

# NAGA DAY

10.JANUARY.2018

A DAY WHERE ALL **NAGAS** COME &  
STAND TOGETHER AS **ONE** PEOPLE



**NAGAS  
WITHOUT  
BORDERS**

.....  
A Publication of **The Forum for Naga Reconciliation**  
.....



## **NAGA DAY**

**To remember, celebrate, embrace, and uphold the spirit of the  
Naga Memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission on  
January 10, 1929.**

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**“... we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of people who could never have conquered us themselves and to whom we were never subjected; but to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times ...”**

Memorandum of the Naga Hills submitted by the  
Naga Club to the Simon Commission on January 10, 1929

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## **Forum for Naga Reconciliation**

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was formed in principle on February 24, 2008 as one of the outcomes of the Naga Peace Convention organized by the Naga Shisha Hoho in Dimapur. It was christened on March 25, 2008 at Kohima with the support of 39 Naga frontal organizations, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), and the Council of Naga Baptist Churches (CNBC). In 2008, the forum comprised of 14 members. In 2017, it expanded to 34 members.

The primary objective of the FNR is to work for the healing and reconciliation of the Naga people through genuine forgiveness, mutual respect and shared understanding based on the historical and political rights of the Nagas.

FNR is not an organization but a forum that pursues its activities in consultation with various Naga frontal organizations, civil society groups and Churches.

FNR members are individuals who volunteer their time, experience and knowledge to fulfilling Naga reconciliation. They are united in their personal commitment to values of reconciliation and are bound together by their shared concern for the dignified future of the Naga people.

FNR puts on public record that it does not belong to any Naga National Group. It is neither affiliated with nor does it represent or support any one particular group or political parties.

FNR carries out its activities through the support and free-will contributions by well-wishers.

For more details about FNR, refer to the article: Naga Reconciliation – A Public Statement by the Forum for Naga Reconciliation on pages 22-33.

## **Usage of Terms**

The word “nation” is being used in place of “tribe” in this book. Tribe is a contested term due to its roots of being defined by outsiders during the period of colonialism. The word “tribe” conveys a negative connotation of a timeless unchanging past.

Similarly, the word “Naga-Lands” and “Homeland” refers to the contiguous Naga areas, transcending the state boundaries imposed upon them.

## **Naga Day**

*- Easterine Kire*

This is our story:

In 1929

The Naga Club

Submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission

The first written record

That stated 'Nagas are one'

They made it clear

They did not belong

To any other but the Naga race

Not to the Indian

Not to the Burman

But to themselves as decreed by their maker.

This is our story

We were free before the British came

And we set aside

The years of village wars

The hunts for heads

The joys of battlesport

And pitted our dormant oneness

Against a common enemy

This is our story.

We repeated that in the Fifties  
We defended our borders  
With no other weapon than unity  
And Indian tanks rolled in this time  
And armies tried to oppress  
Our hills, our fields, our spirits  
Yet so long as we wielded our unity  
The invasions were held off.

But when we fell  
Our defeat was self-made  
We warred against ourselves  
We should have known better  
But people seldom learn from history  
We abandoned solidarity and community  
And embraced tribe, the individual, the self-centric  
We exchanged integrity for deception  
Substituted brotherhood for its opposite  
And filled our streets with brother-blood  
This is our song  
A sad song of defeat, melancholy dirge  
May others learn from it.  
Yes, this was our song.

But the Naga story is not over yet.  
We have another song to sing  
We still have a destiny to step into  
A legacy to inherit  
When our created identity is restored.  
At this crossroad  
Of our shared walk as a people  
Do we look back or  
Do we look to the future?  
Perhaps we should do both  
For the answer lies in both directions.  
The strength of the Naga past  
Was in our oneness - unselfish,  
Noble, sacrificing, unswerving - from  
The common Naga good.  
This was our strength  
This can be our strength again  
As we come together  
Recognising each other  
As part of the bigger Naga family  
Embracing each other  
With the love that politics had wiped out.

This is our strength now  
We know the Son, He sets us free  
From our inability to forgive  
To set aside past hurts, and to love again  
This is our strength now  
He sets us free from ourselves  
He makes unity possible, even Naga unity  
He makes our story possible  
When we step beyond ourselves  
And become one in Him  
To start our story anew through Him.

*Easterine Kire is an internationally renowned poet and author. Her writings are based on the lived realities of the Naga people.*

# 1. “NAGA DAY”

January 10, 2018

## **Preamble:**

In the world of 21<sup>st</sup> century, indigenous people of the world are discovering their untapped potential to rise above from their habitat and makings, to a world open to new horizon and thrive with the rest of the human race to grow and flourish.

The Naga people, like others have a unique cultural-political identity and over time, as a natural human process, we continually seek ways to preserve this memory of our belongingness that we are one.

Thanks to the imaginative wisdom of the signatories of the “Simon Commission” of January 10, 1929. The 20 odd visionaries, representing all Nagas then, wrote to “The British Statutory Commission,” to “safeguard our (Naga) right(s) against all encroachment.”

Contemporaneously, Nagas are a community of institutions and practice that common socio-cultural ethos must be addressed and resolved by processes of peaceful change. The nonviolent position inherent in the Simon Commission is to be conceived as positive, resisting violence of every form. The Nagas must allow our neighbors to remain true to the moral and religious fabric of civilization, while the Nagas must reexamine our own and change. We believe that such an approach is an effective means for the Nagas to ensure our rights. This vision resonates with the sentiments of major constituencies within the Naga community, especially among the younger generations.

**Naga Day:**

The treasure of the Simon Commission and with matchless gratitude to the signatories of the Simon Commission, the memory passed on to the Nagas needs periodic reminder and refinement. Nagas must move on without departing from our belonging, enshrined in the Simon Commission. Therefore, the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) envisages to observe January 10 of each year as “Naga Day” with the following objectives:

- That Nagas are a people of common belonging and therefore, “Nagas are ONE.” An organic bonding is a constructive approach of every race come of age and this requires human imagination and creative application.
- That common socio-cultural and established identity of the Nagas call for nurturing in order to ensure dependable expectations of peaceful coexistence and growth among the Naga family, and respect others as Nagas would want others to do to us.

With this in mind, FNR is organizing “Naga Day” on January 10, 2018, with the hope that it will be a yearly occasion for all Nagas wherever they may be. We therefore, request Nagas – young and old, women and men – to support this momentous “Naga Day.” In the coming years we hope that the people will take ownership of the “Naga Day” and celebrate it in a manner that will uphold the values, aspirations and the belongingness of the Naga people.

Respectfully,  
FNR

## **2. Introducing Naga Day – Nagas Without Borders**

*- Wati Aier*

All human histories are a being. They are living and mutable, and in this are ontological. Among the histories of the world, Naga history is a relative history in its own right, especially in regards to our immediate and de facto communities. Our history is one that can also be sedated by the past, where we find ourselves haunted in the present by the fervent dogmatism of the past memories. Such an opiate of the Naga world view needs to be denounced through a demand for by definitiveness and finality. The alternative, as has been our fateful reality, is to linger in disappointments manifested in the form of rationalization, rhetoric of legalism and to others perhaps, in microscopic politics of narcissism.

Historically, the construction of Naga identity has been chiseled out of our common dreams and aspirations. To be sure, all civilizations are constructed histories. From the onset of the twentieth century, Naga people have desired to safeguard our socio-cultural and political identity. In this, the Naga pioneers' imagination remains unmatched.

Naga Day, unlike an assault on the physical world of anyone, is in the realm of symbolic cultural restoration by spirit of collective imagination. The Naga memory of belonging yearns to listen and be heard, and Naga Day is an opportunity to nurture that memory by answering the silence of the present and visioning the hope of the future. Our present burned lands are fertile lands that can flourish in the future. History is full of small, symbolic acts that altered the world in astonishing ways and Naga Day is no different. The day itself represents the voice of the people.



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Today, if Naga identity is under any threat in ways we don't understand, it will be at the "nation"<sup>1</sup> level that we either solve it or destroy it. The idea of belonging is a universal idea. Americans have it, Indians have it, Chinese have it and so on. The philosophy that "you are alone" and that there is no common ethos of trying to nurture something shared is the embodiment of "every 'nation' for itself." Such an ethos is a culture "turned inward" against others.

In the Naga context, it is paramount that the healing and connection of "nation" be initiated in order to heal our own psychic wounds. If Nagas do not develop ways to publicly confront the emotional consequences of hatred, jealousy, attitudes of superiority, and division, these consequences will continue to burn us to annihilation. Nagas must come to an urgent realization and act that we are basically at war with ourselves. Shall we not underscore and put a stop to where we differ, and practice social ecology of shared humanity among us and with others? The ultimate betrayal of Naga identity is not in acting competitively—that should be positively encouraged—but in the search and creation of exclusion and exclusivity under the pretext of unity and healing.

Belonging to a shared Naga humanity requires a critical and analytical consciousness that will lead to a type of sacrifice that gives more than it costs—where the "grownups" become disciplined role models for the "young" ones, nurturing and empowering the "young" ones to flourish. This sense of solidarity is at the core of what it means to be Naga and will help deliver us to this extraordinary moment in our history. This could very well be the *only* thing that allows us to survive our times.

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<sup>1</sup> I have deliberately opted for the word "nation" in place of "tribe." Tribe is a contested term due to its roots being defined by outsiders during the period of colonialism. The word "tribe" conveys a negative connotation of a timeless and unchanging past.

Let us be reminded that Nagas need to be capable at what we do in order to find contentment in this world. We need to be authentic in our lives and we need to be genuinely connected to others. Above all, we need God. Without God there is no basis for morality. These four values are intrinsic to human finite good.

Sadly, the outcome of the Westphalian paradigm of 1648 ushered in arbitrary frontiers and borders of exclusion and division in the world. Like most ethnic groups, the Nagas are no exception to this reality. Naga Day, therefore, is saying to the Nagas, “Let us go beyond the borders of arbitrarily-enacted division.” It is resolving that we are not going to curtail and limit ourselves by the imaginary borderlines by which we, like others, were programmed to approach the world. It is acknowledged that by fighting for the borders of division, we only defeat ourselves. Naga Day is reminding ourselves and announcing to the world that we are moving on with the pace of time without departing from our socio-cultural and political identity. We take a resolute collective affirmation that the colonial term “borders” be removed from the vocabulary of the Naga people. With post-millennial socio-cultural and political agenda being prioritized around issues of restoring ecology, the tantamount importance for the Nagas is the ecology of indigenous peoples without borders.

