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Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative U Mya Than,  
Member of the Observer Delegation of the Union of Myanmar  
to the Eleventh Session of the Working Group on  
Indigenous Populations  
( 29 July 1993 )

WGIP 93 GOV/SEA.MMR/1

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to begin by telling you how happy I am to see you in the chair of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations once again. You have served as the Chairperson/Rapporteur of this Working Group with great dedication and distinction for nearly a decade since 1985. My delegation extends our warm congratulations to you for your substantive contribution to the work of the Working Group. Our congratulations likewise go to other members of the Bureau.

The current session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations assumes special significance in more than one respect. It is taking place at the midway point of the International Year for Indigenous Populations. It also heralds the United Nations Decade for Indigenous Populations beginning 1994 , soon to be designated by the forthcoming forty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Furthermore, this Working Group has been entrusted with the specific responsibility of completing the draft Declaration on Indigenous Peoples at this very current session. We hope that under your wise and able leadership and with the cooperation and contribution of the distinguished participants , this session will have a fruitful outcome , resulting in the successful adoption of the draft Declaration.

This year being the International Year for Indigenous Peoples, we in Myanmar celebrated this important

international event in a fitting manner as part of, and in conjunction with our celebration of the Union Day on 12 February 1993.

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation has at the previous sessions of this Working Group dwelt at length on the racial homogeneity and common ancestry of all the national races residing in Myanmar. I shall, therefore, refrain from recalling the historical and ethnological aspects of the evolution of our Union. Instead, I shall take this opportunity to apprise this Working Group of our ongoing national endeavours in the areas of development, democracy and human rights pertaining to the national races of my country. As you are aware, my country is going through a crucial period of political, economic and social transformations; my country has already adopted a multi-party democratic system in place of one-party system in accordance with the aspirations of the Myanmar people since September 1988. My country has also changed its economic system from a centrally-planned socialist economy to a market-oriented one. Steps are being taken vigorously and systematically to establish a multi-party democratic state. We in Myanmar are now witnessing the convening of the National Convention in order to lay down the basic principles for the drafting of a new multi-party democratic constitution by the representatives-elect.

In this constitutional process, all the national races of the Union of Myanmar are taking their full part as citizens of the Union of Myanmar. In the National Convention itself, currently in session in Yangon, 699 bonafide

representatives of all the national races including the Kayins (Karens) along with representatives from all walks of life and social strata are participating in the monumental task of laying down the basic principles to be enshrined in the State Constitution.

Representatives participating in the National Convention are presently considering various proposals under 15 headings which include, among others, the fundamental principles of the state, promotion of universal values such as justice, liberty and equality, the separation of powers between the legislature, the administration and the judiciary and between the central and states / divisions. One of the objectives of the National Convention is to lay down fundamental principles that will inspire members of national races with a sense of belonging to the Union and a spirit of unity and co-prosperity among them.

This bears testimony to the fact that bona fide representatives of all the national races in Myanmar are taking their full part in the political, economic and social life of the Union and are actively engaged in the current constitutional process. Needless to say, Madam Chairperson, some individuals of dubious character who use to come to the meetings of this Working Group over the past few years and to make distracting noises in this forum are merely political and social outcasts who are out of the mainstream of the developments in Myanmar. They belong to illegal terrorist groups of criminals, fugitives and outlaws. In view of this, the Working Group should seriously reconsider whether it should continue to connive at the presence of those individuals at its meetings. The Working Group should indeed

take action to prevent any further abuse of this forum by those individuals.

Madam Chairperson,

The advent of the State Law and Order Restoration Council marks a high point in our national endeavours for the development of national races. Development of border areas and national races is one of the top priority tasks being carried out by the State Law and Order Restoration Council. This programme, launched in May 1989 is making steady and significant progress. With a view to alleviating the poverty and uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the local populace, the State Law and Order Restoration Council has been implementing development projects , aimed at building the much-needed infrastructure such as the construction of roads, bridges, hospitals, dispensaries and schools in the border areas of 6 States and 1 Division. The magnitude of the work accomplished by the Government in this area can be judged by the fact that from May 1989 to June 1993 the Government has spent a total of Kyats 1205.39 million, which is equivalent to US dollars 207 million on the development of border areas. To make these efforts for the development of border areas more effective, the Government has established a new ministry ,namely, the Ministry of Development of National Races and Border Areas as of September 1992.

In addition to the noble aims I have referred to, our national programme for the development of border areas and national races has another worthy aim ,namely,to combat the menace of narcotic drugs and thereby to rid our land of a social scourge affecting the national races of the Union.

In recognition of the importance and the positive results of this programme, several United Nations agencies including UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, IFAD, FAO and UNDCP have also participated in the programme by contributing financial and technical assistance.

We attach great importance to the right to development-- one of the fundamental human rights to which every one of us is entitled. Bearing this in mind, the Myanmar Government is doing its utmost for the development of border areas and national races on a scale unprecedented in the history of the independent Myanmar.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.