - 3 August 1990)
Agenda item 5: review of developments

POPULATION TRANSFER AND INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES

Worldwide, indigenous and tribal peoples are to an increasing extent affected by various outside imposed policies. The result is an unprecedented global destruction of indigenous and tribal cultures. While this planned development may be beneficial to the nation-state as such, almost in no case do any of the benefits reach the peoples affected.

One of the more important of these policies is what in this context will be called population transfer. This term will be taken to mean state-imposed resettlement of people, normally taking place within state boundaries. As will be evident, this does not include necessary resettlement following natural disasters. Population transfer affects populations economically, politically, culturally, and ethnically speaking. It is possibly the largest and most important cause of the ongoing and accelerating destruction of indigenous and tribal peoples.

This statement focuses on the serious negative impacts of population transfer on indigenous and tribal cultures. It furthermore raises concern over the effects of this on the future viability of indigenous and tribal cultures. Instead of a sectoral, country-by-country approach as has been the case so far in the deliberations in the Working Group, this statement argues in favor of an alternative thematic and cross-cultural approach that may prove more productive.

1. REASONS

Population transfer is used as a means to achieve various goals, including: (a) counter movements for self-determination, (b) impose a single dominant culture, (c) facilitate resource extraction, (d) accomplish various strategic goals, and (e) relieve population pressure (at least in theory).

2. FORMS

There are several forms of population transfer. These forms are clearly not isolated from each other. People who

are forcibly removed from one place can for example also be seen as induced migrants.

2.a. Induced immigration

In many cases governments induce and facilitate people to migrate to a target area, by threat or by promise.

Examples include induced migration of Bengalis into the territory of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, of Han and other non-Tibetans into Tibet, and Javanese into the outlying islands of Indonesia. In some cases the indigenous and tribal peoples become a minority in their own territory as is the case with the Manchurian in Manchuria, and will be the case with the Papuas in West Papua.

2.b. Forcible removal

Many indigenous and tribal communities are forcibly removed for strategic and other reasons. In some cases the relocation is organized within so-called villagization programmes.

Examples include Kurds shifted by the Iraqi government, the Ethiopian government's resettlement programme, and the United States of America's relocation of indigenous Americans.

2.c. Involuntary resettlement

Involuntary resettlement is seen as the forced relocation of people as a consequence of planned development. This type of planned development is found worldwide, and in the current development aid set-up it is financed under both bilateral and multilateral agreements, including the World Bank and regional development banks. This form is most often found in cases of large infrastructural projects in the energy and water resources sectors, but it is by no means restricted to this.

Examples include the Narmada project in India. Here the construction of large dams will lead to the flooding of vast areas of agricultural land and the displacement of very large numbers of tribal peoples.

3. IMPACTS

The impacts of population transfer are often analysed in the following categories: social, economical, environmental, psychological, and cultural impacts.

The most important impact of population transfer on indigenous and tribal peoples is the loss of their

traditional homelands. This can be further exemplified as follows: (a) adverse effects on traditional means of subsistence, (b) dispersion of communities and kin-ties, (c) destruction of the culture, (d) exposure to new diseases, and (e) apathy and increase in for example crime rates.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward:

1. The Working Group is asked to recognize that population transfer as presented and defined above is an especially serious and important issue, and to express its concern for and interest in the issue. As a consequence a reflection of this should be included in the report of the meeting.

Furthermore, the Working Group is asked to adopt a recommendation regarding population transfer as follows: "In many cases population transfer undermines the human rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. The Working Group urges Governments to adopt legislation to prevent this."

2. It would seem that the present concern with population transfer in connection with indigenous peoples is absent from the Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights. Because of its importance and impact, the problem of the causes and consequences of population transfer should accordingly be specifically mentioned in the Draft Declaration. This can most feasibly be done under Part III, article 17, to be inserted after "... any large-scale projects, particularly ...", as follows: "... population transfer with adverse effects, ..."

3. The problem of population transfer merits further attention. The Working Group is urged to recognize the need for further work on this, and to encourage detailed studies of population transfer.

A first step could be to arrange a seminar with especially invited experts in order to arrive at an overall comparative perspective and construct a framework and focus for further work.

As a further step it is recommended that a study be prepared concerning population transfer. The study should be inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and comparative in approach. It should focus on locating and describing the causes and consequences involved, as well as analyzing them in the light of concrete case studies. The possibility of constructing a generalized model of population transfer should be discussed. The aim of the study should be to arrive at new insights and understanding of the economic and political processes

involved, on the basis of which existing policies can be improved.

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