Naga Day implores Nagas to think generously outside of the box of colonial frontiers—a tool *par excellence* of divide. All identities are unique and as such to be never at the expense of the other. This means, an identity is always defined only in relation of the other. Thus, while the Naga identity is permeable without borders, by the same token, Naga identity is never at the exclusion of non-Nagas who have their legitimate locus in “Naga-Lands.”<sup>2</sup> Nagas have to catch on to the fact that “birds of the same feather” is a dangerous concept to a society of many feathers. The society of

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<sup>2</sup> Here the word “Naga-Lands” refers to all the Naga areas. There are over 40 Naga “nations” living in their lands outside the present state of Nagaland, in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma (Myanmar).

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“same feather” is at the end, an exclusive community.

Finally, the Forum for Naga Reconciliation’s initiation of the Naga Day is solely based on the preceding lines. FNR has absolutely no monopoly on any organizations. Time after time, FNR has sincerely appreciated the contribution of all organizations, including fathers and mothers and concerned prayer groups. FNR abides by our commitment of Naga reconciliation and peace for all stakeholders. As such, the formation of FNR was situational—out of exigency. The day FNR becomes an institutionalized system we will cease to be effective.

FNR welcomes all to the Naga Day.

*Rev. Dr. Wati Aier is the Convenor of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation.*

### 3. Naga: A Nation of Peoples

- Visier Sanyü

Naga Nation is an imagined creation, a historical process and a historical necessity forced by colonialism, conversion, a fast-changing world and more.

In this brief note, I endeavour to take a fresh approach to demonstrate that Nagas are not primitive hill tribes, but *peoples*. The damage of colonisation has been exposed by historians, anthropologists and other scientists. Joseph Conrad refers to it as the 'Heart of Darkness', but the consequences faced by the Nagas extend far beyond this scope. Indeed, Nagas are still a colonised people, but when the colonials - both Europeans and Indians - refer to the Nagas as 'Indian tribes', it insinuates that Nagas are somewhat backward and primitive, inferior to the Brahmins. The terminology, 'tribe', does not even exist in any Naga language. 'Angami Seyie' means 'Angami nation' and not 'Angami tribe', and this applies to all the Naga nations, of which there are many.

There are no people without a unique history of their own, and the Nagas' history is spectacular, heroic and tragic at the same time. The desire of the Nagas to preserve their identity was so strong that it led to the national movement for independence, shaping their identity as a group of people.

In the past, people believed Nagas were isolated, wild headhunting tribes living in forest hills. But now we know that Nagas were in fact highly social people who had trades and wars with neighbouring kingdoms.

The Naga history tells the story of a group of people growing according to their thinking and understanding of themselves and the world. The dynamic chaos of meeting unexpected challenges has involved God and Blood! The crisis has also made others search for the deepest meaning of God's purpose for them and their nation in the modern world. Nagas long to find their rightful place in the world and become a recognised group of people.

The Naga story is the history of several nations, often at war with each other, that were gradually brought together by the powerful impacts on them by colonialism, conversion and Western education. Many changes were introduced by the European colonials, including *Guns, Germs and Steel*, as Jarred Diamond so dramatically coined it.

With these emerging events, the historical process of the national movement was initiated by the Naga National Council and inspired under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo. However, clan divisions and internal conflicts have caused much bloodshed and suffering. But today, though hated and blamed with good reasons by those hurt by the upheaval, the Nagas are envied and admired for their patriotism, courage and commitment to their cause.

### **What made our history unique?**

Naga history and mythical period are left to the interpretations of historians and anthropologists. However, the modern history has some unique landmarks that have shaped perception of Nagas today.

1. A memorandum submitted by the Naga Club to the Simon Commission in 1929 pleaded that after the British left India, the Nagas be left to govern themselves independently. It stated that India never conquered Naga-Land, and that Nagas were never subject to the rule of the neighboring kingdoms. The members of the Naga Club who submitted the memorandum on behalf of all the Nagas did not have the qualification for the task but they were equipped with sophisticated intellect,

visionary minds and were somewhat prophetic in foreseeing the trauma of post-colonialism.

2. Nagas declared independence from Britain on August 14, 1947 - one day before India. Had they declared a day later, the course of Naga history would have been very different. The Naga leaders of the day reaffirmed what their previous leaders had stated in writing 18 years earlier in 1929.
3. The plebiscite conducted by the Naga National Council on May 16, 1951 indicated that 99% of the population voted to remain independent and not to join the new Indian State. This event was the most unique stand of solidarity by the Nagas.
4. The application of a clan system in the National movement enabled the Nagas to govern themselves in a unique and familiar way. The social structure of a Naga clan is incomprehensible to other cultures, just as the caste varna is to the Nagas. The clan structure survived in spite of many changes.

### **Sovereignty should be discussed when India is ready**

The current political processes should not be viewed as the end of the Naga journey toward nationhood, but as the beginning of a new, peaceful political and cultural process.

Even after more than 70 years of struggle the nationalist leaders remain determined to maintain the fight for independence. Tragically they are locked in their factional group think-bubbles of political falsehoods. As a result, the negotiation processes have turned out to be a political charade, a fact those negotiating know better than us. Their position, despite all the appreciation and questions that we may have, reflect the shared predicament of the Naga people. Our duty as a Naga is to critique it but also understand and not over judge it.

A new Naga mindset is needed to assist this process. Although divided geo-politically, Nagas can be united culturally and politically

in the broader realities of civic life. This united Naga culture and mindset can develop in all Naga-Lands as a way to work together. In this changing world, we can all look beyond old colonial boundaries and draw strength from an emerging vision of Naga National identity that is rooted in Naga traditional homelands which has spread to encompass Nagas across the world.

Some Naga national leaders have come out with a constructive proposal that is creative and realistic and honourable to both sides. They state that they know it is too difficult for the rulers in Delhi to recognize Naga sovereignty and independence. The people of India who do not know the facts of Naga history will not allow their Government to even discuss the issue. Yet, Nagas cannot deny or ignore the facts of their history just because it is too difficult for India.

In this background, some veterans of the Naga struggle have taken the stand that Naga sovereignty is a problem for the Government of India. It is not a problem for the Nagas. These leaders are taking the line that sovereignty should be discussed in the future by Nagas and Indians when India is ready. If India is not ready, let her negotiators not raise the issue and blame the Nagas. This will be the wise position at this stage in our history.

Naga confidence comes from the important fact that in staying true to their history they are not secessionist or anti-India.

### **Hope for the Future - The inextinguishable spirit of the Naga people**

The Naga determination and spirit has surprised the Indians, Burmese and Naga observers around the world. Despite the setbacks and disappointments, Nagas in all Naga lands have retained a strong sense of their Naga nationality.

As globalization improves communications, more Naga have awakened to a vision of their Naga nationhood and a determination

to continue to fight for the reunification of their homeland. This Naga national spirit will grow stronger.

The Government of India and Indian thinkers have started to realize that the Naga desire to preserve their identity and nationality cannot be defeated by conventional warfare and military power. There is something in the human spirit that is far more powerful than the barrel of a gun.

### **Where to from here?**

The hopes that motivated the heroic struggle of the Naga people in the past have been disappointed. Yet the scenario, if faced realistically, does provide grounds for hope.

Similar struggles around the world have shown that a group of people, no matter how geographically fragmented, can develop a united identity and voice. The Naga leadership is currently fragmented, but it is possible for old factional enmities and allegiances to be put aside for the sake of a future goal.

The development of Naga nationhood and unity can occur across the world and can help build a united political identity, even though in physical and geographical terms we are divided between two nation states. This vision of Naga unity achieved peacefully in a 'virtual world', and implemented separately in two states is a starting point for rethinking a new vision of Naga nationhood.

'Nationhood' does not have to be all or nothing. There are many constitutional arrangements where Nations have allowed smaller nations to pursue many of its national goals, while remaining part of a larger sovereign state.

Today the Naga sense of identity remains strong and there are many opportunities that can shape our future. The history of many nations has shown that a flexible approach to leadership can shape the future. History has also demonstrated that such opportunities can be lost if a



leader is locked in backwards thinking and hatreds of the past.

Many volatile situations have been solved by the goodwill and determination of the people. The human desire to live in peace is so great that given the right opportunities and leaders with vision, communities that have in the past fought and struggled can put aside their differences and work out a peaceful way forward. With realism, the right attitude, and the growth of trust between leaders, seemingly impossible conflicts can be worked out peacefully. Examples include the ending of apartheid in South Africa, and the successful peace process in Northern Ireland.

One point I want to emphasize is about Nagas Without Borders. Make no mistake; there is no greater Nagaland or smaller Nagaland but there is only one *Naga-Land*. Naga ancestral land belongs to the Nagas and to no one else. We have the right to live together with our own laws and our own culture. We have the right to inherit our ancestral land. The solution has to be worked out through dialogue with our neighbours because it cannot be imposed on us by Delhi or Yangon.

I would like to conclude by what T. Sakhrie, the then General Secretary of Naga National Council, wrote some seventy years ago:

***“If I were to choose a country it would be Nagaland,  
my fair Nagaland, again and again.”***

*Dr. Visier Sanyü is a Naga historian. He lives in Healing Garden, Medziphema, growing trees for future generations. Sanyü has authored the book “A Naga Odyssey: Visier’s Long Way Home” with Richard Broome, which was published by Monash University, 2017.*

#### 4. On Being a Naga

- *Temsula Ao*

It is 'a complex fate' being a Naga. But in our context, it is a double-edged sword because the complexity lies not only in the way 'outsiders' view us but also in the way we see ourselves.... Being a Naga has never been easy for us. The mystique and negative power of the 'savage' has always fascinated the western mind and when we were 'discovered' by anthropologists and ethnographers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we became exotic and exciting specimens for them to study, but from their perspective only. Our material culture seems to have caught their imagination in such a manner that the best specimens were spirited away to their museums without any qualms because they were the 'finders' and therefore the 'keepers'. But fortunately for us, though we were stripped of our external Naga-ness, the essential core of our being Nagas could not be obliterated and this consciousness has remained firmly rooted to the soil of our origin.

