

**The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII)  
3<sup>rd</sup> Session, May 10 – 21, 2004, New York, USA.**



**Item (4) Human Rights**

Thank you Mr. Chairman. My name is Atina Gangmei representing the Zeliangrong Women's Union. I am speaking on behalf of my people, the **indigenous Naga peoples**.

The Naga Peoples resistance is one of the oldest struggles in the sub-continent for self-determination against colonization, crossing beyond 50 years and yet it continues to be one of the least known peoples movement to the world.

The Naga Nation consists of about 42 tribes each speaking its own language and dialect, and with a population of about 4 million. The Naga Homeland is occupied by two neighboring countries – India and Burma. The Indian State occupies the western portion and the Burmese State occupies the eastern portion. India and Burma has set up physical and technical barriers to keep the Naga population divided. In 1972 India and Burma marked a boundary line through Nagaland on the basis of these claims which left about 3 million Nagas on the side of India and about 1 million inside Burma. The armed forces of these countries have imposed ban on the traditional free movement of the Nagas across the "international boundary line". The so-called international boundary was drawn without the consent and knowledge of the Naga people.

As part of the policy of occupation, the Indian State further divided the Nagas into four different administrative states in an effort to fragment and dilute the Naga political struggle. The 16-point Agreement arrived at between the Indian Government and Naga Peoples Convention (NPC) led to the formation of Nagaland state within the Indian Union which covers only 16,579 sq kms leaving out a large chunk of our homeland in the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. It is imperative to understand that the majority of the Naga population lives outside of the present so-called 'Nagaland State'. The Agreement was rejected by the Naga people stating that it was part of the Indian State's effort to limit the Naga peoples struggle for self determination, and carrying the colonial policy of "divide and rule".

The Naga people under the banner Naga National Council (NNC) launched a people's movement resisting the occupation of their land and the subjugation of the people. The resistance movement launched by the NNC was based on the principles of non-violence, non-cooperation and to uphold the independence of the Naga Nation.

However by 1953, the Indian State met the Naga non-violent resistance movement with a policy of genocide and militarization. By 1956, 100,000 Indian soldiers arrived to suppress the Naga people. In 1958 the Indian Parliament enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, to legitimize violation of human rights being committed by the Indian Armed Forces on innocent Naga people.



The Act granted the Armed Forces legal immunity as well as the powers to arrest, search and seize without warrant and the power to 'shoot to kill' on mere suspicion. This policy of State terrorism was to threaten every level of the Naga society and to reduce the democratic space of the Naga people to resist militarization of the Indian State. As a result Naga leaders had to go 'underground' and 'village guards' were formed to defend their homeland.

The imposition of Armed Forces (Special Power) Act of 1958 violates the fundamental rights to life, liberty, equality, freedom of speech and expression, assemble peacefully, move freely, practice any profession, protect against arbitrary arrest and freedom of religion enshrined in Article 21, 14, 19, 22 and 25 respectively of the constitution of India.

As you may be aware Mr. Chair, the government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland has started a peace process. The cease-fire has been in place since the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1997. The dialogue was initiated by the National Democratic Alliance led by Janata Bharatiya Party. Though the world continued in ignorance, but for the 4 million Naga people, the Ceasefire and Peace initiative brought a new sense of hope and an opportunity to heal our spirits and reclaim our rightful place as free peoples.

As all of you are aware of the latest development in the political scenario, there is a change of government in India. We hope that the present government will continue with the peace process. It is essential that a peaceful solution to the crisis is found.

We therefore make the following recommendations to the Permanent Forum kindly to urge the Government of India to:

1. **Expedite and strengthen** the political dialogue which India has started with the Nagas, to bring to its logical end through a just negotiated settlement.
2. **Repeal the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act** of 1958 which continues to dehumanize all people and violates the basic principles of human rights.
3. Fulfill the **demand of Greater Nagaland** by integrating all Naga inhabited Areas under one administrative unit.

In conclusion we appeal to the international community and my fellow indigenous peoples to support the initiative of peace between the Govt. of India and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim because we are convinced that in our struggle for peace, the end of more than 5 decades old conflict between India and the Nagas will benefit not only the Nagas but even the whole world as a whole. However, if such an opportunity is allowed to pass us by, a situation will be created whereby the past more than 50 years of bloody conflict will return to this region leading to militarization and consequently, large scale violation of human rights.

Thank you Mr. Chair for your kind attention.