



**The First Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**  
**Agenda Item (6) - Health**  
**Statement by: Famark Hlawngching**  
**Chin Human Rights Organization**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you very much for giving me the floor. On behalf of Chin and other indigenous peoples of Burma, I would like to extend my congratulations on your election as Chairperson for the Forum.

Mr. Chairman,

Yesterday, the Xinhuanet, a news agency said that "military regime of Burma has instituted proactive measures at national level against HIV/AIDS since a decade ago, forming a multi-sectoral National AIDS Committee in 1989. A master strategic plan for the upgraded and expanded response to HIV/AIDS infection was then also developed with objectives of expanding the existing program activities reaching all areas and population group of the country. HIV/AIDS, a national concern in Burma, is recognized by the Burma Ministry of Health as one of the three priority communicable diseases, apart from malaria and Tuberculosis (TB). The combine budget of the Burmese Government, the U.N. system, local and international non-governmental organization was also estimated to amount to about 3 million dollars annually".

However, despite the huge budget allocation, it will not cover the extremely needy areas of indigenous peoples. 10% of the Chin indigenous peoples who recently migrated to the US are infected with TB but only detected when they had a medical check-up. The negligence of the military regime to indigenous peoples is apparent from the lack of information about malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chairman,

It seems that such extensive program and huge budget would have had substantial impact on the health situation especially HIV/AIDS. However, UN agencies in Burma recently warned that the country is "on the brink of a humanitarian crisis" with a high incidence of HIV epidemic, high infant and maternal mortality rate and under 5 malnutrition rate. It specified "an explosive HIV/AIDS problem as a major contributor to erosion of people's well-being". According to a report from the International Crisis Group February 2002, "HIV prevalence is rising rapidly in Burma, fuelled by population mobility, poverty and frustration that breeds risky sex and drug-taking. Already, one in 50 adults are estimated to be infected, and infection rate in sub-populations with especially risky behavior such as drug users and sex workers are among the highest in Asia".

Mr. Chairman,

It is apparent that such an extensive program has failed to address problems and indicate lack of accountability and transparency. Under such situation, the UNICEF has committed to increase its funds to 2.5 million US dollars to be spent on HIV/AIDS projects in Burma. Therefore, in order to become effective, we need to carefully examine the reasons. In fact, the underlying root cause of the humanitarian crisis in Burma including Health (HIV/AIDS) is-

- a) Bad governance and lack of a democratic government accountable to the peoples, and
- b) The military regime's focus on power instead of promoting the interest of the peoples.

The present health system in Burma is elitist, urban-biased, and corrupt. It is unfortunate but painfully true that health professionals in public sector have been compelled to earn money for their survival by opening private clinics or by corrupt practices. Leaders of the regime are reluctant to acknowledge the negative developments in any sector including Health. The regime focus only on urban areas to show the international community but fail or has no interest to respond to problems of needy areas especially indigenous peoples' areas.

Mr. Chairman,

I would therefore like to request you and the Forum to advise UN agencies, Programs and the international community planning to conduct and plan health programs in Burma as follows:-

- (1) To be delivered only after consultation with opposition groups and leaders of indigenous community and peoples;
- (2) To be delivered directly to the need peoples;
- (3) To be delivered through international NGOs that abide an international NGO Code of Conduct;
- (4) To be delivered across national borders if it is not possible to reach the most needy areas because of obstruction by the regime and its army; and
- (5) That all assistance should be designed to contribute to positive democratic changes in Burma.

I believe in doing so, the proposed programmes and fund would truly benefit indigenous peoples and the country as a whole and not prolong the military regime in Burma.

Thank you.