Then came the British administrators, with their policy of identifying and dealing with 'primitive' subjects and we were isolated from the rest of their dominion by restricting access to the hills where we had lived almost forever. The Christian missionaries came more or less at the same time with their zeal for proselitization and sowed the seeds of doubt in our minds about our own intrinsic worth. However it has to be admitted that they also brought literacy, though it was with the sole policy of 'educating' the savage in the right path towards eternal life by empowering them to read the Good Book. At this stage of our history, being a Naga became an apologetic acknowledgement of a seemingly inferior individual.

These onslaughts on our territory and our way of life, now in retrospect seem like continuous waves of aggression against a people who had never imagined that such 'others' even existed! Our transition from our insulated ignorance to knowledge of the outside world by such alien methods was so abrupt that it shook our worldview to its core. The turmoil and turbulence in the land was inevitable. The rebellion was born essentially in retaliation against the attempt to belittle us in our own estimate and it was conceived as an effort to wrest back our identity, self-worth and sovereignty from the intruders in our own land. But it has also to be said that we were not ready yet to claim our rightful place in the assembly of nations not only because of the many divergences in our perceived homogeneity but also because of crucial economic and political circumstances over which we had no control to emerge as an 'independent' nation. Into this state of un-preparedness and general confusion the concept of a state as the viable alternative was injected and accepted, though not without stiff opposition from the Naga freedom fighters.

We tried to catch up with the rest of the country by importing 'national' norms in governance, education and other important sectors for the sake of mere 'uniformity' in progress. If we claim that this is the progress we have achieved, it has been done at a tremendous cost because we are no longer a self-reliant people, we have ceased to be fighters and achievers, and have become mere loungers on stipends, concessions and sub-contracts. The political aspirations had initially set out to establish the intrinsic worth of our being, our Naga-ness. But the result we see today is a pathetic blend of greed, self-centredness and mutual suspicion.

In the quagmire of uncertainties that beset Naga society today, the most essential question that needs to be asked is: What does it mean to be a Naga? Is the word Naga merely a political blanket term to designate the countless tribes living in a more or less contiguous territory of the country? What is the 'commonness' shared by these tribes that they have been bunched under this

umbrella term? Is it a common language? No, because there is no common Naga language. Then is it a common culture? If so, what is it? Can we specify it? Can we retrieve it and is it desirable to do so? But we will discover that it is not the mere geographical location of the tribes, racial traits and history; nor is it a common language that lies at the heart of this blanket identity.

Now to the question of how we see ourselves. Among the many divisive elements that add another dimension to these questions, is the tribal divide that has had the most devastating effect on the political scenario both overground and underground. Even if there are professed political parties within the electoral system that is current in the state, when it comes to crunch time, people's mandates are swayed either by tribal or clan affiliations; party ideology seeming to have no influence at the crucial time. The same trend is reflected in the convolutions of the other movement also. During elections candidates are known to seek help from their underground brothers who conveniently forget that they are helping the followers of a system that they are ideologically opposed to and will oblige if the price is right. The elected representatives of the state too turn a blind eye to blatant demands of 'tax' from the people, and not only that, they are also often accused of facilitating a percentage from all government projects! When such a compromise prevails in the state, cries of lasting peace and amity become less than a whisper in the wilderness where principles no longer count. Have the Nagas entered the twilight zone? Is there any hope for a clear-cut enunciation of honest intents and purposeful actions?

The superficial affluence brought in by the imported system seems to have left the village folk far behind and there is an ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. This is the real paradox of our existence as a people: the divide between the village and urban ethos. Though all the new money, political influence and modern life-style seem to reside in the urban areas, the real essence of our Naga-ness still remain in the heart of the

land: the villages. To 'belong' in a village is the first requisite of an individual in building up the notion of identity as a Naga. To be banished from one's village for grave wrong-doing is the ultimate punishment and insult to a Naga male, rendering him a man without a country; he ceases to belong in the most basic unit of his existence with a recognized identity.

And then, when we look deep into our hearts and try to compare ourselves with our fellow Nagas, we come to the realization that we do share an intrinsic one-ness in our way of thinking and living. That is why, in spite of the many surface differences we have continued to exist as a coherent group of people. If that be so, can we build on the 'common' factors, no matter how intangible they may seem at present?

Throughout all these upheavals in our history, what has remained a constant is the amorphous nature of our identity, of being a Naga. There can be no single definition or prescription for constructing or de-constructing this problematic identity that we have been encumbered with. But we have also to admit that the naming ceremony was done centuries ago and we have legitimised it by agreeing to become Naga-land! So we have to go back to the idea of the 'intrinsic one-ness in our way of thinking and living'.

It is therefore clear that whatever identity we are trying to forge for ourselves cannot be attained through academic and empirical research alone which can at best lend some authenticity to sites of origin and trails of migration. But it will only be a historical account of the evolution of the Nagas through the ages. Today, identity formation for Nagas has to be in consonance with our present circumstances and informed by a spirit of inclusion of all superficial differences; the diachronic discourse must include the synchronic paradigms that draw the Nagas together at a stage in the history of mankind when the whole of humanity is being inexorably propelled towards the vortex called globalization where identities are made, un-made and re-made. What we ought

to do now is to exercise some 'intellectual flexibility' and hold on to the essential values that made us what we are as a people, holding us together through countless generations. The envisaged identity has therefore to be based on the principle of 'oneness' that is inclusive of both commonality as well as differences and has to be introspective and inter-relational because the identity perforce will always be multi-layered. Only when we acknowledge these inalienable facts of geography, history and culture that have imposed this pseudo-homogeneity on us and accept the multi-faceted identity that we share as a people, the 'complex fate' being a Naga will perhaps no longer be so 'complex!'

Extract from Temsula Ao, **On Being a Naga Essays**, Heritage Publishing House, 2014

*Dr. Temsula Ao is a noted Naga Academician, poet and a prolific writer. She is presently the Chairperson of Nagaland State Commission for Women.*

## 5. Come Now, Let Us Reason Together

- *Zelhou Keyho*

To be leading the devotion this morning is an opportunity for me and I believe that God has given us another chance to ask some serious questions and do some deep soul searching. Nagas are a big family and we take pride in this. But where is our pride today? Hasn't this pride fractured?

The question I want to pose before you is: Why do we call ourselves Nagas? Nagas are spread across the international boundaries. We think of our Naga brothers and sisters in Myanmar, Arunachal, Manipur, Assam and the Nagas in Nagaland.

What binds us together and why do we call ourselves as Nagas? Is it because we were once upon a time savage and lost in our own world? Or is it because of our unique historical and cultural distinctiveness which we all share?

Part of the song sung by the young people this morning goes: "Fair mountain and valleys rich with God's resources, gift to us to muster, our heritage so rich, let this forever be ours." But what do we have now? This is the question we must ask. Another line goes "undimmed by fears and tears, join hands through broken lines."

There are many broken lines and we must extend our hands to one another and join hands together so as to find healing and to make the broken lines disappear.

Based on the theme, "Come Now, Let Us Reason Together," I have come prepared to share four things, only four things and my prayer is that God will speak to us through this day as you deliberate on issues that touch us deeply as Nagas.

1. Nagas must take the journey of being honest with ourselves. We must be frank and be honest with each other. Nagas have a good and unique history but as long as we are fractured, the way we are now, our good history - our uniqueness will not save

us. Personal agenda and organizational structures must take the backseat and allow the common Naga agenda to flow out freely. We cannot pretend anymore, Nagas are badly divided. Our division has cost us dearly. We are shoved to the left and right, back and forth with ideas and ideals that are good and noble but when it comes to the finality we find the missing link. The simple truth is, we are not united. Our stronghold is broken. The affinity that we share and the common brotherhood as one people and one nation regardless of our regional differences and difficulties are buried and made to disappear. The war of supremacy over one another is hurting us deeply. We have come to a stage where we do not want to listen to each other. We must do some soul searching and ask some serious questions. What has really gone wrong with us? Is it us or them? Calling ourselves Nagas and being divided badly is deceiving ourselves.

2. Calling ourselves Nagas and not being able to get along with each other is destroying us. We have allowed ourselves for people to dictate us and set their agenda for us. We have made ourselves vulnerable with our disunity that people take us very lightly. People don't take us seriously anymore. Have we noticed that? They have learnt to speak our language, they say, "we recognized their uniqueness" but, if they do, why this long? We have allowed ourselves for people to play with our emotion and our intellect. They don't respect us anymore.

Our problem is nothing to them because they have seen in us that we have now lost our common cause which we once held dear. People are saying, "It's okay they will never get along, we don't need to take them seriously." Just leave them to fight and argue among themselves and let us just please them by pretending that we care about their issue and concern. This has become the attitude of others and without realizing that we take pride in fighting among ourselves. Aren't we?

3. We have become educated and informed people. The problem we are in can be correctly analyzed by everyone. But we have developed pseudo knowledge out of our problem. Everyone thinks he/she knows better than others and with that



knowledge, instead of building bridges we pull down, tear down others. This is nothing but pseudo knowledge. True knowledge is sharing and feeling the pain and taking action by contributing to ease the problem. We have become too comfortable with our critique that we have shelled off those who choose to differ with us. Let me tell you this, as long as we are defensive we will always create offensive attitude and vice versa.

It is now time to act positively. The point is this; unless we reconcile and unite there is no other way out. Our pride must die. Our pseudo knowledge must be put to end and we must humble ourselves. If the Nagas from the East, West, North, South and the Center consider ourselves as one, how many reconciliations do we need? Can't we just give up our pride and unite?

4. Nagas must take the journey to find the real and true God - the God of the Bible. Nagas have carved too many gods for ourselves. The God of the East seems to be different from the God of the West. The God of the South seems to be different from the God of the North. Likewise, the God of the Nagas in Nagaland appears to be different.

In our prolonged crisis we have carved our own God to suit our own desire and longing like the people of Israel. From whose God do our revelation and prophecy come?

We cannot play with God. He is the Great Jehovah, the God who is "I am who I am." We must find Him. And as we find Him, we must take heed to what He says, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NRSV).

