

An Open Communiqué to the IUAES Commission Heads, Members of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) and to the Global Anthropology Fraternity

Greetings and good wishes during these Covid Times!

This communiqué comes from the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), the Departments of Anthropology of Utkal, Sambalpur, and Delhi Universities, and the United Indian Anthropology Forum, representing the Indian Anthropology Fraternity, all of whom being either the legally mandated partners to organize the IUAES World Anthropology Congress 2023, either directly or indirectly as the main organizer or as collaborators, or as its main stakeholders. These institutions, for the reason stated, are either directly or indirectly affected by the unprecedented, unilateral and undemocratic decision of the IUAES Executive, first to withhold KISS from being part of it, and later to deviate from every other aspect of the original decision, including the place, collaborators, theme, and even the dates. Since this was totally in contravention to the mandate of the IUAES General Assembly at Florianopolis, Brazil in 2018, these institutions are determined to hold the Congress, keeping intact, every aspect of the original decision, as per the original proposal.

The purpose of this communiqué is to apprise you of the factual situation regarding the 2023 IUAES Congress and request you to take cognizance of the grave condition which was solely the making of the IUAES Executive.

You are welcome to correct us if you believe that there is anything erroneous or untrue or based on misinformation on our part; and if not, we wish that you do all that you can, to undo the damage done to the World Anthropology so that to restore the credibility of the subject, in the eyes of the global academia in general and of the general public in particular, and to do justice to the Indian Anthropological Fraternity, by extending your whole-hearted support to us, even while persuading IUAES Executive to come to terms with the reality, for the sake of upholding the interest of the subject and of its stakeholders in the present and the future.

Coming to the Issue:

Once the venue has been decided by the General Assembly of the IUAES through a democratic process after strict scrutiny and short-listing of nominations, any alteration or change at a later stage by the IUAES Executive Committee is both unprecedented and unheard of, and not at all provisioned in the Constitution of the organisation.

- Even if someone argues for a case, – in the event of so severe a situation that has developed or come to light in the period of the post-General Assembly Meeting, under which the execution of the original decision would severely question the very integrity of the subject, – that it warrants the intervention of the IUAES Executive to exercise its power, if at all the IUAES legitimately possesses such power, to bring about an amendment to the original decision, the fairest thing the IUAES Executive could have done is to initiate a fair and fact-finding investigation of the claim in a purely anthropological spirit, taking all the stakeholders into confidence, and come to a fair and acceptable decision with the consent of all parties concerned.
- Not only the IUAES Executive failed to take, even the minimal steps required to authenticate the reality, in the true spirit of anthropology, but it had gone to the extent of ignoring the continuous individual plea of the hundreds of Indian anthropologists of high reputation, and of the several reputed Indian Anthropological Associations and also of their joint statements with the endorsement of the majority of the Indian Anthropological fraternity, not to take any hasty decision that would jeopardise the very interest and integrity of the subject, and of taking a unilateral decision to drop KISS, one of the reputed educational Institutes in India and the main and legitimate organizer of the 2023 Congress, from organizing it, throwing to winds all ethical and democratic standards to dust.
- Such a unilateral decision had not only put the reputation of the particular Institute at stake, but also that of the Indian Anthropological fraternity and of the nation as a whole, resulting in rejecting the IUAES EC decision by the other co-organisers of the Congress, led by the Departments of Anthropology of Utkal University and of Sambalpur University, leaving behind the third co-organiser of the Congress, the Indian Anthropology Association, – that had been disowned and rejected by the very Department of Anthropology, Delhi University to which it is supposed to be rooted in, not only on account of the several complaints received against the unlawful functioning of the organization including the several unilateral decisions at the level of leadership with no sanction whatsoever from the General Body or the Executive Body of the organization, but also because of the dubious role of the leadership in the unethical decision of the IUAES Executive.
- The decision of the IUAES Executive which has been unfair, undemocratic and unethical to the core, is most unfortunate, and unacceptable to the Indian Anthropological Fraternity, bringing about only a reverse effect, and boomeranging as a historic blunder.

