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One Hundred and Twelfth Congress

## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on “Indigenous People in Asia” B318 Rayburn HOB – Tuesday, July 26, 2011 – 10:00-11:30 AM**

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Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I would also like to thank Molly Hofsommer and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for coordinating this hearing, and I especially want to thank our witnesses for their attendance.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to bring attention to the many human rights issues facing the indigenous groups of the world. This is the final hearing in a series which we have held, and this time we will be looking at indigenous groups of Asia.

It is estimated that the indigenous people of the world number somewhere between 300-500 million, occupy 20% of the land surface, and live in nearly all countries on the planet. However, there still is no universally agreed upon meaning of “indigenous” which has been the source of many of the problems facing native groups including lack of recognition by local governments, no access to justice, and loss of land.

In Asia, there are over 700 indigenous groups consisting of an estimated 250 million people, making it the most culturally diverse region in the world. Despite this diversity, the indigenous groups of Asia face many of the same challenges. High poverty rates, low life expectancy, malnutrition, extrajudicial killings, and forced disappearances, are just some of the many problems facing indigenous people in their day to day lives.

Some Asian countries have enacted legislation to provide protections for the indigenous groups of their state. However, in many cases these regulations are either looked over or ignored, or groups are only considered to be minorities which does not provide the same protections they would otherwise be entitled to. The way of life for these indigenous people is threatened by forces of change in the name of development and globalization. Populations are seeing land loss, population growth, warfare, environmental degradation, and economic marginalization.

Today, in addition to a general overview of the situation in Asia, we will be investigating the groups of the Adivasis in India, the Royhinga of Burma, and the native peoples of the