We cannot run away from Him if we honestly realize that without Him we cannot solve our problems. We must reconcile and unite with one another; from the East, West, North, South and Center. He is our only hope for He is our healer (Exodus 15:26), He will send His Word to heal our disease (Psalm 107: 20), the disease of disunity amongst the Nagas. We must enthrone God as the God

of the Nagas. He is the God who punishes those who blaspheme and use His name in vain and judges those who go against Him. But He is also a loving and a forgiving God. Today, He invites us to reason together with Him. Isaiah 1: 18 reads, "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD." This is an invitation for the Nagas today.

*Rev. Dr. Zelhou Keyho is the General Secretary of the NBCC. This was shared at the Forum for Naga Reconciliation reflection held at the Naga Shisha Hoho, Kohima on August 25, 2017.*

## **6. Naga Reconciliation – A Public Statement**

Forum for Naga Reconciliation

September 24, 2017

### **Formation of FNR**

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was formed in principle on February 24, 2008 as one of the outcomes of the Naga Peace Convention organized by the Naga Shisha Hoho in Dimapur. It was christened on March 25, 2008 at Kohima with the support of 39 Naga frontal organizations, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), and the Council of Naga Baptist Churches (CNBC). In 2008, the forum comprised of 14 members. In 2017 it has expanded to 34 members.

FNR was formed at a time when Naga society was torn apart with intense “interfactual” violence, suspicion, distrust and divisive political rhetoric.

After a painstaking and difficult process the FNR’s Journey of Common Hope with the support and goodwill of the people made decisive and incisive strides towards Naga Reconciliation.

Eventually, the “interfactual” violence decreased, and some form of relative peace was established. Due gratitude goes to the Naga National Groups for upholding their commitment to refrain from all forms of violence against each other. However, outstanding political differences remain to be resolved.

Hence, despite the positive path to end blood-shed, the Nagas are still confronted with a polarizing situation of power politics, self-preservation and exclusiveness. These threaten to demoralize the Naga spirit and obstruct Naga reconciliation.

The Naga people are once again vulnerable to further division and separation and are deeply overwhelmed by the overall fragmenting status. The fluidity and uncertainty of the present situation and the manner in which they are being expressed raise serious worry, particularly for the common men and women.

The Naga people are therefore anxious of this degenerating context. If the present situation is allowed to prevail, it will only jeopardize the shared Naga future.

The FNR refuses to give in to the principalities of division, distrust, suspicion and fear which are paralysing Naga people in all walks of their lives. FNR believes that with people's active support and prudent intervention this spiralling situation can be arrested and reversed.

With this in mind the Forum for Naga Reconciliation makes this Public Statement. Through this Public Statement, FNR briefly outlines its formation, principles, activities and calls for the renewing of our determination, our commitment and our call for reconciliation

### **The Position of FNR**

1. FNR puts on public record that it does not belong to any Naga National Group. It is neither affiliated with nor does it represent or support any one particular group.
2. FNR pursues Naga reconciliation on the basis of the historical and political rights of the Naga people.
3. FNR pledges to work for reconciliation of all in the spirit of forgiveness, openness and mutual acceptance of one another through acknowledgement of wrongs done by all of us. This will contribute towards an inclusive and shared Naga future.
4. FNR works irrespective of geographical demarcations in an impartial and fair manner – without taking sides and without discrimination of any Naga National Groups – keeping in mind the people's common interests and aspirations at the center of its activities.

5. FNR asserts the necessity of reconciliation of the Naga National Groups as well as civil society organizations and the public as an essential ingredient for healing and restoring people's dignity towards a holistic Naga destiny.

### **FNR's activities from 2008 to 2014**

Due to the contextual situation in which FNR was formed, its initial work was concentrated on the Naga National Groups. FNR's primary objective in the first phase was to end the "interfactional" violence and to enable the groups to reconcile on the basis of the historical and political rights of the Nagas through the spirit of genuine forgiveness.

Here is a list of FNR meetings and some Reconciliation activities from 2008-2014:

- FNR held an overall total of 267 meetings with the Naga National Groups.
- FNR visited GPRN/NSCN Designated Camp 59 times.
- FNR visited NSCN (IM) Designated Camp 57 times.
- FNR met with NNC/FGN 37 times.
- FNR visited Eastern Nagaland (Burma) 7 times.
- FNR met 21 times outside the country.
- FNR had 12 meetings with Naga tribe organizations.
- FNR had 36 meetings with the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Naga National Groups both within Nagaland and outside.
- FNR had 16 meetings with Naga individuals – educators, social workers, writers, activists, lawyers.
- FNR and the JWG undertook 7 tours to different parts

of Naga-Land.

- FNR with JWG and a choir formed by soldiers from different Groups visited churches in Dimapur, painted the Flyover Bridge and the Clock-Tower in Dimapur.
- FNR, JWG, civil society organizations and the churches played “Reconciliation Football” in Kohima and Dimapur.
- On May 11, 2010, food and essentials were distributed by the JWG to the displaced Naga villagers at Kisama.
- The Forum for Naga Reconciliation met on September 25, 2008 at the Sumi Baptist Church Dimapur and with the support of 47 Naga organizations and the NBCC pushed the Naga Reconciliation: A Journey of Common Hope forward.
- This was followed up with a Public Meeting on February 21-22, 2009 at Kohima in which 45 Naga organizations and the Church extended their support to FNR.
- FNR met on August 26, 2009 at Hotel Saramati, Dimapur with 46 Naga organizations and the Church and called for the immediate meeting of top leaders of the Naga Political Groups for reconciliation on the basis of the historical and political rights of the Nagas at the earliest.
- As a result, the Historic Highest Level Meeting took place on September 18, 2010, Dimapur attended by Th. Muivah, Kitovi Zhimomi, Brig (Retired) S. Singnya and Zhopra Vero, followed by 11 other meetings.
- FNR met with 40 Naga organizations and the Church on November 18, 2010 and called for the Highest Level Meeting “within a stipulated period of 45 days.”
- On February 29, 2012, the Naga Reconciliation Meeting

was held at the Agri-Expo, Dimapur. It was a public meeting where Nagas from all Naga-Land attended, and for the first time top leaders from the Naga National Groups spoke to the Naga public from one common platform.

It was only after FNR held a series of meetings with the Naga National Groups that confidence building measures could be taken to address “interfactual” violence. This eventually resulted in drastically reducing the levels of violence and killing and this spirit of goodwill continues to prevail even now. This has greatly enhanced economic activities in Nagaland and also broadened the space for various social movements to grow.

The Journey of Common Hope revealed the human side of the Naga National Groups and offered an opportunity to forgive each other and to experience civil and family life. Simultaneously, intimidation decreased and the fear and suspicion among people reduced. This enhanced the freedom of movement and the freedom of speech and expression and contributed towards improving relationships between the Naga National Groups and the public.

Overall, the Naga Reconciliation process created a healthy environment. However, during this period of goodwill, it also enabled various stakeholders to take advantage of the situation. They have exploited the “vacuum” that was created when “interfactual” violence declined.

### **Reconciliation Agreements between Naga National Groups**

Between 2008 and 2014 a number of agreements were signed between the Naga National Groups. While most agreements were related to improving ground situations, fostering conducive atmosphere and confidence building measures, there were some

with political and historical implications.

Here is the highlight of the significant agreements:

- **Covenant of Reconciliation:** Signed on June 13, 2009 by Isak Chishi Swu, SS Khaplang and Brig (Retd) S Singnya. The signatories committed before God to offer themselves to Naga Reconciliation and Forgiveness based on the Historical and Political Rights of the Nagas. They resolved to work together in the spirit of love, nonviolence, peace and respect to resolve outstanding issues among themselves. The Covenant of Reconciliation was instrumental in the cessation of armed confrontation and bloodshed among the Naga Political Groups.
- **A Public Affirmation:** Signed on December 8, 2009 by Vikiye Awomi, Zhopra Vero and C Singson. The Affirmation was made to honor “A Joint Declaration” signed on September 28, 2009 to “jointly reject any form of conditional package offered to the Nagas by the Government of India.”
- **Joint Appeal:** Signed on March 10, 2010 by C Singson, Zhopra Vero, Q Tuccu and witnessed by Rev. Dr. Wati Aier. Among others, the Appeal reaffirmed “to cease all offensive activities in toto; and all Naga army commanders in the Naga areas are hereby requested to uphold and abide by this principle.”
- **Statement:** Signed on August 22, 2011 by Isak Swu, Th Muivah, Gen (Retd) Kholi Konyak, Kitovi Zhimomi, Brig (Retd) S Singnya and Zhopra Vero. The signatories stated, “... In the spirit of love, respect and understanding, have agreed to strengthen and broaden the peace process based on the ‘Uniqueness of Naga History.’”
- **August 24 and 25, 2011 Meetings of Naga Leaders:** Signed by Isak Swu, Th Muivah, Gen (Retd) Kholi



Konyak, Kitovi Zhimomi, Brig (Retd) S Singnya and Zhopra Vero. The signatories stated that they have arrived “to work towards a shared Naga future on the foundation of our Historical and Political rights.” In this statement they accorded on the following six points, which reads as: “RECONCILED on the basis of the historical and political rights of the Nagas; ACKNOWLEDGED that we have hurt one another and that in the spirit of love we have forgiven each other, and are prepared to understand each other towards a shared future; REAFFIRM the resolve not to harbor any non-Naga organizations adverse to the Naga political cause .... Furthermore, serious note is taken on the harboring of non-Naga organizations opposed to the Naga political cause and hence, strongly denounce such acts; DISENGAGE in and from all forms of actions and associations detrimental to the Historical and Political cause of the Nagas; AFFIRM to work for the territorial integrity of all Nagas; and ANY INTERIM arrangement of the political rights of the Nagas shall be outside the purview of the Indian Constitution per se.”

- **Naga Concordant:** Signed on August 26, 2011 by Isak Swu, Th Muivah, Gen (Retd) Kholi Konyak, Kitovi Zhimomi, Brig (Retd) S Singnya and Zhopra Vero. The signatories stated: “Having Reconciled on the basis of the Historical and Political Rights, the top Naga leaders have agreed that Nagas are ONE. Therefore, in pursuance of this agreement, the following signatories have resolved in principle to work towards the formation of one Naga National Government. To expedite this process of eventually forming the Naga National Government, a High Level Commission was formed with the Forum for Naga Reconciliation as facilitators.”
- **Lenten Agreement:** Signed on March 28, 2014, by Isak Swu, Th Muivah, Gen (Retd) Kholi Konyak, Kitovi

Zhimomi, Brig (Retd) S Singnya and Zhopra Vero. In the Agreement, the signatories stated: “We request the FNR to work out the modalities to expedite the process. While this task is being carried out, we call for the maintenance of status quo, by vigilantly refraining from any unwarranted activities by the Nagas. Furthermore, in the spirit of Naga unity, through reconciliation and peace, we remain open to other Naga groups who are committed to Naga reconciliation and agree, to abide and uphold its aim and purposes.”