Even then, keeping the interest of the subject alone in mind and with an inclusive paradigm, there had been several efforts and appeals to the IUAES Executive to reverse the decision but of no avail

- Two of the three architects of the proposal for the Congress in India, namely Dr Achyuta Samanta and Prof Deepak Kumar Behera are on one side, and Prof Soumendra Patnaik who had been accommodated in the IUAES Executive as an Ex-officio representative from India, solely based on the recommendation of the former, is on the other side.

- On 1 Aug 2020, there was a communication from the President of IUAES, to Prof Samanta, in which he says that after a long and hard deliberation, taking all factors and arguments into account, we finally reached a conclusion and decision that we need to withdraw our collaboration with your respected institute in regard to hosting the World Congress in 2023, even while conveying the message that they are fully aware that KISS is highly successful and admired by so many. In our considered view, this letter is a first-rate example of utter cowardice and of the double standard, and unanthropological in its core, with its paradoxical claim and intrinsically contradictory observation.

- The IUAES President did converse with Prof Deepak Kumar Behera, on 7 August 2020 in which Prof Behera pleaded

- 1) to honour the decision of the General Body so that to avoid all legal complications,
- 2) to have a virtual dialogue with senior Indian anthropologists on the issue,
- 3) to send a delegation to KISS for empirical verification of the reality,
- 4) to listen to the voice of the Indian Anthropologists, and
- 5) to wait at least for a month before making any announcement. Unfortunately, the IUAES Executive had taken no cognizance of any of the pleas put forth by Prof Behera.

Starting from the open letter of Prof Sahay to the numerous communications emanated from hundreds of Indian anthropologists who included the reputed and seasoned Anthropologists such as Prof PK Misra and Prof RK Mutatkar, the former Vice Chancellor of Utkal University for culture, Prof KK Misra, the incumbent Vice-Chancellors of different Universities including Prof PC Joshi, Prof Sabita Acharya, and Prof KK Basa, some of whom had also held high level positions in the leading Anthropological Institutes of the country such as the Anthropological Survey of India, National Museum of Humankind, and Indian Museum, the higher level functionaries of various Indian anthropological Associations including Prof Subho Ray, Prof Rajat Kanti Das, Prof Jibonkumar Singh, Prof Vijay Prakash Sharma, Prof S Gregory and many other reputed Anthropologists, and former and current professors of different Departments of Anthropology and

Heads of different National and State level Institutes, including late Prof Vinay Kumar Srivastav, Prof Sarit Kumar Chaudhury, Prof Shalina Mehta, Prof Arbind Sinha, Prof AB Ota, Prof PK Singh, Prof Paparao, Prof Hussain Khan, Prof Venkata Rao, Prof HK Bhat, and scores of other Anthropologists of all ages and cadres across the country, who have all emphatically expressed their voice that the IUAES should not deviate from its original mandate awarded to KISS as there had been no merit in the allegations laid against it mostly by non-anthropologists, and rejecting them to be far from empirical reality.

- A joint statement was sent by Prof Behera, with endorsement by a large number of senior Anthropology professionals, and Indian Anthropological Associations, in mid-August 2020, expressing disappointment and perturbation over the uncertainty created concerning the organization of ICAES 2023, and again insisting that the IUAES Executive Committee makes a committed declaration that it stands by the decision made by the IUAES General Body at Brazil in 2018 as any deviation from it would only amount to the assault of our collective consciousness and wisdom and our adhered ethics, and our very faith in IUAES.
- A similar Joint Statement was sent by the Member Secretary of the United Indian Anthropology Forum, on behalf of the community of Indian anthropologists in India, comprising of more than 200 senior professors, Young Anthropologists, and seven reputed anthropological societies in India, representing more than 2000 Anthropologists in all, on 27 Aug. 2020, expressing once again, similar sentiments with a repeated plea and appeal to revoke the unfortunate and undemocratic decision to block KISS as the organiser for the ICAES 2023, in the best interest of the IUAES as a democratic organization, and to allow the Indian anthropologists to organize the Congress the way it had been presented in the Brazil Congress, and which was overwhelmingly accepted by the General Body.
- Furthermore, a petition was submitted with the support of more than 300 and odd Anthropologists through change.org to the President, IUAES, with the appeal to revoke the undemocratic decision of the Executive Committee, IUAES, on 17 September 2020.
- A letter by the Secretary of the ALL Odisha Adivasi Forum with nearly 4500 signatures had also been submitted to the President, IUAES, on 5 August 2020. Strongly refuting the allegations, and in support of organising the Congress at KISS.

