MEMBER PROFILE

NAGALIM

National Socialist Council of Nagalim - NSCN (IM)
Population: 4.5+ million
Area: Between China, India and Myanmar (approximately 120,000 km²)

Languages: English is the official language; Nagamese, Assamese and tribal variants

Religions: Christianity, Hinduism, animism and others


UNPO REPRESENTATION

Nagalim is represented at UNPO by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN(IM)). The NSCN was created in 1980 by Mr Isak Chishi Swu, Mr Khaapleng and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah, strengthening the resistance movement of the Naga after a delegation of the Naga National Council (NNC) – which had been formed in 1946 by Naga leaders – signed an agreement with the Indian Government committing to unconditional acceptance of the Constitution of India. The “Shillong Accord” was seen by the National Assembly of the Naga as a betrayal to their movement and, under the leadership of Mr Swu and Mr Muivah, the NSCN stood against it and gathered worldwide attention for the Naga case. Representatives of the NSCN attended various international meetings, visited numerous countries and, after resisting years of military attacks, engaged in negotiations with India’s central government in the 1990s, representing the interests of the Naga.

NSCN was divided into two factions when a coup was staged on 30 April 1998, led by S S Khaapleng. The coup led to the formation of the NSCN(K) under Khaapleng’s leadership – Muivah and Swu remained the leaders of the organisation, since then named NSCN(IM).

On 23 January 1993, the organisation was admitted to UNPO. The NSCN(IM) is still engaged in negotiations with the Indian government, having reached a historic pre-agreement in 2015. In August 2017, the organisation affirmed that the parties were close to a final agreement.

OVERVIEW

Geography

Nagalim is situated between China, India and Myanmar, occupying an area of 120,000 km². The region's climate is generally warm, with high levels of humidity and a significant amount of rainfall from May to September. The
landscape is predominantly mountainous, which is why many villages are located on the top of steep hills - from there, it was easier for the Nagas to protect themselves from intruders and to defend their villages. The part of Nagaland ruled by India consists of the territory which today is administered by four different administrative units - the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland. The eastern part of Nagalim, ruled by Myanmar (formerly Burma) has been placed under two administrative units, those of the Kachin state and of Sagaing division.

Population
The Nagas form several tribes (55+), mainly established in the North Eastern region of India and north-western Myanmar and accounting for a population of over 4.5 million. Traditionally, the Nagas live in villages and separate clans, of which each speaking its own dialect. However, commercial towns have been rapidly growing in the region, bringing changes to the way of life and the social organisation of the Naga people.

Economy
The Nagas earn their living essentially through agriculture: terrace and jhum cultivation are extensively practiced in the region, mainly producing rice, tobacco, oilseeds, pulses, potato and sugarcane. Irrigation through water channels controlled by bamboo sticks facilitates cultivation on the mountainous territory and farmers also produce plantation crops - for instance, tea, cardamom and coffee. Farmers grow vegetables such as carrots, chillies, onion, spinach leaf, cucumber and mustard. This primary source of revenue is threatened by a worrying increase of environmental degradation, adding to the severe environmental damage caused by the irresponsible exploitation of the land by the British during colonial times. The region is also rich in mineral resources such as coal, nickel, cobalt, magnetite,
marble, petroleum and natural gas but negligent practices of extraction of these resources have affected the region's environment since colonial rule. Industrial activities are still incipient in the region, currently consisting of sugar mills, cottage, oil and bamboo-related industries.

Culture and Language

Naga tribal philosophies, expressed in folk tales, dances and music, carry lessons of ethical living for the Nagas. Every individual is expected to celebrate life by taking part in the singing and dance ceremonies. Naga traditions are permeated by the idea of heritage as the Nagas are taught to respect and preserve the wisdom and knowledge acquired from past generations. Every generation is expected to pass on to the next the knowledge necessary to ensure the survival of their culture.

Although most of the population in present days is adept of Christianity, a legacy of colonial times that grew stronger by the hands of missionaries, traditional beliefs are still strong in Naga society. Naga tales reveal their ties with the spiritual world, which is closely related to nature, animals and wildlife. The Nagas’ relation to the environment is based on a holistic and harmonic worldview.