### **Limitations of the FNR Process**

While the Agreements relating to “ceasing all offensive activities in toto” continue to be implemented in spirit, the agreements relating to political matters such as the “Naga Concordant” and the “Lenten Agreement” have not been implemented. The inability to uphold and implement these two significant agreements which were crucial to the realization of Naga Reconciliation brought the Reconciliation Journey of Common Hope to a sudden and premature halt.

By large the present crisis is a result of the non-implementation of the “Naga Concordant” and the “Lenten Agreement.” Since 2014 the lull in the process has created further division in Naga society. The degree of trust and accountability which was cultivated during the Reconciliation process broke down. This led to trust deficit and the different Naga National Groups continued to pursue their own political agenda.

Since then, the Naga national movement seems to be spiralling downwards and has become damaging to Naga society.

Currently, Naga institutions are collapsing even as more fragmentations are occurring and there is a growing economic inequality even as the common person is burdened by taxation. Furthermore, there is alarming increase of social ills and the nexus between Naga National Groups and vested individuals and

parties are strengthening the culture of impunity.

All these have added to a situation of confusion and anxiety among the Naga public, as well as the Naga National Groups. There is now a lack of clarity and purpose on the direction Nagas are heading towards. The loss of accountability, transparency, trust and respect for each other has made the process murky.

Nagas can no longer weaken each other by blaming and demonizing one another for this situation. Nagas need to turn these weaknesses into common strength by learning from our own mistakes.

Almighty God alone can grant us this miracle of grace. If we will only inspire each other by our openness and truthfulness, God will do His part without fail.

### **Public Apology of FNR**

Since 2008 FNR has given its very best to achieve the objective of Naga Reconciliation. However, even with the best of our intentions, we were unable to clearly respond when the process faced new challenges along with our inability to keep the public in confidence about this fragile situation. While still hoping for the Naga National Groups to respond and implement the agreements they entered into, our silence has been misunderstood.

FNR acknowledges that in the course of the process we were unable to communicate, engage and keep the public informed in a consistent, transparent and accountable manner. Furthermore, we recognize our failure to insist upon the Naga National Groups to sincerely implement the “Naga Concordant” and “Lenten Agreement.” In due course FNR was caught up in a complex situation as its role became less compelling and unclear in the midst of groups engaged in power politics.

FNR takes this opportunity to publicly apologize and say Sorry to the Naga people and in particular to the Naga National Groups for all these failures and shortcomings.

## **The Way Forward**

Recognizing and acknowledging its contributions and weaknesses, FNR has undergone an intensive process of constructive criticism and evaluation in 2017. FNR remains committed to the stand that only an inclusive and united approach can lead the Nagas to a direction of shared belongingness and Nagahood.

Looking at the present situation, the FNR is of the view that Reconciliation is fundamental at this juncture. The Naga Reconciliation should not be confined to the Naga National Groups, it needs to be broadened. FNR believes that Naga Reconciliation: A Journey of Common Hope can be given a new lease of life when the Naga Churches, Tribes, civil society organizations and the public recognize the necessity for reconciliation among themselves.

The healing, forgiveness and reconciliation within Naga civil society is equally important. In fact, reconciliation of the Naga people has become essential for bringing unity among the Naga National Groups. Only when Nagas reconcile as a people can we become a moral and political force that will restore health and authority of the Naga National Groups to evolve together and take the Nagas forward.

The FNR is aware that the Naga public are tired and weary of division, suspicion and violence taking place within the Naga national movement. They feel this division has given undue advantages to those who continue to suppress the Naga historical and political rights. This has only prolonged the suffering of the people. The divisions have only polarized and weakened the Naga movement which are preventing the Nagas from taking forward looking steps.

The Naga public demand that the Naga National Groups rise above 'factional politics' and work honestly and sincerely for the common good in the spirit of broader participation and needing the best of one another because the stakes are so high.

The FNR asserts that no group's interest or personal interest should be over and above the common interest and shared

destiny of the Nagas.

The FNR therefore appeals to the leaders of the Naga National Groups to demonstrate political wisdom and statesmanship by turning to the path of Naga Reconciliation in order to safeguard the Naga historical and political rights.

Let us take courage to admit our own mistakes which will make us all greater, not lesser, human beings. Let us heed to the call for a lasting end to divisive politics, violence and to be free of fear, intimidation and hate. Let us strengthen our commitment to reconciliation, nonviolence and the peaceful resolution of disputes. This is the only way for the Nagas to heal the past and to build a common Naga future founded upon principles of justice, mutual respect, acceptance, equality and nonviolence.

Transcending the given impasse will require collective wisdom, realism and humility to match the demands of the contemporary world and a gracious heart that welcomes one another.

Let us not breed seeds of division and suspicion that demonizes the other. We must not forget that the boat the Nagas are travelling on is fragile and the sea is perilously stormy. If the boat sinks all of us will lose equally. For once let all Nagas give “togetherness” a chance. It is in our “togetherness” that Nagas can prevail.

In the Naga journey towards reconciliation, many are exhausted and weary. Despite their best intentions some are misunderstood by their own country fellows. Other voices are unheard. While others are still too afraid to speak. And then there are many who have lost all hope and are therefore cynical. Yet, this Journey of Common Hope demands that we must bear each other’s burden.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to reach out to all Nagas – young and old, men and women, rich and poor to give Naga Reconciliation one decisive push no matter how tedious and exhausting the process may seem to be.

The time has come for Nagas of all ages and gender to take the responsibility of working for a peaceful and a just Naga society. For this, it is imperative that we courageously strengthen the path

for Naga reconciliation. Our future needs it!

1. Rev. Dr. Wati Aier, Convenor of FNR
2. Abei-u Meru
3. Aram Pamei
4. Athong Makury
5. Dr. Aküm Longchari
6. Dr. B. Henshet Phom
7. Dr. Chingmak Chang
8. Dr. Lanusangla Tzudir
9. Dr. N Venuh
10. Dr. Pangernungba Kechu
11. Dr. Phyobemo Ngully
12. Dr. PS Lorin
13. Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü
14. Dr. Visier Sanyü
15. Dr. YL Minthing
16. G. Vashum
17. Grace Shatsang
18. Vitono Gugu Haralu
19. Kevidezo Peter Rutsa
20. Kheseheli Chishi
21. Kirang Zeme
22. Mercy S Rengma
23. Neingulo Krome
24. Nepuni Piku
25. Niketu Iralu
26. Pastor Vezalhu
27. Pastor Vezokho Vero
28. Rev Dr. Zelhou Keyho
29. Rev. Dr. Ellen Konyak Jamir
30. Rev. Dr. Phughoto Aye
31. Rev. Dr. VK Nuh
32. Rev. Puduhu Khusoh
33. Somipam Lungleng
34. Sovenyi Nyekha

## 7. In the Beginning

- *Ningreichon Tungshang*

In the beginning  
When life was breathed  
Hope and dignity was weaved

Thy who gave us freedom  
Gave us land we now protect,  
With our lives and history  
So that our stories and streams will be free  
And our minds and spirit un-oppressed

Our ancestors taught us land is sacred  
And gave us their songs  
That binds us

Our journey is long  
Our manna is running short  
But the harvest is nigh  
For us to greet the memory of them,  
who gave us the elements;  
Of life and dignity of struggle

Urra Uvie! Urra Uvie

March to the shore  
Where the salt of life  
Will be known by its light  
and shadows shall roam no more  
when all shall toil and rest

and know what peace is  
That,  
Our fathers and brothers be freed from shame  
Our mothers and sisters mourn without regrets  
Our children cry free from fear

For the land was given  
To protect us, yes to protect us

In the beginning  
When life was breathed  
When hope and dignity was weaved!

*Ningreichon Tungshang is a human rights activist and a mother of three children.*



## 8. What Shall We Dream About?

- Abokali Jimomi

What future shall we dream about today? What is our reality and how should our dream be different from it?

Dystopia is an imaginary society where people are unhappy and often lead dehumanized and fearful lives under hedonistic governing class usually characterized by a stark divide between the haves and the have-nots set in an environmentally degraded place.

A dystopian future is obviously not what we wish for ourselves despite the tell-tale signs popping up every now and then like soap commercials in our reality show.

Perhaps the choice is ours to make, to imagine and plot our own story diverting it from an apocalyptic ending.

Perhaps we should break out from the maze of our restricted definition of freedom, imagine the end of the vicious cycle of corruption enslavement and design a new path to escape a nearly dystopian reality as Margaret Atwood in her dystopian story, *A Handmaid's Tale*, puts, 'A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze.'

If imagination is the beginning of creation, what future then shall we imagine for our people? If our children are our future, what shall we guide them to dream about? What values shall we let them emulate? How shall we teach them to survive and thrive?

To let them imitate how we live here now would be a perfect script for a catastrophe. Surely, we do not want a future where our children accept and live with injustices and inequalities

without questioning; stripping them off their rights to nutrition, education, healthcare, gainful employment and access to even basic amenities devaluing their human dignity and freedom.

What different future can we imagine that is better from the present? Should we let our children inherit our insecurities and corrupt practices?

Should we teach our children how to bribe their way up in work and life, or how to amass what is not rightfully theirs to take to build their empires? Shall we show them how to buy jobs or siphon off funds meant for facilitating opportunities and well-being for thousands of children, students and the public, depriving the majority of their rights to live a dignified life?

Shall we teach them that dishonesty can always be pardoned in the weekly Sunday prayers and that glory and redemption are achieved by donating huge sums of corrupt money for 'a good cause'?

We do not want a future where our children in the world's largest democracy have no options but to sell their votes for peanuts, trade their life, their freedom and development of their land for small favours mutilating their basic human rights forever.

