



Address by Myanmar observer to the First Session of the permanent Forum
on Indigenous Issues.

May 22, 2002



Mr.Chairman,

It is an honour to address this First Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, may I express my congratulations to you and all members of the bureau on your election to this important forum .

Mr.Chairman,

As you may know, my country is made up of eight national races, namely, Bamars, Shans, Kayins, Rakhines, Mons, Chins, Kachins and Kayahs. Counting all the ethnic national groups there are a total of 135 national groups. Among us there is no distinct early comers or later coming colonizers and all our national brethren have lived together through weal or woe for many centuries, with neither attempting to assimilate another, each respecting the others differences. Being so, Myanmar by its laws recognizes each individual group. However, since nothing is perfect in this world, there was a time in the past when the national unity and harmony was affected by external factors, which I do not wish to elaborate here. However , the national reconciliation process is now steadily striding ahead.

Mr.Chairman,

Myanmar is a country living today with the affects of unilateral economic sanctions by some powerful countries , even so, we have done the best we can to develop the lives of all the many national races, especially those in far-flung border areas. A Ministry of Progress for the Border Areas and National Races was established in 1992 to further promote the development of National Races in the Border Areas. Believing that education is the best tool to fight poverty and to bring about development, education takes a primary role in our efforts for development , 564 primary schools, 59 middle schools and 33 high schools have been established in the remote border areas of Myanmar with a capacity of 46,108 primary school students, 19,516 middle school students and 3,715 high school students .

Although Myanmar is a developing country with limited resources, we have put the development of the border areas and national races as a top priority and have spent over Kyats 24610.42 Million over the last 13 years for all round development of the border areas and national races.

As a State Party to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which is widely acclaimed to be the most efficiently monitored Human Rights Convention, Myanmar has enacted the Child Law under which every child of each of our national races enjoy equal rights, and in March 2002, we had submitted your second national report. We believe that it is impertinent to guarantee the rights of the youngest and weakest in a nation. Hence, The Child Law has been translated into Myanmar language and six other local languages and is being widely disseminated, to inform every child of their birth rights.

With regards to health care there is a choice of both Western medicine and Indigenous Medicine and there is a separate Department for Indigenous Medicine under the Ministry of Health. Traditional medicine practitioners are recognized and trained at an Institute in Mandalay conferring the Diploma in Traditional Medicine and over 1,000 practitioners have received recognized qualifications. Plans are now underway to confer Bachelor Degrees in traditional medicine. The Ministry of Health has issued "Traditional Medicine Law" and "Traditional Practitioners Association Act" for the development of Indigenous medicine. Since various herbs are needed from these medicines, apart from the traditional way of collecting herbs, over 120 acres have been cultivated in different parts of the country to produce sufficient raw material.

Myanmar is also giving national priority to the various challenges that face the international community. Global challenges, be they the scourge of narcotic drugs, HIV/AIDS and the preservation and conservation of the environment need the concerted efforts of the international community, without politicizing these important issues.

HIV/AIDS as well as malaria, tuberculosis receive top most priority in Myanmar's national health programme and are designated diseases of national concern. We are cooperating with United Nations agencies as well as the NGO community to address these challenges. I would like to mention that Myanmar has also been elected to the Programme Coordination Board of UNAIDS for the 2003-2005 term and that we shall confront this challenge of HIV/AIDS nationally as well as by contributing to the international efforts, as a member of the board.

In conclusion, Mr.Chairman, may I wish the Permanent Forum and all our indigenous brothers and sisters from all over the world, success in finding viable and practical solutions to all the challenges they seek to address, in harmony with the United Nations and all Member States.

Thank you.