English is the official language of Nagalim and is the medium of education. Nagamese, a creole language based on Assamese, is also widely spoken. Assamese is the language spoken by the people of Assam, the nearest neighbours of the Naga people situated in the Western part of Nagalim. Other than these two languages, different tribes speak their own languages.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Naga people belongs to the Tibeto-Myanma group of Sino-Mongolid descent. The Naga are originally from Mongolia, having migrated to the region of Nagalim in the 10th century before Christ (BC). The term Nagalim refers to the entire Naga ancestral domain which was partitioned by the British between India and Burma, now Myanmar.

Until the British invasion in 1832, the Nagas were independent, living in city-states on the hills of Nagalim. The region was declared a British District 49 years after being invaded and the colonial rule of the British kept the Nagas isolated as a way to prevent them from joining the political movements taking place in British India. During the First World War, the British recruited about four thousand Nagas as manual labour corps for their army in France. In 1918, when they returned, the Nagas formed the “Naga Club”, the first civil society organisation in the Naga Hills. Nagas were politically conscious of their future and as such did not want to be part of British India.

In 1929, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the commission of British lawmakers in charge of assessing the state of Indian constitutional affairs: the Indian Statutory Commission, or Simon Commission. The memorandum stressed the unique character of the Naga society and the history of the Nagas as a free and independent people, urging Britain to avoid putting Nagalim under the administration of one of the neighbouring nations.

The Naga National Council (NNC), founded in 1946 and composed of Naga leaders, reached the “Nine-Point Agreement” with the Indian government, which recognised their right to self-determination and granted the Nagas autonomy, with India as a “guardian power” that would ensure the observance of the agreement in the region for a period of 10 years. After this period, the Nagas were supposed be free to decide on their future as a nation. In August 1947, the NNC declared the independence of Nagalim. Shortly after the independence of India, which came one day later, a Naga delegation met Mahatma Gandhi to assert the Nagas’ intention to remain independent from the Indian Union. The activist gave a historical
statement supporting Naga independence. However, the Nine-Point Agreement was revoked unilaterally for alleged invalidity by India in 1949.

A nation-wide plebiscite was conducted by the NNC on 16 May 1951, after India refused NNC's invitation to hold a referendum. 99.9 percent of the population voted in favour of an independent and sovereign Nagalim. Disregarding the outcome of the plebiscite, Indian Prime Minister Nehru started the process of dividing Nagalim between India and Myanmar, although the Myanmar authorities had expressed no interest in the region until the independence of India.

On 22 March 1956, in an effort to monitor the Indian military policy, the NNC proclaimed the establishment of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN). The NNC formed an armed wing called the Naga Safe-Guards, which later became the Naga Army. The establishment of those institutes led India to initiate military operations aiming at restoring its authority over the territory. Under Indian occupation, tens of thousands of Nagas were forced into concentration camps built across the Naga Hills, where many perished as a result of hunger and water contamination between 1958 and 1959. Continuous fighting between the Naga and the Indian Union took place until September 1964, when a ceasefire agreement was concluded between the parties. The failure of the 1964 Indo-Naga peace process ended in a political impasse that reverted to armed confrontation. Six rounds of talks took place at the highest level, before India discontinued them in 1972.

In 1975, the government of India imposed the Shillong Accord, based on the unconditional acceptance of the Indian constitution and the surrender of arms, which was signed by the federal delegation on 11 November of that year. The National Assembly of the Nagas, held in August 1976, condemned the Accord as a betrayal of the Naga movement. Forces of resistance, led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu, then NNC General Secretary and Vice President, respectively, founded the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) in January 1980. Mr Swu later became the Chairman of the Council.

The movement of resistance gained strength under the NSCN and India began to suffer military and political setbacks in their offensive against the Nagas. The United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights allowed the NSCN Chairman to speak during its 54th session, held from 16 March to 27 April 1998. NSCN was then divided into two factions after a coup, led by S S Khaplang against the Council, resulting in the death of more than 200 Nagas. Mr Khaplang formed NSCN(K), while Muivah and Swu, who survived the attacks, remained the leaders of the organisation from then on named NSCN(IM).

