



MYANMAR

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Statement by Daw Khin Thandar, First Secretary, Union of Myanmar Permanent Mission to
the United Nations
at the Second Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Agenda Item 4(f) : Education

21 May, 2003, New York

Mr. Chairman,

Since this is the first time for me to take the floor, may I congratulate you and all the members of the bureau on your re-election. May I also express Mr. Chairman, our confidence in your ability to guide this Second Session of the forum to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Chairman,

My country, Myanmar lies at one the crossroads in Asia, a tri-junction point between India, china and South East Asia and since time immemorial many migratory waves have passed through Myanmar. Some have chosen to stay and call Myanmar their home. This is why Myanmar is one the most ethnically diverse countries in the world today, with a population of approximately 52 million people, made up of 135 national races. Since we have lived together not for a few hundreds of years but for several millennia, we choose not to differentiate among ourselves on who is or who is not indigenous, instead, we have appreciated and respected each others unique characteristics and cultures. The very fact that so many races and national groups live and exist within a unified country, after living together for several millennia is a testimony to this fact.

Mr. Chairman,

Myanmar is a developing country striving like many other developing countries around the world for the economic and social development of its people. Myanmar is

trying its best and with considerable success to feed, shelter and educate its entire population. In Myanmar the most populous of her national races is Bamar and constitutes approximately over 60 % of the population, while all other national races constitute approximately 40% of the population. There are seven States and seven divisions in Myanmar and the name of the seven States refer to the largest ethnic groups residing in each State. They are Shan State with an area of approximately 60,000 square miles, Kachin State with an area of approximately 34,379 square miles, Chin State with an area of 13,907 square miles, Mon State with an area of approximately 4,748 square miles, Karen State with an area of approximately 11,731 square miles, Rakhine State with an area of approximately 14,200 square miles and the Kayah State with an area of approximately 12,000 square kilometer.

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the wisdom of the Forum on choosing a most appropriate theme for this year's session " **Indigenous children and youth**". Education is the key to development and a better future for children and youth. Therefore, the Government of Myanmar places a great deal of importance on education. One fourth of the Government's budget is devoted to education. Education, since the early days, has been highly regarded in Myanmar. Nicolo Manucci, a Venetian who travelled in Myanmar about 1700 A.D. described the country as "a kingdom governed by the pen, for not a single person can go from one village to another without a paper or writing".

Mr. Chairman,

In the past 15 years, over 5,000 primary schools, 425 middle schools 240 high schools and 128 colleges and Universities have been established across the country. In the recent years peace and stability has returned to the border areas, which until recently had faced decades of insurgency. As a result the Government was able to establish 564 primary schools, 59 middle schools and 33 high schools in the remote border areas, where many of the national groups live. Here it is pertinent to point out that the national reconciliation process pursued by the government, which has resulted to 17½ out of 18 insurgents groups coming back to the legal fold by exchanging arms for peace also have beneficial dividend in other areas, including in the area of human rights. The Special Rapporteur Myanmar Professor Pinhero in his report to the 59th Human Right Commission has made the following observation :- Quote "According to third-party views, it is true that there has been more development, peace and stability in more areas than before and there is more freedom (in relative terms)" Unquote.

Our academic year starts in June every year and according to our figures for last year, as a result of the nationwide school enrollment campaign, a total of 1.23 million children registered in kindergarten classes last year, thereby reaching 93.7% enrollment of the nation's school age children.

The Government has also opened 17 border areas and national races development schools where basic education primary, middle and high school lessons are taught to students to enable them to join the education mainstream. Students who pass the

matriculation examination from the border areas and national races development schools may attend two Nationalities Youth Resource Development Degree College, either in Yangon or in Mandalay or attend 128 other Universities and Colleges.

The leading University for national races in Myanmar is the University for Development of the National Races in Ywa Thit Gyi. This is an Institute established in 1964 for the national races firstly as an academy and was upgraded to a University in 1990. Today this University confers Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate Degrees. Apart from holding degree courses the University also conducts one year and four year primary teacher training courses and special primary teacher training courses. It is the tradition for graduates of this University to be honored with a banquet hosted by no other than the Head of State himself, upon their graduation.

The national races and ethnic groups of Myanmar have their own customs and traditional cultures. These customs and traditional cultures are basically similar to one another but have their own unique characteristics. The Institutes for national races encourages their students to preserve their traditions and cultures as the cultural heritage of Myanmar.

Mr. Chairman,

There has been unwarranted criticism from certain sectors that the most populous group "Bamar" is "Burmanizing" all ethnic groups. This is far from the truth. Whilst the teaching medium in primary and middle schools is the language of the most populous group, Bamar, English is taught in schools from the age of 5 and the medium for high school and Universities is English. The Government encourages the teaching and preservation of ethnic languages and culture. Many major ethnic groups such as the Shan, Mon, Karen and Kachin run languages and culture courses in the summer, for the children and youth. Many thousands of school children and youth have benefited from these language courses, ensuring the perpetuation of ethnic minority languages and cultures.

Mr. Chairman,

Listening to the many speakers before us, we realize that a major aspiration for many of the indigenous peoples from all over the world is to be educated in their own language. We have also noted as nations become more economically developed their capacity to fulfil this aspiration also increase. In this aspect, we come to this forum, to learn and share good practices and experiences from our Indigenous brothers and sisters from around the world.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.