Should our children learn how to remain apathetic and self-indulgent even when every infrastructure in our land is falling apart? What purpose would that serve except disaster?

Should we like us also let them not question the status-quo and accept traditional biases, moral policing and prejudices as absolute truths?

Should they also carry forward our social, racial, tribal and religious intolerances, religious bigotry and patriarchal conditioning like heirlooms around their necks? Would that make a better future?

It would seem like a pure Utopian fantasy now to imagine that every Naga girl child, not just girls from the privileged, the

'educated' and the elite sections of our society, should dream of a participatory and a more conscious future where their voices are valued and their participation indispensable in the decision-making processes of their families, clans, villages and towns, that they are not born to be just sidekicks in their father's, husband's or father-in-law's houses. They must dream of a future where they are not 'owned' by anyone that they must break out from the illusionary 'freedom' in the maze of our traditional conditioning.

We must envision a just future that recognizes every person's worth and capability and creation of a space that enables our capabilities to flower and thrive.

We want our children to grow up as compassionate human beings, valuing diversity, valuing harmonious co-existence, valuing social justice and merit, and valuing our natural resources and possessing the wisdom to take care of our fragile and delicate ecosystems. We must truly imagine a future where we don't plunder our forests, wildlife, mountains and rivers for today's profit alone to satiate our short-lived cravings for a supposedly 'good life'.

If degradation and self-destruction are not our goals, we need a different plot from the status-quo. Without self-introspection and a change from within, and the determination to challenge and shift the status-quo, we can only continue to run around the maze.

### **A song of despair: But still this Land, this soul**

A love-hate romance for eternity,

You curse, I curse.

Cursed to be with each other forever,

You and me.

You are me and I am you;

looking at your scars, my wounds fester.

This hopelessness...

Your beauty and purity – time cannot measure:

these greenest hills, just my kind of dance and song,

villages and bamboos and birds, leaves of every shape and size,

wisdom of cloud-covered mountains, timeless and solid,

a night sky that talks to me like nowhere else on this arm of the galaxy.

Magic and yarn and yam, mud and rain, rituals and rice and maize fields,

pigs and pounding tables, nakedness, dirt, blood and innocence;

a way of life to call our own, our beauty, our grace.

One precious life-time of divine romance with your soul.

But now the mirror of time reflects the tale of our dying:

Day by day, season after season seen searching...

Lost together, lost forever in the search of what civilization?

A no-return journey to the bottomless abyss

of superficiality and soul-splitting self-deceit,

toward a complete loss of originality.

A maddening desire to be someone else,

erasing our mountains and our souls.

Transformed into heartbeat-less plastic puppets

while seeking the untruth...

40 Naga Day

Could we then live together  
in this agonizing pit of chronic misery  
and ever hope for love?

I could shut you out for a while,  
for decades, for a life-time.

I could hide for forever  
perhaps in some alien paradise,  
but still,

hopelessly, even after death,  
could this soul forget?

This land is me, and I am you.

*Abokali Jimomi is an entrepreneur and a mother to a daughter.*

## **9. Nagas - The Way Forward**

*- Athong Makury*

Nagas have been struggling for more than seventy years to be a free people and to exercise our sovereign rights. However, till date the struggle to chart our own destiny continues amidst the gathering storm. Among other reasons, I have identified here four aspects for the failure on our part. All these aspects are central to our understanding of a shared Naga future. These four aspects are:

### **Factionalism and lack of reconciliation**

The glorious legacy of the Nagas under one united house, namely the Naga National Council, has been undone given the increasing factionalism in the present Naga political discourse. While we blame India and Burma for their divide and conquer policy on the Nagas, we too are equally responsible and accountable for succumbing to it. The reasons for this are lack of transparency and accountability, misconceived pride, misplaced loyalty, idealism without pragmatic planning and lack of philosophy and values.

### **Corruption**

Corruption in Naga society has reached its peak. It has become pervasive and has impinged all aspects of our lives, including the church. The culture and practice of corruption threatens the Naga way of life and is in complete contravention of our indigenous values and practices.

## **Dependency**

The present day Nagas have become too dependent on India and Burma in the form of education, jobs, goods, business, trade and basic infrastructure. As we have become too dependent, Nagas are trailing behind in many fields. Furthermore, Nagas have been put inside a box and are now conditioned to think and behave according to their ways. This has led to economic dependency and erosion of cultural and political values and principles.

## **Challenges of geo-politics**

Naga-Land being a landlocked homeland that suffers from geo-political challenges caused between the two great power houses of Asia. As a result the international community is quite reluctant to intervene in the Naga issue though there is awareness of the situation and acknowledgement of the fact there is something seriously wrong. On the other hand Nagas too tend to ignore the role of the international community and support from them. Consequently the international community perspective on the Naga issue is often influenced by dominant media. It is tragic that the Naga story from Naga perspective has not found its due place in the community of nations. This is further compounded by the internal bickering within the fractured Naga movement. Along with this, the inability of the Nagas to adequately and effectively reach out to our neighbors, who actually want to reach out to us, has limited our politics.

## **What are some of the ways forward to a shared Naga future?**

1. All Nagas need to come together and participate in dealing with the issues of corruption that is prevalent at the systemic, structural, social, community and individual levels. We need to evolve an effective and prudent strategy in eradicating this chronic disease at all of Naga life.

2. The Naga National Workers need to overcome factional differences and achieve Naga national reconciliation for the sake of the Naga future. The issue of disunity and factionalism must be decisively resolved so that the internal chaos is not a stumbling block to Naga aspirations.
3. Nagas need to create a new Naga consciousness. It implies communicating with the world and with each other through the Naga lens, and not through the lens of the oppressor. A new Naga consciousness needs to lead towards a self-reliant society. For Nagas to be self-reliant, it means creating new models of governance, education, business, trade, commerce, economy and a relevant and workable legal system. It means getting down to addressing and achieving basic needs.
4. Nagas need to formulate a comprehensive geo-political policy that will protect, safeguard, secure and further the common interests of the Naga people and its neighbors.

The resilient spirit of Naga nationalism and consciousness is needed at this juncture. Naga minds from all over the Naga-Land – young and old, poor and rich, women and men – need to come together as One Nation to create a comprehensive policy for the progress and liberty of the Naga people. This is the path of our shared future.

Kuknalim!

*Athong Makury is the President of the Council of Naga Affairs based in Naga Self-Administered Zone, Myanmar.*



## 10. Nagas Without Borders : Imagining the Future

- Nokho Nyekha

*“Is this what family is like : The feeling that everyone’s connected, that with one piece missing, the whole thing’s broken?”*

- Trenton Lee Steward, *The Mysterious Benedict Society*

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from Naga-Land, ma’am”

“Oh! Is your father a terrorist then?” (laughs)

A conversation I had with my professor as a student in the national capital, which slapped me to reality. For the first time, a painful unexpressible pinch enveloped me about my identity. Looking back, I’m grateful for that question because it was then I began my quest to find my roots.

I’ve been taught of my existence as a different entity at a young age, but never on how far my family stretches. I spent the first 2 decades of my existence on earth ignorant of the fact that my Naga family is actually spread across four states in India and three administrative divisions in Myanmar. To learn more about my own family, I had to look for books, souvenirs, articles to teach myself. Yet, the perplexity remains the same despite accumulating bundles of knowledge and insights six years after my first encounter with the reality of who I am.

In my small opinion, patriotism is important for any country to flourish, simply because a Nation requires teamwork and loyalty to build. A sense of patriotism is also important to develop character in an individual. It gives them a sense of belongingness, a pride of being part of something bigger. Nobody can serve two masters, and my generation has grown up not knowing which master to serve. Such confusion is leading to varied form of frustrations, which is bouncing back to the society. The young generation is in dire need of an identity to begin taking a proactive role in contributing to our society. I envision for an answer to who I am.

The mighty British left the Nagas at the mercy of two nations, who came together and drew lines right in our homes. Many of us went a step further, and unconsciously welcomed those man-made lines into our hearts and minds, and began to enlarge them whilst clinging on to the hope of removing them on paper. The result being one big scattered Naga family who are gradually unlearning the existence of each other.

Despite being of subservient nature, I had the opportunity to work with and for the Nagas on a number of platforms while in Delhi. It was fulfilling to have had the privilege of being part of addressing issues of our Naga family, including Myanmar. Tribal lines never mattered, political boundaries never mattered then. All that mattered was that we are a family, and every problem – big or small – is meant to be shared by all. And once we get to know each other, all the prejudices diminished in no time. It has never been a burdensome task to find a common ground to work together. I envision the same approach to internal issues back home. An instinctive family bond always sparks up if we decide to give it a chance.

Countries educate and equip its citizens to thrive professionally and morally, and use their talents in return for its own growth. When education and the environment don't synchronise, a maze creeps the minds blocking it from polishing. We ought to

learn to grow, rather than memorising a few books to crack some exams solely for respect and salary packages. I envision a society where students are given the freedom to choose how they wish to contribute to the society and cumberless ways for them to work towards achieving their dreams, and not being compelled to merely survive with whatever job they could find in order to bring food to the table.

Communication can go a long way in solving societal challenges. Two people when locked in separate boxes cannot be expected to connect and understand each other. I envision a time when we as a family can freely get to know each other without reservations. We need to begin by removing the walls we have built in our hearts and minds. I see political boundaries as mere lines we see in the maps, in truest sense.

Compromise leads to unity. When we have our leaders striving for a common goal with their backs faced at each other, it is difficult to hope for the reality of The Common Naga Goal we all wish for. I envision our leaders working hand in hand, to lead and guide us to a better future.

Women are the backbone of every society. No society can thrive by suppressing the women. Time and again, our own Naga women have proven themselves no less than their male counterparts. Women's unflinching contribution towards the Naga cause also continues to this day. I envision for the inclusion of women in the decision making process of our cause without being confined to restore peace in troubled times.

As young people today, it remains our responsibility to be conscious of our culture and our unique history, for the torch and the baggage our leaders are carrying today shall one day be ours. We are only a part of the big heritage we are proud to call family, stretching back centuries. We cannot afford to break the chain, which could otherwise threaten the existence of generations that are to come.

Physical integration is what we long for, and it is what the Nagas have rightly been fighting towards. However, in the quest of erasing the political boundaries, we must be careful not to erase the bond we share with each other. I sincerely wish for an emotional integration alongside physical integration, without which we shall be dusting the sacrifices made by our parents.

