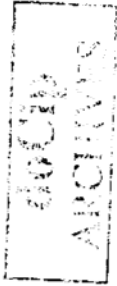


STATEMENT BY U MYA THAN, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
AT THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
ON 2 AUGUST 1988



MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

IT GIVES ME A VERY GREAT PLEASURE TO SEE YOU ONCE AGAIN IN THE CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS. PLEASE ACCEPT MY HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS FOR YOUR RE-ELECTION TO THIS HIGH OFFICE OF CHAIRMAN/RAPPORTEUR OF THE WORKING GROUP.

MY DELEGATION WISHES TO EXPRESS ITS DEEP APPRECIATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THIS WORKING GROUP UNDER YOUR ABLE STEWARDSHIP IN THE FIELD OF STANDARD-SETTING AND FORMULATION OF NORMS AND PRINCIPLES RELATING TO THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS.

PLEASE ALLOW ME, MADAM CHAIRPERSON, TO BRIEFLY TOUCH UPON OUR NATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THIS RESPECT. TALKING ABOUT OUR NATIONAL EXPERIENCE, I CANNOT HELP BUT RECALL THE HISTORICAL FACT THAT THE UNITY AND HARMONY OF NATIONAL GROUPS IN MY COUNTRY CAME THROUGH A SOCIAL CONTRACT OR A TREATY. THE HISTORIC PANGLONG AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL GROUPS IN BURMA ON 12 FEBRUARY 1947 AT A SMALL TOWN CALLED PANGLONG IN THE SHAN STATE IN THE EASTERN PART OF BURMA. NATIONAL GROUPS IN BURMA THEREBY DECIDED BY THEIR OWN FREE WILL TO FORM A UNION AFTER GAINING INDEPENDENCE FROM THE BRITISH RULE AND LIVE TOGETHER AS ONE ENTITY THROUGH WEAL AND WOE. THIS ENDURING PANGLONG SPIRIT IS A LIVING PROOF OF HOW NATIONAL GROUPS CAN LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY AND HARMONY IN A HAPPY UNION.

BORN OUT OF THIS HISTORICAL CONSENSUS AND AGE-OLD FRATERNAL TIES, THE UNION OF NATIONAL GROUPS IN BURMA IS A PARTNERSHIP IN WHICH ALL NATIONAL GROUPS ARE ON EQUAL FOOTING AND ENJOY ALL FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF RACE, RELIGION AND SEX.

OUR NATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROVES THAT FRATERNITY, EQUALITY, MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT AND THE FEELING OF ONENESS ARE THE ESSENTIAL PILLARS OF A HAPPY UNION. THANKS TO THESE FIRM

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FOUNDATIONS, UNITY IN OUR COUNTRY IS GROWING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

THIS PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY OF NATIONAL GROUPS AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF EVERY CITIZENS ARE ENSHRINED IN THE 1947 CONSTITUTION AND THE 1974 STATE CONSTITUTION. THE PRESENT STATE CONSTITUTION WAS DRAFTED WITH THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ALL NATIONAL GROUPS AND WAS ADOPTED IN A REFERENDUM WITH THE AFFIRMATIVE VOTES OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF 90.19 PER CENT IN DECEMBER 1973. IN ADOPTING THIS STATE CONSTITUTION, NATIONAL GROUPS OF BURMA REAFFIRMED, IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONSTITUTION, THEIR RESOLVE "TO LIVE FOREVER IN HARMONY AND UNITY AND RACIAL EQUALITY SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS THROUGH WEAL AND WOE IN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF BURMA".

SEVEN STATES AND SEVEN DIVISIONS HAVE BEEN CONSTITUTED UNDER THE STATE CONSTITUTION. ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN HELD IN 1974, 1978, 1981 AND 1985. AS A RESULT OF THOSE ELECTIONS, KAREN, KACHIN AND ALL OTHER NATIONAL GROUPS ARE REPRESENTED AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF STATE ORGANS AND ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES FROM THE LOWEST VILLAGE OR WARD LEVEL UP TO THAT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE. THE PEOPLE'S COUNCILS AT THE VILLAGE/WARD, TOWNSHIP AND STATE LEVELS IN THE STATES ARE NOW PRINCIPALLY COMPOSED OF RESPECTIVE NATIONALS.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

IN BURMA, IT IS NOT ONLY THROUGH THE ENFORCEMENT OF LAW THAT WE ENSURE THE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. IT IS MORE THAN THAT. IT IS ALSO BY TRADITION AND CUSTOMS THAT WE OBSERVE THE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN MY COUNTRY WHOSE TOLERANCE AND COMPASSION ARE THE HALLMARK OF ITS CULTURE.

THIS BEING THE CASE, SOME ACCUSATIONS OF THE VIOLATION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA PROVE TO BE UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS. THE BURMESE AUTHORITIES FROM TIME TO TIME ORGANIZE

STUDY TOURS FOR FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES AND JOURNALISTS TO VARIOUS STATES OF THE COUNTRY TO LET THE FOREIGNERS SEE FOR THEMSELVES THE OBJECTIVE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA. THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF SUCH STUDY TOURS WERE CONDUCTED IN THE KAREN STATE IN NOVEMBER 1987 AND IN THE KACHIN STATE IN JANUARY 1988.