In 1995, the government of India invited NSCN(IM) for negotiations and two years later, on 1 August 1997, a cease-fire came into effect. Several obstacles to a concrete peace deal
presented themselves during the following talks. The first was the refusal of the government of India to officially extend the ceasefire to all Naga-inhabited areas, especially to the four Naga-inhabited districts of Ukhrul, Chandel, Senapati and Tamenglong in Manipur. The second was the attempted murder of Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir in November 1999. Last but not least 12 NSCN(IM) activists were killed by the 17th Para regiment of India on 11 July 1999, in the North Cachar Hills.

On 18 May 1999, Mr Swu and Mr Muivah visited Nagaland after 33 years in exile. Mr Muivah was arrested the following year for making use of false identity papers when he attempted to travel to Europe for negotiation meetings with representatives of the Indian government. Mr Muivah had refused, in protest, to use an Indian passport. Mr Muivah, whose detention threatened the continuation of the peace talks between the Nagas and India, was released on bail after eight months, following an intense mobilisation in which UNPO took part, among other organisations.

The ceasefire between the NSCN(IM) and India, extended time by time since 1997, was extended indefinitely in 2007. Two years later, on 13 June 2009, after a decade of recurrent clashes between the NSCN factions, representatives of the NSCN(K), the NSCN(IM) and the Nagaland state government held negotiations in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and signed the Covenant of Reconciliation (CoR).

NSCN(IM), after elaborating a proposal for a special federal agreement in which the Nagas would govern themselves, accused India of deliberately delaying the talks in 2014. That same year, the organisation signed the Lenten Agreement with the NSCN(KK), a faction that split from NSCN(K) in 2011, and the NNC, committing to the formation of a National Naga Government (NNG) and stressing the importance of reconciliation and unity.

The government of India, now led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, declared that while negotiations with the NSCN(IM) were ongoing, it would not engage in talks with other groups. In the third quarter of the year 2015, the parties reached a historical 33-point pre-agreement, which came to be known as the “Framework Agreement”.

The content of the document was not made public, but Mr Muivah declared that it “recognises the unique history, the identity, the sovereignty, the territories of the Nagas. It also recognises the legitimate right of the Nagas to the integration of all Naga territories”. On 14 August 2017, the NSCN(IM) revealed that the negotiation was close to being completed.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Due to the exploitation of the mineral resources of Nagalim by colonial entrepreneurs, the ecological balance of the once rich lands of the region has been severely harmed. Furthermore, irresponsible practices of exploitation continue to impact the living conditions of the Naga people. According to a booklet published by the Nagaland Pollution Control Board (NPCB), named “Study of coal mining areas in Nagaland and its impact on environment”, an intensive and disorganised exploitation in the mining sector causes the loss of substantial amounts of resources and increases the occurrence of landslides, threatening not only the flora and the fauna, but also the communities in the vicinity of mining sites.

Mining promotes intensive deforestation and causes exposed underground rocks and minerals to release toxic gases that cause air pollution, therefore contributing to climate change. Excessive dust from mining also hinders the growth of plants, thus negatively impacting agricultural activities. Animals are driven away from their natural habitats due to the constant noise and vibration caused by mining machinery and toxic minerals released through the excavation of large sites lead to water contamination that is harmful to aquatic
organisms. Communities living near mining sites deal with limited access to drinkable water and water-borne diseases such as cholera tend to spread. Additionally, cultivable lands lose fertility due to the removal of top soil and to the contamination of land and water.

Besides, environmental degradation deprives the Nagas from maintaining a sustainable and respectful relation with nature that is characteristic to their culture and traditions. The Nagas are bound to nature through their most basic values, which permeate their traditional social, economic and religious practices. The contamination and increasing shortage of resources in the region therefore represent a violation of the Nagas’ indigenous rights.

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