It is hard to believe that such a reputed International Anthropological Organization like IUAES could be so insensitive to the plea of its fraternity, and ignore even the voices of the very indigenous people, the lives of whom had been a great concern for the subject since its origin.

- Surprisingly, even the appeal of Prof Sumita Chaudhuri, one of the Vice-Presidents of the IUAES Executive Committee and an anthropologist from India, requesting wider consultations before taking a final decision had not been given due consideration by the IUAES Executive.
- There were many overseas Anthropologists including Prof Anand Singh from South Africa, who is familiar with the Indian reality, who had pleaded for sticking on to the decision of the IUAES General Assembly, no other than which would be acceptable to the Indian Anthropological Fraternity.
- Another overseas scholar, Dr Christine Finnan, the Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Charleston, who was fortunate to spend about six months at KISS as a Fulbright Nehru Research Fellow and brought out an ethnographic account of KISS, based on her personal experience, had dismissed the allegations against KISS, and pleaded for upholding the mandate of the IUAES General Assembly.
- **It is a matter of surprise and dismay that the IUAES has taken to believe hearsay accounts than the facts presenting the ground reality based on an anthropological investigation by an anthropologist herself!**

It is natural, in all fairness to expect an honourable and convincing response from the World body when it receives such an overwhelming protest against its undemocratic decision. Unfortunately, however, there was hardly any response whatsoever, from IUAES to the appeals and apprehensions raised by the scores of Indian Anthropological fraternity and Associations, which the Anthropological fraternity deserve. It shows nothing but an utter disregard and insolence from the World body to one of the largest contingents of fellow Anthropologists, representing India and hence it could be construed as an insult to the nation as well, which cannot be expected at all from an anthropological body.

While not heeding to any of these pleas from the Indian and the overseas Anthropological Fraternity, while resorting to taking such an unprecedented decision, it is only natural to expect that the Executive does take the Commission Heads, and other global Anthropological associations, into confidence and initiate a wider consultation, through an online meeting, which has almost become a new-normal during Covid times. But we doubt that even that happened either.

On the Allegations against KISS

The petitioners, almost all of whom have nothing to do with Anthropology, have made four major allegations against the host institution KISS. Those are

- (1) Cultural Genocide
- (2) De-tribalization
- (3) Hinduaization of Tribes, and
- (4) Factory School.

Though on the surface of it, the allegations might look very disturbing, it would not have any merit if any of these have not been substantiated by empirical evidence and subjected to closer anthropological scrutiny. The available facts and the empirical study by Dr Christinne as well as the first-hand experience of some of the very functionaries of the IUAES Executive, as evident for their discourses and deliberations during their visit to KISS, during and after the IUAES Inter-Congress in 2012 at KISS, would vouch for the falsity of those allegations.

In the first instance, it should dawn to our minds that if KISS is guilty of any atrocities it is accused of, it would not have opened its doors at the first instance, to the world of Anthropology. Moreover, if the Congress is held at KISS, there could not be a better opportunity for the visiting Anthropologists than directly experiencing what KISS does and stands for, and suggest ways and means to improve upon its existing status.

