

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-commission on prevention of Discrimination
And protection of Minorities
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Statement by Mr. Malsawmliana in the seventeenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Geneva.

Respected Madam Chair and Distinguished Delegates,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the opportunity to intervene during this session.

My name is Malsawmliana and I represent the Chin Organization in exile, Chin Relief and Development Committee based in India. The Chin peoples reside in the north-western part of Burma, the Chin state and its surrounding areas.

Madam Chair,

The Chin peoples were a free and independent nation until the British invasion in 1895. Then, in 1947, the Chin, Kachin, Shan and Burman leaders signed the Panglong Agreement in which they agreed to form a federal union. In 1948, the Chin and the other parties to the Panglong Agreement gained independence, forming the Union of Burma. The Union of Burma enjoyed a multi-party democratic system until the military coup led by General Ne Win in 1962. Since then Burma has been ruled by military dictatorships, under various names, of the Burmese Army.

Madam Chair,

The military regime, as soon as it seized power, changed the law concerning land ownership. According to the regime's new law, all land belongs to the state. The farmers and peasants are the victims worst effected by the regime's unjust law. They no longer have the right to grow what they want on their own land. They must cultivate what the regime orders them to. The peasants in paddy cultivable areas must grow a kind of paddy that the regime forces them to cultivate.

The peasants also must sell their produce to the regime for a very low price, compared to the market rate. For instance, of the 40-50 tins of paddy yielded per acre, 12 tins must be sold to the regime at the price that they themselves fix. In addition, since 1995, the regime forces each peasant to contribute one tin of paddy per acre for the army and the bureaucrats; this without any payment in return.

Madam Chair,

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I would like to give another example of the regime's unjust treatment of the Chin people; this particular case in Tiddim township of the Chin state. In 1997, Chin State Peace and Development Council confiscated 1000 acres of paddy fields from the Chin peoples without paying them any compensation what so ever.

Most of the Chin peoples live from forest produce as well as rotating slash and burn cultivation. The regime, while it was named State Law and Order Restoration Council, issued an order banning our traditional method of cultivation and chopping down trees for fuel. They did this without providing any alternative means for the Chin to earn their livelihood. However, in contradiction to this order, military personnel exploit the timber and forest produce for their own personal gain..

Madam Chair,

I would like to point out another sad thing that the Burmese army is doing on the Chin people's land. Army personnel, in association with non indigenous businessmen, are operating orchid picking and sandal wood lumbering businesses in Chinland. They do not grow the orchids in nurseries, but, rather, collect rare species from the forest. In order to do this, they fell entire trees. To search for sandal wood they burn down whole jungles.

Madam Chair,

Those are only a few of the very many examples that I could bring to the attention of the Working Group in this session concerning how the Chin Indigenous peoples are helplessly facing expropriation of their lands by the military regime.

Finally, for the Chin indigenous peoples to enjoy their inalienable rights on their own land, we feel that Chin representatives must be included in the democratically elected legislative body and decision making body of the nation. To this end I would like to earnestly express our need for the intervention of governments and the entire international community to search for a solution to this untenable state of affairs.

Thank you, Madam Chair