

A submission made by Mr. Neingulo Krome, Convenor, NPMHR, at the 16th session of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Population at Geneva from 27th to 31st July 1998

Madam Chairperson, Respected leaders and Members of the Indigenous Community, Distinguished ladies and gentleman,

At the outset, I extend warm greetings to all fellow Indigenous Peoples from different parts of the world, and the friends of the UN Working Group who have made it possible for us to share this floor to exchange matters affecting the lives of the indigenous peoples, on behalf of the Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) in particular, and the Naga public in general.

For 50 years our people had lived through untold pains and humiliations, which many of you must have heard about already. But today I am not here to recall our sufferings which simply went on and on for the last fifty years.

I am here just to share one point and that is, how the Naga people in the present day situation had tried to find a peaceful solution to the problem. Most of you may be aware that armed conflicts had ceaselessly persisted in the Naga areas all these years, baring a couple of intervals. The civil population and the villages suffered the brunt of the conflicts.

Coming to the point, in July 1997, when the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) declared Cease-fire for three months, the public were up in joy boundlessly and insisted on both the sides to extend the period. And without wasting time, all the social and voluntary organisations representing churches, students, women, village chiefs/Gaon Boras, tribal leaders, human right workers and intellectuals, etc., started meeting to discuss how this new-found PEACE could be maintained. Because, the desire of the people was unanimous, which was and still is a peaceful solution to our problem.

Unfortunately, elections in India for the 12th Lok Sabha and some State Assemblies, including the present state of Nagaland were just round the corner. Everybody knew, if elections were held at this time, the hard won peace will surely be disturbed and sabotaged.

Therefore, a high-level Naga delegation, representing all social, tribal and voluntary organisations rushed to New Delhi, apprised different Indian leaders of our apprehensions and submitted a Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 5th January 1998, with only two specific requests :

1. With-hold the forthcoming General and Parliamentary elections in the Naga inhabited areas and thereby facilitate the talks between the Government of India and the Naga National leaders to take place under a peaceful atmosphere.
2. Extend the cease-fire period which was due to expire on the 31st January 1998 at that time.

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The Naga delegation knew that the Government of India fully understood our apprehensions and concerns. However, they imposed the said elections against the expressed opinion and will of the Naga people.

The only thing left for us to do was stay away and abstain from participating in the forced elections. Three major political parties of Nagaland, including the BJP unit, a component of the present ruling party in India, also declared not to participate and refrained from filing any nomination papers, in favour of a peaceful solution, rather than going for a "super-imposed" election. All Naga National leaders, including the NSCN (I-M), NSCN (K), NNC/FGN also welcomed the decision of the Naga public and expressed their support of not participating in the forced elections. Only the Congress (I) party in Nagaland defied the Nagas and fielded candidates to all the 60 Assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat, with another 20 partyless candidates vying for 17 Assembly seats in a proxy election, to create a semblance of an election being held. 43 constituencies did not go to the polls. In the 17 constituencies a few hand-picked Congress (I) workers and daily wage earners were seen casting proxy votes on payment, throughout the day, which was witnessed by many reporters, observers and journalists from different parts of India. In the Naga areas of Manipur, in both the Outer Parliamentary seat and the Tadubi Assembly seat, Nagas abstained completely.

All this was done as a contribution to the building of a peaceful atmosphere so that political talks between the Government of India and the Naga National leaders could take place.

There can perhaps be no better proof that the Naga people in general did genuinely want a solution to their problem, rather than facing a farcical election. But how far have the people in power appreciated the genuineness of the people's aspirations? And how long can people be subjugated to the whims and fancies of power mongers?

This, Madam Chairperson, is the recent development in Nagaland. Thank you so much for giving me the floor, on behalf of all peace-loving citizens of Nagaland.

Neingulo Krome