As grateful as I am for the coveted opportunity to voice out on a platform such as this, I wish for the same approach in other areas and platforms. Because, the younger generation, even the women care all the same. I wish we begin choosing leaders based solely on the qualities and not on gender lines or age or tribe.

*Nokho Nyekha is an Independent Researcher of Indigenous Traditions, a freelance writer and talent agent.*

## **11. Nagas Without Borders: Imagining the Future For a Meaningful and Inclusive Naga Homeland**

- Pamyo Chamrui

At the very outset let me assert the plurality of my identity. I am Naga, yet, I belong to a particular clan, a village, and a 'nation'. I enjoy the cultural privileges within my society even as one hailing from a minority community in the midst of larger communities and many powerful forces. Upholding a semblance of independence is a continuing struggle.

Here, I am not trying to assert the *fatalisms* which have steadily unfastened and fractured the bond that many Nagas had tilled with their lives. My intent is rather to remind oneself of the dangers that arise out of a homogenising tendency in the aspiration of nations, as history tells us so. Secondly, to acknowledge our plural identity in order to be aware of the 'othering' that often arises out of such plurality. Because to aspire and imagine a future together, I am of the view that it is necessary to be cognizant of our varied actualities which had shaped and still continue to mould our collective memories. Not for its own sake, but to soothe some of our tainted memories that such diversity had at times brought about—with the humility to ask for forgiveness and also have the courage and kindness to forgive, for a more purposeful and meaningful future of our people. Without such acts of reconciliation, how do we imagine a collective destiny, an inclusive Naga Homeland?

Acknowledging all our past and present actualities, unless we, as a people, are ready to rectify our past mistakes and nurture a familial bond amidst us, it is unlikely that any status of any form will bring about a united people. The prolonged systemic association entailed by a single administration may bring a semblance or to

a certain extent, a notion of belongingness. But is that all that the Nagas have strived for over the years? Are our identities, relationships, and aspirations solely dependent on being entitled under a state-system? No doubt, to live under one roof would be a blessing and a fulfilment of the cherished vision of our people, despite the uphill task that it will be. But can we and should we not also aspire for a Naga nation beyond the rigid conceptions of a nation-state?

### **A Naga Nation still in the making**

At the risk of sounding utopian and insensible, the Naga identity and the Naga nation that I yearn for, is still in the making. An identity I can aspire to, rather than content with the present. To be enlightened by the past, yet, not dragged down by it. To be a Naga who is more forgiving and has the magnanimity to share one's privileges. To break bread with any Naga, regardless of human-made boundaries—either by the state or in our hearts. To be grounded in lived actualities and being aware of all the odds that are against us, still, have the sincere willingness and integrity to rejoice in *Kuknalim for all*. A Naga-Land where one moves beyond the rhetoric of being one family, and enact what we profess.

The nation that I want to aspire for will not be built by our leaders alone, but each one of us will have to strive for a future moulded from the grassroots level. What I am aspiring for, is not out of my imagination alone. One only has to interact with the many young Nagas who aim for such future, and some are already on this path. The silver lining is already on the horizon.

### **“Nagas Without Borders”**

In a recent measles outbreak in Lahe Township, Myanmar, it was heartening to witness the deeds of many amongst us from the Indian side of the ‘border’ reaching out to the Nagas in Myanmar—with the much needed moral support and material

resources. The food, clothing and medicinal supplies for the outreach were funded with the resources gathered from our midst—each to one's own capacity and out of one's volition—utilising our technological privileges, relative wealth and human resources.

There are also Christian missionaries among us who are reaching out to the Nagas in Myanmar with the gospel of Christ, despite the constant threat to their lives. I've also heard the warm sound of few young Nagas reviving and regaling with the rich songs of our ancestors—the deep repository of our narratives: of a village; a clan; of the life world that was. The collective memories that make us who we are and what we can be.

Furthermore, many Nagas are also studying and working in various areas of the Indian sub-continent, as well as in different parts of the world. Despite the struggles that one has to face in such milieu, it has to a certain extent provided a platform for many Nagas to interact and live out a small aspect of their lives together: a sharing of narratives and actualities which we need on a much larger scale and frequency, if we are to overcome the walls in our hearts. Few Nagas have also donned the entrepreneurial role and are now job makers rather than waiting for a job to come their way. Hopefully, many more will have the courage to set out on such arduous path. But for many more to take such a path, and for them to thrive, our society will have to learn to support them with our deeds.

I'll like to believe that many of us are also living in our own capacity, the best that we can be, not just for one's sake but also for our people. As it is only such heartfelt concern and ingenuity at the grassroots level which will truly nurture a meaningful Naga Homeland. Without such efforts, a total reliance on top-down bureaucratic setup, compounded by our limited resources, and under the onslaught of crony capitalism, it is very likely that our self-seeking *isms* will resurface, despite our best intentions. We risk being a nation for a few in power—not for the community—the Naga peoples.

Therefore, I am of the view that a concerted effort in our individual capacities as well as at the organisational level is the need at every hour. Lest we forget, we, the Nagas, still do retain strong traditional institutions which command respect and loyalty of our people, despite all its flaws. I am of the view that these institutions will have to evolve from their overtly political character in the present, into institutions that concerns itself with many other issues—be it culture, environment, education, human rights, and so on. Else, what will a nation where its natural resources are ravaged, and its people oblivious to their roots, aspire for?

I am a Christian and Jesus Christ is the foundation of my aspirations. And it is under His grace and might that we have made it thus far. So, it is only right that we discern our foundation, in the imagining of our future. As it is written in the Bible, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.”

Kuknalim!

*Pamyo Chamrui is a student of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is an avid reader and loves photography.*



## 12. Respecting Nature and Social Responsibility

- *Esther Konyak*

A study of human interaction with the natural world or, in other words, the interaction between culture and nature deepens our understanding of how we have been affected by the natural environment in the past, and also how we have affected the environment and with what results. How did this interaction between nature and culture work?

In the Naga historical and cultural context, traditional knowledge and wisdom ensured a mechanism for ecological balance and sustainability. The Naga life was closely intertwined with nature. Beginning with our habitat to our lifestyles to our culture and our agricultural activities, it was all in harmony and balance. Naga life was coterminous to the cycle of nature.

This intricate relationship formed the basis to uphold a respectful and nonviolent relationship with nature. Naga traditional institutions such as the clan system, folk culture, taboos, etc provided a framework for resource utilization and protection. Storytelling, theatre and folktales were the cultural means that informed us of the ethical and moral values needed for sustaining a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with our environment and ecology. The folktales narrate stories of human relation with nature, animals and birds. All of these fell within the human responsibility to protect and uphold nature.

Hunting, fishing and food gathering were common practices. However, the means to attaining these benefits were traditional and it guaranteed the sustainability of the resources. For instance, the Konyak Nagas resorted to resources provided by the forest vegetation for fishing. This did not contaminate or leave residue

on the fish, water and the forest. The forest provided everything they needed and hence a profound interdependent relationship existed between humans and nature. Traditional knowledge of plants and their properties and the effective appropriation of this knowledge was a powerful tool in maintaining a healthy and balanced environment.

The very identity of a Naga is rooted to land and culture. The loss of land is seen as loss of identity, an alienation from nature. With this strong sense of connection, the protection of land and forest was both conscious and culturally internalized. Therefore, the belief that as “land belonged to the human, the human belonged to the land” was a strong ethical and moral foundation of everyday Konyak life.

Such was the traditional wisdom with which the Konyak lived harmoniously with nature. Today, the modern Konyak is fast losing the intimate relationship with mother earth. The displacement of people into urban areas, rapacious industries and businesses, abandonment of agricultural practices are some indications of this loss.

One of the basic and fundamental tools of understanding the gravity of this ecological issue is through education and awareness. Both rich and poor, urban and rural have access to education today. The process of education is crucial to understanding that we as human live “in nature” and not with nature. The “I Love My Mon Town” (ILMMT) Campaign initiated by the Mon District Administration on October 2, 2016 is one such powerful medium that spearheads the drive for ecological balance.

It is a campaign that belongs to the people of Mon. It is a campaign to bring people from different walks of life with a sense of urgency and responsibility with the hope to aspire and bring about change through education. The real challenge is to foster a new consciousness, a sense of responsibility and the ILMMT is an exemplary platform taking this ecology movement to the schools, the church and the village.

Nagas need to adapt and adopt traditional knowledge and judiciously utilize resources as we respond to the growing needs and demands. Places like Mon can be made a Green Corridor. This means that every village will have a reserve forest which connects each other whereby animals and birds from Assam and other states will have a passage all the way to Myanmar.

The vision of a shared Naga future is complete only when Nagas recover and rebuild our interdependent relationship with nature, land and culture. It needs to begin with a deep sense of social responsibility.

*Dr. Esther Konyak got her Ph.D from Jawarharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Esther studied Pre-Colonial Eastern Bengal Frontier and Environmental Studies. She currently teaches History at Wangkhao College, Mon.*

### 13. Bordered Differences: “Envisaging a Naga Path”

- Asangba Tzudir

*Ingrained in a unique history and identity, as a Naga peoples' ...  
Down a beautiful memory lane, there's a Naga path,  
Almost forgotten to the brink of oblivion.  
It lays waiting, to embrace and assert,  
With dignity and integrity.*

*Nagas, all across the borders,  
A peoples' Identity finds threatened,  
From 'who' we were and what we've become ...  
Traversing a trajectory where all sense of existence finds lost.  
Lest we become “imagined communities”?*

*From 'culturing of knowledge' to 'bordering of cultures'  
The bells of 'violence' rings loud,  
Our own greed incites hatred and creates enmity.  
Its shackles have strangulated a meaningful living  
For love and peace and unity find under siege.*

*The Naga path tells us to revisit and recreate anew,  
A unified purpose, with no 'borders',  
Where there's no hatred, only love,  
Where there are no differences, only acceptance  
And heal the fragmented existence.*

*Let every Naga come together as a people,  
And speak the language of tolerance, peace and unity and oneness.  
The cost of a little 'sacrifice', in flesh and in spirit,  
Of accommodating 'bordered' differences,  
The day beckons, to enjoy the fruits of shared belongingness.*

*We are at a threshold  
Behold! the 'coming' Naga community,  
Where, on the rim of each rising sun,  
Every proud Naga will live  
As 'ONE' without 'borders.'*

## 14. Activism - the Tool of Critical Engagement

- James Pochury

Every Nation or Organisation has their challenging contexts to grapple with and disturbing concerns to discern and deal with. Caste system, religious fundamentalism, unbridled capitalism and entrenched patriarchy are to name but a few in the Indian context. The most disturbing concern for Naga Nation, I feel, is that Naga Democratic institutions lie mutilated and strewn all over beyond recognition. Like termites eating into the vitals of wooden pillars; the ethical, moral and spiritual foundation on which once proudly stood the Naga edifice of Direct Democracy (Participatory Democracy from the Clan and upwards), is today cracking and crumbling. Prudent activism and not reactive 'Mindless Actions' to issues have to be replaced with 'Mindful Actions' through analysis of what the problems are, what causes them and addressing the root causes.

