



The Chin, represented by the Chin National Front (CNF) is headed by Mr. Thomas Thangnou and had applied for the UNPO membership since 1996.

On July 15, 2001, the 26th Steering Committee meeting unanimously accepted the Chin peoples as new members, following a briefing by the Shan representative, Mr Sai Wansai. The CNF have been actively lobbying for their admittance for some years, particularly at the February 2001 UNPO General Assembly meeting in Tallinn, Estonia. With their admittance, UNPO now has a total number of 17 members in the Asia Pacific Region alone; adding to the latter's importance within the organization. It is noted that at least two members are now actively moving towards independence or autonomy, namely East Timor and Bougainville, while Nagalim is still engaged in peace negotiations with the government of India. On the other hand, South Moluccas and Aceh/Sumatra are still plagued by violence and instability. Taiwan recently made strides in proliferating its strive towards self-determination and international recognition. For the benefit of UNPO News readership we provide some background information on our new members.

Chinland is located in the western part of Burma (Myanmar), bordering India in the northeast and Bangladesh in the southeast. The estimated population of Chins in Burma is about 1.5 million. At the UNPO, the Chin National Front (CNF) represents the Chin people. The territory known today as Chin State was an independent territory outside the Burmese kingdom until the British annexed it in the 1890s. It was directly ruled by the British governor from Rangoon through the chieftains of the territory outside the provincial government of British Burma. When the British government gave independence to the Burmese kingdom in 1948, the Chin territory was legally entitled to become an independent sovereign state, as it was not annexed as a part of the Burmese kingdom. The Chin people are a distinct people much different from the Burmese in language, custom and culture.

The Chin chieftains who ruled the Chin territory signed the historic Panglong Agreement with other nationalities on February 12, 1947 to achieve freedom from any colonialism including British colonialism. This historic day became known as Union Day, and has been observed since in the whole Union of Burma. Another important day is February 20th. This day marked the end to despotic and aristocratic rule in the Chin State, and has been recognized by successive governments of the Union of Burma as the Chin National Day. However, British colonialism was in effect being replaced by a Burmese leadership instigated 'neo-colonialism' when the founding fathers of the Union led by General Aung San were assassinated on July 19, 1947 before completing the Union Constitution.

Again in early 1962 the constitutional government of the Union agreed to amend the 1947 Union Constitution in a federal form, according to the vision of the founding fathers of the Union. This was sabotaged by a group of armed forces led by General Ne Win who overthrew the constitutional government and abolished the parliamentary system on March 2, 1962. Since then General Ne Win ruled the country as a despot dictator responsible for the gross human rights violations and misery. The year 1988 saw a pro-democracy uprising against the military regime, seeking an end to the military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy and justice in the whole of Burma. The military regime responded by occupying Chinland with military force.

American-led Baptist missions since 1899 brought Christianity to Chinland. With its overwhelming Christian population, it became the only Christian region in the 14 provinces of the Union of Burma. The Burmese military regime accuses the Chin people as being pro-Western and pro-American and uses this as an excuse, justifying their unlawful acts of persecution, torture, rape and ethnic cleansing. Thousands were forced to flee, resulting in the existence of a large community-in-exile of Chin people. Like many other UNPO member nations the Chin are being persecuted on the grounds of their ethnicity, minority status, religion and practice of democracy in their respective (religious) organizations and institutions. This has continuously destabilized and brutalized Burmese society. In a sense, their membership of UNPO and lobbying of international organizations like the UN constitutes a 'last resort' to inform the outside world of their desperate situation and to seek effective shelter from the military regime's repressive rule.

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