However, for the present, we can rely on the two scholarly publications, one by the insider on 'Holistic tribal education' and the other by the outsider, on 'Total institution as a castle of hope', the reading of which emphatically suggest that the KISS experiment looks to be largely to the benefit of the tribal upliftment, with minimal negatives though, as in any initiative, there would always be a scope for further improvement.

KISS' Association with IUAES

KISS had been awarded by IUAES to host the Inter Congress of Anthropology in 2012, the theme of which was "Children and Youth in a Changing World". Prof Behera played a key role in the organization of the Inter-Congress at KISS, during which all the participants having their expertise in Children, Youth and Childhood, interacted with the children and youth of KISS had all been in praise of KISS' initiative and expressed their great satisfaction.

It was this positive response that boosted KISS' interest in bidding for the World anthropology congress at the Manchester Congress in 2013.

The IUAES did not find any problem at that point of time and allowed KISS to compete with others. Unfortunately, there was another contender for the same from India and the choice went for Brazil.

KISS waited for its next opportunity; Fortunately, there were two vice Chancellors with Anthropology Background in Odisha, one being Prof Behera and the other Prof Patnaik, both of whom, along with their respective Universities joined KISS' initiative to bid for the 2023 Congress, at the Brazil Congress.

Again, the IUAES did not have any problem with KISS and it was allowed to compete, and it had won the bid by a huge margin

Prof Junji, the incumbent President of IUAES had the first-hand experience of this in 2012. To the best of our knowledge, he did not have any objections to KISS as a venue then – because he did not voice anything negative. That is why he allowed KISS to bid for the 2018 Congress in Manchester in 2013 even though he had one entire year to decide against KISS if he had any objection.

In 2018 in Florianopolis, Prof Junji once again allowed KISS to bid for the Congress. That gave him a further 5 years to object to KISS if he wanted to. The General Body voted in favour of KISS then.

KISS was again given a platform in October 2019 to make a presentation on the progress of the World Congress in the General Assembly of the Poznań {Poland} Inter-Congress.

The IUAES Executive expressed their satisfaction with the progress of the preparation for the 2023 Congress.

But it was only in 2020, two years after the decision of the IUAES General body that Prof Junji and the IUAES Executive decided to go along with certain nefarious objections to KISS as host for the 2023 Congress.

Paradoxically, Prof Junji, the incumbent President of IUAES, who was one of the key participants of the Inter-Congress organized at KISS in 2012, was all praise for the yeomen service that KISS is rendering to the indigenous children.

It was the same story with other functionaries of the IUAES Executive, including its present Secretary General Prof Noel B Salazar, or its Senior Vice President Prof Subhadra Chenna Mitra, or the estranged ex-officio Vice-President, Prof Patnaik, who

had all experienced the hospitality of KISS at one time or other, and who had all witnessed at first hand, the kind of activities that KISS has been engaged in, and had been impressed upon, and expressed their deep appreciation of the KISS' relentless missionary zeal for the cause of the tribal children at all counts.

After all these, turning their backs against the same Institute, based on some frivolous and unsubstantiated allegation is nothing but a betrayal to the core, unanthropological, and unethical to its peak.

It is, therefore, most insulting to an institution that has provided a unique and workable educational model that creatively straddles between the conventional and the modernising change that characterises this world, which has received laurels for its initiatives across the globe, and from great personalities of national and international fame as well as from the national and international organizations and Institutions.

Simply speaking, given the present imbroglio, if someone raises doubts about certain malicious designs against holding the Congress in India, one cannot find fault with it.

Why KISS' interest in and Commitment to Anthropology

- KISS has a special interest in Anthropology mainly because, it is committed to the well-being of a section of society, namely the indigenous tribal communities and of their future generation that anthropology is equally committed to and is concerned with at all times.
- KISS' interest in anthropology is evidence of its openness and honesty to seek anthropological insights in dealing with the tribal children. Its appreciation of tribal values and heritage is evident in its curriculum planning that reflects the tribal input being reflected across academic courses and programmes.
- The very fact that KISS takes interest in anthropology shows its commitment to the anthropological approach and perspective vis-à-vis the tribal people
- KISS has a Department of Anthropology at the PG level.