Article 371-A was a climb down but a game changing moment nevertheless, but it remained an abstract rhetoric without any justifiable, tangible road map (in the Naga Court of Law, if not anywhere else). Sans operation plan backed by notifications, state rules and subsequent amendments and orders, what could have reinforced and unleashed the unique Naga way of life, of participatory democracy, on our own terms, remains a fossilized creature with ornamental value – with limited utility. As it stands now on shaky ground, you invoke the Article if it suits someone and denigrate if 'regressive' to others.

Or was it shrewdly done on purpose by the Oppressor India like it does today with adivasis/tribals in Schedule V areas where two

revolutionary legislations – the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) and Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) 1996, remain sorely unimplemented. Laws that literally shifted power from the Centre to the Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) for Self Governance, but lack teeth without organic linkages in the governance structures, State Rules and Notifications under PESA and diversionary and distractive strategies and tactics of the forest bureaucracy and tiger conservation lobby under FRA. Similarly, in Schedule VI areas of Northeast of India there is no organic link in the governance structures from the village level and upwards.

So, in the case of Naga-Land, however powerful, credible and authentic the traditional bodies like Naga Hoho or tribal hohos and village institutions might be, the State machinery is not legally bound or mandated to listen to them, let alone act. More water cannons and military might could still be wielded to suppress democratic dissent in the days ahead. The gap between the elected and the electors is bound to increase if the clamor for participatory democracy is not heightened, for provisioning organically linked structures right from the Clan to Village upto the Naga Parliament or legislative assembly. Failing which, we will perpetually remain entangled in the Indian parliamentary form of “representative democracy” where local elected MLAs will pretend to be our representatives and take decisions left, right and centre, in all nooks and corners. Is this what we want to reduce the great Naga civilization to? That your voice begins and ends at the polling booth once every five years?

It is about time to analyse and understand whether ‘power’ is exercised by the elite few, a despotic collective or, by a genuine people’s collective. And then, critically engage in democratic actions to turn the tables in our favour – for a more equitable and just society, founded on participatory democracy at all levels of our society, economy and polity – including our town and municipal bodies.

The real challenge is the intention (choosing between two types of activism cited below) and ability of Nagas to strategically and effectively turn problems into 'Issues' through critical and sustained engagement. For which, we need to understand the nuances and optics of 'activism'.

What kind of activism critically engages with the system for transformational change of society? These are crucial questions that Nagas confront now.

'Activism' broadly is actions to bring about political or social change. The distinguishing feature between social activism and political activism is that the former attempts to address 'issues' while the latter attempts to address issues by interrogating the unjust and unequal political and social power structure in society that are at the 'root of these issues'. In other words, political activism enters the terrain of power relations, competing and/or challenging the existing dominant political and/or economic power. While social activists primarily attempt to raise issues hoping that the existing power structure would address their grievances or demands (anti-corruption drives, clean election campaign, etc.), the political activists seek to confront the existing power structure to create a negotiating space for larger and deeper reforms of significant impact and importance to society so that such issues do not recur.

Political activism, through struggles, simultaneously moves into the space opened up by their actions to engage politically with the structures of democracy. The changes sought are substantial and long standing. (Gram Sabhas for instance under the Forest Rights Act and PESA have unprecedented powers shifted from the Centre to the villages. Our 371-A is impressive but sans power at the village level where it is supposed to be rooted). Social activists, on the other hand, largely focus on grievance redressal of individuals or small groups of aggrieved without seeking systemic changes in governance that eradicates the possibility of



such grievances re-emerging.

Further, political activism can also be to retain status quo and the existing hegemony, to come to power replacing the existing power groups or to democratize the power structure to a more egalitarian, equitable and just society. The former two retains the existing inequitable hegemonic power structure while the latter seeks to radically restructure society through empowerment of grassroots and dismantling the hegemonic power structure. The political strategy adopted are accordingly developed which then determines the actions of the activists in intent and content.

Such a critical understanding would be useful to understand the real nature of activism and activists rather than be carried away by rhetoric, polemics or grandiose statements. In a democracy, all these typologies of activism are natural. A vibrant democracy requires a good enough expanding space for all such activisms to flower and flourish and is not unhealthy or threat to development or progress.

In Naga politics which are the political processes that are trying to retain the hegemonic status quo and those that challenge the status quo? And here we are neither talking in terms of change in leadership nor in terms of change in political party at all. It is not about transfer of power between one group to another. We are rather talking about a transfer of power from hegemonic structures to a more community-centred participatory structure, a change of the power equation from a centralized to a non-centralized system which is more democratic. This is a structural change. Similarly, in the ongoing Naga-India Peace Talks, that has just appeared to have gotten more 'inclusive', so to speak, the 'Collective Leadership' is purportedly negotiating from a 'position of power', as 'two separate entities', of 'shared sovereignty', etc., which, if true, is progressive to the extent of democratizing and empowering Naga people, in the given economic and geo-political circumstances. But what, why and how after that?

The fundamental question is the question of power. Whether our development priorities are embedded in a governance model that is based on participatory democracy of the local community and where everything is under the control of local communities.

*James Pochury is from Meluri living and working in Delhi with ActionAid, an International NGO that works on human rights issues, including Peoples Control over Resources and Radical Democratisation of society, economy and polity at all levels.*

## **15. Naga Day, January 10, 2018 Program Highlight**

Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR)

welcomes you to the

“Naga Day”

**A day when all Nagas come and  
stand together as ONE people**

Date: January 10, 2018

Time: 10:00AM

Venue: Khuochiezie (Kohima Local Ground), Kohima

### **Highlights:**

Messages by Niketu Iralu, Rev. Dr. Wati Aier  
and Naga women and men from the Naga homeland

**Naga Colors** presented by musicians from the Naga homeland  
such as Naga Choir, Featherheads, Nagagenous, Angam Khong,  
Alobo Naga, Nagaland Chamber Choir, Tali Angh, Dreamz  
Unlimited

and many more ... !

## 16. Naga Memorandum to The Simon Commission

Z Assam-57/1.

Memorandum on the Naga Hills, from

The Secretary,  
Naga Club, Kohima, Naga Hills,  
Assam.

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We, the undersigned Nagas of the Naga Club at Kohima, who are the only persons at present who can voice for our people have heard with great regret that our Hills were included within the reformed Scheme of India without our knowledge, but as the administration of our Hills continued to be in the hands of the Officers of the British Government we did not consider it necessary to raise any protest in the past. Now we learn that you have come to India as representatives of the British Government to enquire into the working of the system of Government and the growth of education and we beg to submit below our views with the prayer that our Hills ~~may~~ be withdrawn from under the reformed Scheme and ~~put~~ placed outside the Reforms but directly under the British Government. We never asked for any reforms and we don't wish for any reforms.

Before the British Government conquered our country in 1879-1800 we were living in a state of intermittent warfare with the Assamese of the Assam valley to the North and West of our country and the Manipuris to the South. They never conquered us nor were we ever subjected to their rule. On the other hand we were always a terror to these people. Our country within the administered area consists of more than 8 tribes quite different from one another with quite different languages which cannot be understood by one another and there are more tribes outside the administered area which are now known at present. We have no unity among us and it is only the British Government that is holding us together now.

Our

E-Assam-57/2.

Our education at present is poor. The occupation of our country by the British Government being so recent as 1880 we have had no chance or opportunity to improve in education and though we can boast of 2 or 3 graduates of an Indian University in our country, we have not got one yet who is able to represent all our different tribes or master our languages, much less one to represent us in any council of a province, more over our population numbering 102,000 is very small in comparison with the populations of the plains Districts in the province and any representation that may be allotted to us in the Council will be negligible and will have no weight whatever. Our language is quite different from those of the plains and we have no social affinities with either Hindus or Mahammadans. We are looked down upon by the one for our Beef and by the other for our pork and by both for our want in education which is not due to any fault of ours.

Our country is poor and it does not pay for its own administration. Therefore if it is continued to be placed under the Reformed Scheme we are afraid that new and heavy taxes will have to be imposed upon us and when we cannot pay them, all our lands will have to be sold and in the long run we shall have no share in the land of our birth and life will not be worth living there. Though our land at present is within the British Territory, Government have always recognised our private rights in it, but if we are forced to enter the Council all these rights may be extinguished by an unsympathetic Council the majority of whose members is sure to be long to the plains Districts. We also much fear the introduction of foreign laws and customs to supersede our own customary law which we now enjoy.

For the

E-Assam-57/3.

For the above reasons we pray that the British Government will continue to safeguard our rights against all encroachments from other people who are more advanced than us by with<sup>draw</sup>ing our country from the Reformed Scheme and placing it directly under its own protection. If the British Government however, want to throw us away we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of people who could never have conquered us themselves and to whom we were never subjected to; but to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient time.

We claim to represent<sup>not</sup> only the members of the Naga Club at Kohima but all the members of the tribes to which we belong, viz:-

Angamis.	Kacha Nagas.	Kukis.	Somas.	Ihotas.	Rengmas.
10,254	1,315	366	2,780	1,748	977

BR.19/10.

Note: This copy of the Memorandum on Naga Hills submitted by the Naga Club to the Simon Commission was sourced from “E-Assam-57: Memorandum on the Naga Hills from the Secretary, Naga Club, Kohima, Naga Hills,” in Indian Statutory Commission – Memoranda, Assam (57-1033), British Library, London.





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