

Paper presentation during the 15th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2016 on: “Indigenous Peoples: Conflict, Peace and Resolution” by Neingulo Krome, Secretary General, Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights at the United Nations Headquarters at New York on the 17th of May 2016.

Respected Chair of the Permanent Forum, honorable Expert Members, distinguished Indigenous leaders and delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Nagas are one of the indigenous peoples of Asia, who were independent and sovereign much like the ancient Greek city-states till Britishers found them and invaded their land in 1832. Nagas fought back and resisted them till parts of their land were conquered and colonized in 1879 leaving a large area as un-administered and free from any kind of governance. So when the British Statutory Commission came to the then Naga Hills in 1929, the Nagas submitted their first written document, asking the British Government that the Naga Hills be withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme of India, in which the Naga Hills were included without their consent or knowledge, and to leave the Nagas alone to determine for themselves as in ancient times. Very unfortunately, when the British left the sub-continent and India started militarily occupying the Naga country, the British Government never even blinked its eyes not to talk of speaking a word to set records right.

So after India became Independent and Nagas refused to join the new Indian union and boycotted the first Indian General elections in 1952, Indian military troops were sent into the Naga Hills in 1953, to crush the Nagas. As a consequence, entire villages were burnt down, granaries, crops, cattle and domestic animals were not even spared. Women raped, tortured and murdered in full view of family members and villagers and so on. The list is endless and dehumanizing. So to make a very long story short, let me just say that the political conflict of the Indigenous Nagas is known to be one of Asia's longest running conflicts.

From then and until now, there have been numerous conflicts, also peace agreements and several attempts for resolution of the conflicts. But all of these have failed to meaningfully serve its purpose, but rather promoted other more and newer conflicts. For instance, there was the first Ceasefire, which came into effect on September 6, 1964 and Peace negotiations were held between Naga leaders and the Government of India but which could not resolve the conflict with India eventually and unilaterally breaking off the Ceasefire.

With resumption of military operations on the Nagas, which saw more violence and destruction, pain and human sufferings and which came to the notice of the United Nations, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, acknowledged and said; “there is human rights situation in Nagaland”. This revelation from the UN and other admissions made by a few Indian

Army Generals, that the Naga problem cannot be solved militarily and must be solved politically, the 2nd Ceasefire came into effect on the 1st of August 1997.

It is almost 19 years now since the 2nd Ceasefire had taken place and numerous Political negotiations have been going on without any concrete resolution. But nevertheless there have been positive outcomes in the various stages of negotiations despite the many frustrations. It was also only last year in August 3, 2015, that a Framework Agreement was also signed and which the Prime Minister of India himself proudly announced to the international community in Dubai saying that a final Peace settlement with the Nagas issue is at hand. But this also has not happened yet.

We do not know when a resolution to our Conflict will come which have been assured year after year. But what we do know is, that India is infested with all kinds of social and political unrest wherever Indigenous peoples live. Many Indigenous peoples even in North East India are also asserting their rights and have been fighting for their rights. The Naga political movement has been often branded as the “mother of all insurgency in North East India” which is not necessarily correct because of the nature in which Governments deals with Indigenous peoples and their issues. But whatever the case may be, nobody wants to live in a trouble-torn state of affairs all their lives but nobody will also easily give up their rights without some kind of respect to their human dignity. And therefore, almost every people’s movement in India is also watching how India is going to resolve the Naga issue. If the resolution of the Naga conflict is seen as “honourable and acceptable”, there are huge possibilities where other Indigenous Peoples movement may come forward for peaceful resolution as some are already doing. But if it is not, in all likelihood the situations in the already trouble-torn Indigenous areas may deteriorate.

Ladies and Gentlemen let me conclude by saying that the Indigenous Nagas fought and resisted the invading British colonials for 47 years; we were subjects of colonialism for 68 years. We have undergone all kinds of human sufferings and humiliation for another 50 years under military occupation of India. And we are now experiencing 19 years of Ceasefire. But during these last 19 years of Ceasefire and political negotiations we are also seeing psychological warfare, developmental aggressions, corruption and divisions at all levels of the society, while the energy of the peace loving citizens are drained just in trying to keep the peace process alive. Notwithstanding all of the above, and in the midst of all the turmoil, our lands and people were divided into nation states of India and Burma (now Myanmar) and within India, into different states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh without our knowledge or consent which in itself is a manifestation of the colonial policy of “Divide and Rule” being imposed on us forcefully.

Finally, in line with the experiences of Nagas and other indigenous peoples of North East India, which are common to other indigenous peoples in Asia and perhaps around the world, we can draw some of the following common issues and recommendations:

1. Indigenous peoples in Asia have faced long-standing conflicts beginning with colonial powers and now with States under which their territories fall. To resolve these conflicts, rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination need to be respected as per Articles 3 and 4 of the UNDRIP so that they can freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

2. Besides political conflicts, development aggression of States in indigenous territories is adding to the worsening situation of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources as guaranteed mainly in Articles 26, 27, 28, 30 and 32 of the UNDRIP, including right against forced military activities in their lands should be fully implemented to prevent and resolve further land-related conflicts of indigenous peoples.

3. International borders have divided indigenous peoples. This has denied them the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders, as required under Article 36 of the UNDRIP. States need to take more effective measures to implement this right in conjunction with the indigenous peoples.

Thank you