

24<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva (31<sup>st</sup> July-4<sup>th</sup> August 2006) Working Group on Indigenous Populations Agenda Item: 4 (b). Utilization of Indigenous People's land by Non-Indigenous authorities, groups or individuals for military purposes.

Presented by : Khetoho Enatoli Sema, Western Sumi Hoho, Nagaland, India.

Nagaland is one of the states in the North -Eastern region of India sharing its boundary with the States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Nagas are indigenous peoples occupying approximately 0.2 % of the country's geographical area with a population of about 3 million. The Nagas constitute about 50 tribes in total, with 18 major tribes. One of them is the Sema ( Sumi) Tribe, to which I belong.

At this point, it will be important to go back to history briefly so as to create a link with the main theme of this session. Historically, Nagaland was a free territory, with no outside interference or subjugation. Until the late nineteenth century, each Tribe distinct in itself in terms of culture, language, customs, and tradition had separate political systems governing their communities, living in villages that were spread across their respective tribal- boundary.

In the mid-twentieth century, with the British leaving India, issues with regard to the future of the people of Nagaland also came up. The Nagas, had as early as 1929 submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission, declaring their sovereignty and the desire to be left alone in the event of India gaining independence. A voluntary plebiscite that was held in May 1951 to determine whether Nagas would join the Indian Union, or live by themselves revealed that 99% of the Naga population was in favor of an Independent Sovereign Naga Nation.

One of the major turning points in our history was the signing of the 'Shillong Accord' in 1975, between a section of the Naga leaders and the Indian government, which led to a split in the Naga Underground Movement. Thus, with the intensification of the Naga people's struggle for self-determination, which has lasted more than five decades, the presence of the Indian Armed forces has become more conspicuous over the years.

The Naga people, like other indigenous populations of the world, are deeply attached to their land, as land is held sacred and forms our very identity. Our society is primarily agro-based with the majority of the population still living in villages, dependent on their land for basic survival.

The land use by the Indian Armed forces is both direct and indirect. They have made direct use of indigenous land by way of ransack and willful occupation of mostly private and community land. This in turn has discouraged investment hampering the development process as substantial amount of the lands occupied by them are in central commercial areas, further disturbing the economy.

Furthermore, given the historical violence inflicted by the armed forces on our people, which is continuing in many places, and the unceasing visible presence of the Indian Armed forces along with the enforcement of draconian law such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 has created an environment of fear which successfully suppresses the voice and courage of the indigenous people to speak up even when it

Whereas on the one hand, the presence of the Armed Forces gives an impression of stability and control, on the other hand the Armed Forces stationed in these border areas have ignored the large-scale infiltration and settlement of illegal non-indigenous

immigrants on indigenous land. Such a trend not only affects the indigenous land rights of the Naga people but also their socio-economic and political rights as well.

Proposals:-

- There is a need for proper assessment of extent and use of indigenous land by the Indian Army for military purposes and to check the trends having negative impact on the indigenous population.
- There is a need for shifting the Armed forces base from populated commercial and civilian areas, so as to remove psychological threat and barriers, and to create an environment that encourages indigenous economic initiative in the developmental process.
- There is a need for an International and independent National Monitoring Agency and process to check and control the so-called 'invisible population' of migrants settled on indigenous land.
- There is a need to investigate the reasons which lead to such large-scale permanent military presence in the indigenous lands of Nagaland and their purpose today, and to devise measures to control and end the misuse and exploitation of the Naga people and their land.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.