The chronology of events and the facts clearly point to the failure of the IUAES Executive, which, with its unyielding and stubborn attitude and over-enthusiasm to justify its original blunder, have been making continuous alterations to its decision, finally resulting in the total departure of and deviation from the original decision of the General Assembly.

There was no ray of hope and no positive signal from the IUAES Executive which seems to have been bent on and is determined to stand by its decision, in the process of which it had gone to the extent of deviating from every component of the original mandate of the IUAES General Assembly, starting from the change of venue, change of organizers, change of collaborators, change of the original theme, and whatnot.

This has left the Indian Anthropological Fraternity, today largely represented by the United Indian Anthropology Forum (IUAEF) along with all the major Indian Anthropological Associations and Societies as Associates, and almost all Departments of Anthropology of different Universities across India, leaving with no other alternative but to take a decision, though with a lot of pain, to stand firm with KISS in the organization of the World Anthropology Congress as per the original mandate given by the IUAES General Assembly at the 2018 Congress at Brazil, keeping intact all its original components including its co-organizers/collaborators (except for the IAA), venue, theme and dates, even while, in the absence of any other alternative, KISS itself is simultaneously pursuing a legal solution on the issue, against the injustice heaped upon it by the IUAES Executive by filing a Law-suit against IUAES.

The Department Council of the Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, one of the largest Departments with a Faculty strength of 17 members, and which is said to be the official HQ of the Indian Anthropology Association had unanimously (with the sole exception of Prof Soumendra Patnaik, on whom the IUAES put its entire weight on the organization of the World anthropology Congress in 2023) had resolved to reject the proposal of Prof Patnaik and to extend full support to Dr Achyuta Samanta and to the KISS in the organization of the Congress. This has also been communicated to the President of the IUAES through its mail dated 14 June 2021.

This is nothing but exactly the replica of the mind of the Indian Anthropological fraternity.

• **Could there be a World Congress of Anthropology in India sans the Indian Anthropological Fraternity, the most important stakeholders of the Congress?**

Anthropological ethics demands that everyone who is concerned with the glorious tradition and the humanistic perspective of the subject should speak loud in this time of crisis and to avoid any further damage to the subject at large.

- We are at the crossroads where we need to commit ourselves to speak what Anthropology stands for.
- It was under these circumstances that the undersigned Institutions, with the support of nearly all the major Indian Anthropological Associations, and the Departments of Anthropology, have been determined to stand together and organize this historical event on the same lines in every respect, as per the original proposal mandated by the General Assembly of IUAES.

It is your turn now, to take a historical and informed decision.

- Otherwise, your silence will only widen the divide in global anthropology while your timely intervention might help avert a historic blunder that the IUAES Executive has committed and now in the process of giving it the final shape.

In our humble opinion, there could be only one option in front of you, that is, to take a stand to honour the IUAES General Assembly decision taken at Florianopolis in Brazil 2018, to stand by the Indian Anthropology Fraternity, and support KISS' initiative to Organise the 2023 world Congress and make it a grand success, even while persuading the IUAES Executive in tandem to correct its ways and to come to terms with the reality for the sake of the subject and of its stakeholders in the present and of the future.

The brochure carrying the first announcement of the Congress and inviting the Expression of Interest is attached herewith along with this appraisal.

This Communiqué is intended to have your informed support and participation and for dissemination among your colleagues and researchers to encourage their participation, so that to make the Congress a grand success for the promotion of global Anthropology in general, and of Indian anthropology in particular.

We expect a positive response from you at the earliest, upholding the glorious tradition of Anthropology,



**Kalinga Institute of
Social Sciences (KISS)**



**Department of Anthropology,
Utkal University**



**Department of Anthropology,
Sambalpur University**



**Department of Anthropology,
University of Delhi**



United Indian Anthropology Forum (UIAF)