IN THIS CONNECTION, I WISH TO RECALL THE APPRAISAL OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BURMA BY SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON SUMMARY AND ARBITRARY EXECUTIONS MR. AMOS WAKO AT THE FORTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, HELD AT GENEVA IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH 1988. REFERRING TO THE ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BURMA, THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR MADE THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS:

"IF THERE WERE KILLINGS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE, THEN THE BLAME MUST BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE KAREN AND KACHIN INSURGENTS. ANY ALLEGED EXCESSES BY THE PERSONNEL OF THE BURMESE ARMY DURING THE PERIOD 1986-87 COULD ONLY HAVE STEMMED FROM THE MALICIOUS DEFAMATION CAMPAIGN INSTIGATED BY THE INSURGENTS. MY ATTENTION WAS FURTHER DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT RECENTLY THE GOVERNMENT TOOK AMBASSADORS AND MILITARY ATTACHES FROM FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND JOURNALISTS FROM FOREIGN NEWS AGENCIES IN RANGOON ON STUDY TOURS OF KAREN STATE AND KACHIN STATE IN NOVEMBER 1987 AND JANUARY 1988 WHICH ALLEGEDLY CONFIRMED THAT THE SITUATION IS NOT AS HAD BEEN REPORTED TO ME."

THE ABOVE-MENTIONED COMMENTS BY THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR, COMING FROM AN INDEPENDENT OBSERVER, MAY BE ONE OF THE BEST TESTIMONIES TO THE OBJECTIVE SITUATION IN BURMA, WHERE THE UTMOST RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS GENERALLY OBSERVED, AND TO THE INCORRECTNESS OF THE UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS FABRICATED BY SOME DUBIOUS ELEMENTS WITH MALICIOUS INTENT TO TARNISH THE GOOD REPUTATION AND IMAGE OF BURMA.

AS REGARDS THE ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL HERBICIDES (2,4D), AGAINST THE LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE FRONTIER AREAS, THE SAID CHEMICAL HERBICIDE HAS BEEN USED ONLY IN AERIAL SPRAYING OF THE POPPY FIELDS IN THE FRONTIER AREAS AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POPPY CROP ERADICATION PROGRAMME. THE TERRAIN, WHERE POPPY FIELDS EXIST, IS VERY MOUNTAINOUS AND DENSELY FORESTED, MAKING ACCESS THERETO VERY DIFFICULT. AERIAL SPRAYING WITH LIQUID CHEMICAL (2,4D) HAD THEREFORE BEEN CARRIED OUT TO DESTROY A GREATER ACREAGE IN A SHORTER TIME.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, MANY TESTS WERE CARRIED OUT BEFORE IT WAS ACTUALLY USED. SO FAR AS THESE TESTS WERE CONCERNED, NO ONE WAS AFFECTED BY THE CHEMICAL AND NO DAMAGE WHATSOEVER WAS DETECTED. ONLY WHEN THE SAFETY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS USE HAD BEEN CONCLUSIVELY ESTABLISHED, THE CHEMICAL WAS USED IN AERIAL SPRAYING OPERATIONS.

IT MAY THEREFORE BE OBSERVED THAT THOSE CRITICIZING THE USE OF CHEMICAL (2,4D) MAY ONLY TURN OUT TO BE THOSE WHO HAVE VESTED INTERESTS IN THE ILLICIT NARCOTIC TRAFFIC. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE USE OF THE CHEMICAL IS THE CLEAREST PROOF OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE USE OF THAT CHEMICAL IN ERADICATING POPPY FIELDS.

MAY I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS OUR PROFOUND SATISFACTION WITH THE WORKING PAPER ON THE DRAFT DECLARATION ON INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY YOU. I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THAT PRINCIPLES AND NORMS INCORPORATED IN THIS DRAFT TEXT ARE, IN GENERAL, CONSISTENT WITH THE BASIC PRINCIPLES ENSHRINED IN OUR CONSTITUTION, AND THE PRACTICE AND THE TRADITION IN MY COUNTRY.

THE WORKING GROUP HAS PROVED TO BE AN EXTREMELY USEFUL FORUM FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF QUESTIONS RELATING TO INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS. HOWEVER, THE NOTE OF CAUTION IN YOUR OPENING STATEMENT YESTERDAY IS IN ORDER. WE OUGHT NOT TO ALLOW THIS AUGUST BODY TO DEGENERATE, TO BORROW YOUR OWN WORDS, INTO A CHAMBER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, AND AN ARENA FOR DEFAMATION CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS. SUCH ABUSES OF THIS FORUM SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO TAKE PLACE IN ORDER THAT THIS ESTEEMED FORUM MAY CONTINUE TO FULFIL ITS NOBLE AND VALUABLE TASK, UNHAMPERED.