

**STATEMENT BY HKUN OKKER
THE PRESIDENT OF PA-O PEOPLES' LIBERATION ORGANISATION
TO THE
17th SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
IN GENEVA, 26-30 JULY 1999**

Agenda Item 5: Indigenous Peoples and their Relationship to Land

Madame Chairperson,

Thank you very much for allowing me to be here. My name is HKUN OKKER. I belong to the Pa-O people, one of the Indigenous Peoples from Burma. We also refer to ourselves as ethnic nationalities people of Burma.

It is a sad story that our de-facto military government, they have ruled Burma for nearly four decades, never accepted that Burma has its indigenous Peoples. Yesterday their agents here said "we have no early comer or late colonisers". It is totally untrue. That remark is too chauvenistic. In Burma history it is clearly stated that all together four empires had been established by means of military might. The era of ANAWRAHTA, BRINNAUNG, ALONG PAYA and lastly Ne Win military regime.

The Shan and Karenni states are colonisers occupied by the dominant race of Ethnic Burman very lately. The Arakan and Mon state are totally destroyed and were colonised by the Burman King long time ago.

Today, in accordance with the issue agenda Item 5, I would like to highlight the current situation in Burma.

For our Indigenous peoples inside Burma our land is everything to us. Our life, our culture and our identity. Before the British occupation of Burma territories most of our land was under our chieftain control. After independence our land were under central(Burman dominated) government control.

After 1958 using the excuse of the Kumingtan invasion in our Shan States, the Burma army systematically and quietly, occupied the Shan States. Later after the forced-cease-fire agreement between Shan armed groups and the military regime, there are more army deployments in Shan States. The notorious Burma Army, forced all the local peoples to relocate and occupied their lands, villages land, farm land and water resources. That is not enough that the already relocated local indigenous peoples were subjected to forced-labour to build the military camp, to serve the military unit as porters, to work at military's farm

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previously owned by themselves. If the local indigenous peoples could not stand the military's systematic harassment, they had to escape to the border areas. Almost every month the Shan refugees are entering northern Thai land in low profile because the military regime does not want to publicise the problem. So that they can lie to the international communities that there is peace inside Burma.

Among the ethnic armed groups there is more than the Karen National Union (KNU) who are not return to legal fold (if we used the regime words). They are Shan State Army, Chin National Front, Arakan Liberation Party, still in existence and resisting the brutal military rule in Burma. The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) is the only armed group that broke away after a 3 month old cease fire agreement with the regime. So in the Karenni States hundreds of villages were forced to relocate and the Karenni indigenous peoples are under heavy "Ethnic Cleansing" operations by the Burma Army. Fighting occurs almost everyday on the Thai Burma border areas of the Mae Hong son Province.

Madame Chairperson,

in conclusion, on behalf of our Indigenous peoples from Burma, I would like to make a very loud and clear announcement that our land are occupied, our lives are in danger and our identity is at stake, inside today's Burma.

So please kindly find the way:

- to protect us,
- to stop genocidal war on us and
- save our indigenous identity.

Thank you.