

## United Nations 1st Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

New York, May 20, 2002.

Agenda No. 6: Theme – Human Rights.

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Mr. Chairman Sir, respected Members of the Permanent Forum, distinguished Member States, Indigenous brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen.

With a very deep sense of gratitude to the UN Voluntary Fund for enabling me to be here, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to all of you, on behalf of the people of Nagaland (Nagalim). It seems to me, the United Nations that was founded to salvage humankind from the "scourge of war" has once again delivered the Indigenous Peoples of the world from subjugation to self-assertion through the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. And as we participate and "celebrate" (in the words of Mary Robinson) this first historic session, I would like to briefly dwell on the human rights situation in our part of the world which has been reeling under an armed political conflict for the last 55 years.

Indigenous Peoples wherever they are, are confronted with challenges that demands collective wisdom and concerted efforts to free themselves from the bondage of dominant nations and communities with alien culture and legal systems. In this regard, leaving aside all social, cultural and economic injustices, the Naga people too have been trampled under the boots of "draconian laws", besides the arbitrary divisions of their lands and people into nation states and within state boundaries. Our constant experiences over the last 55 years has been the dehumanization of our "beings" through imposition of laws, such as:

- The Assam Maintenance of Public Order, 1953
- The Nagaland Security Regulation, 1962
- The National Security Act
- The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act

And the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958**, which legitimizes personnel of the Indian Armed Forces, to **search and arrest without warrant, "shoot to kill"** any person on mere suspicion with full legal impunity. These unlimited powers have been further strengthened with the re-enforcement of the Prevention of Terrorist Act, 2002 (POTA).

The result of the application of such inhuman laws over the period of time has been the minimum loss of an approximate 150,000 human lives (*Statistics are not clear because of abnormal situation which does not permit collection of data*). Our other neighboring indigenous brothers and sisters of the Northeast India have their own stories to tell. However, I shall not recount the nature of human sufferings our people underwent and the total destruction of lives and properties. Nevertheless, allow me to say that, as indigenous people of our land who fought for what they believe to be right and just, struggled in the best way they knew how, to defend the truth in order to regain human dignity and to live with respect and also paid the price for it.

During the course of the struggle, Naga people have come across a number of Peace Agreements, Accords and Cease-fires, which were all made mockery of, maybe because of insincerities on the part of negotiating parties or the lack of people's participation. Whatsoever might have been the case, peace condition being an essential element to resolve any conflict, another Cease-fire was signed and declared between the Government of India and Leaders of the Resistance Movement (*National Socialist Council of Nagalim - led by Isak Chishi Swu, Khodao Yanthan and Th. Muivah*) in 1997, which as a matter of fact has already been tabled and reported in the previous meetings of the UNWGIP at Geneva.

Ever since, the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) as a human rights organization have been initiating a process of democratizing the peace process itself, to transcend beyond the negotiating table, to facilitate democratic space for people to come together to speak without fear and to share their hopes and dreams. We are therefore encouraging and empowering people's participation in the making of decisions affecting their lives, through creating awareness on issues of rights and opening debates on public opinion by initiating Peoples-to-Peoples dialogue, not only within the indigenous communities, but also with the people of India and those of our neighbors and to prepare the minds of people for reconciliation to take place.

And our experience during the last five years of cease-fire have also been the frank admission of both commanders of the Indian Military and the Naga Army, that "it is much easier to make war than to maintain peace". History also teaches us that peace has never been made, because peace is always in the making.

But this time round, the people in general are determined to make this peace process work towards fulfilling its objectives. Leaders of the negotiating table too have started a wide-based consultation with community leaders and representatives of people's organizations, which have now seen 3 such consultations, the latest one being the one held at Bangkok, Thailand in early part of May this month (2002).

Mr. Chairman Sir, I want to take this opportunity to appeal all members of the Permanent Forum, while congratulating you to your prestigious and most responsible offices, to become more sensitive to the crying needs of the Indigenous Peoples wherever they are, whether it is a question of land rights, Health Care, Education, Cultures or Welfare Services etc., and requests the Permanent Forum to initiate investigations into cases of rights violations and depute fact-finding teams from time to time wherever and whenever called for.

KUKNALIM

Thank You.