



Chin National Front
General Headquarters
CHINLAND

**Intervention Speech of Dr. Sui Khar, External Affairs Secretary of the Chin
National Front in 55th Session of the U.N. Human Rights
Commission Meeting on (Agenda Item # 14)
April 19, 1999, Geneva**

Madam Chairperson,

It is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak about religious persecutions in Chinland situated in the western part of Burma.

With the arrival of the first Christian missionary, Christianity was introduced to the Chin people in 1899. Over the decades a large percentage (nearly 90%) of the Chin people converted from animism to the Christian faith, not only because of religious fervor, but also because this helped the Chin people maintain a separate cultural identity in the face of the Burman ethnic majority who are overwhelmingly Buddhist.

Even though the constitution of Burma guaranteed a measure of freedom of religion, since the Burmese Army took the State power in 1962 the successive governments have undertaken religious persecution against Christians and Muslims in Burma. To military rulers who have adopted a xenophobic, crypto - marxist philosophy, it is a threat that a very large percentage of the Chin people have embraced Christianity which they consider a foreign religion. In any possible way, the military dictatorship has continuously maneuvered to prevent the growth of the Chin Christian Church and forcibly introduce Buddhism to Chin people. Among the 40 ministries created by the regime, it is the ministry of Religious Affairs headed by Maj. Gen. Sein Htwa which deals with the promotion of Buddhism and the abolition of other religions.

Since 1995, the Chin children have been lured away from their parents with the promises of sending them to be educated in Rangoon. But it was later found out that they were rather placed in Buddhist monasteries, forced to become Buddhist novices and learn Buddhism. The parents of these Children were denied information about them and given stern warnings that any further attempt to contact their children would result in imprisonment.

Madame Chair,

Since the military regime of State Law and Order Restoration Council (now has changed State Peace and Development Council) emerged in 1988, churches and crosses erected at the top of hills were dismantled and replaced with pagodas. The regime then forced Chin Christians to build pagodas and provide fund for it. A church and a missionary house in

Arn Myo, Ngaphe Township were dismantled on 19th September, 1998 by the regime and were replaced with a pagoda and a monastery.

The military regime sent their Buddhist monks to Chinland to preach Buddhism among the Chin people. The monks are not only safeguarded by the army but also the Chin people are forcibly called for portage to carry the monks' belongings. The Chin people are forcibly gathered and forced to listen the preaching of Buddhism. While preaching of Buddhism is promoted and sponsored by the regime, Christian missionary work is prevented by any means. Chin for Christ in One Century, a native missionary organization was totally banned by the military junta in 1996. The regime accused them as having contact with Chin National Front (CNF), which opposes the junta. Christians are discriminated even in the Army, Christian soldiers cannot be promoted to ranks higher than Major. Christian soldiers are offered promotion if they convert to Buddhism.

Madame Chair,

As it has come for the Chin people to celebrate the Centenary of Christianity in Chinland, the SPDC has increased religious persecutions in Chinland. On January 5, 1999 six pastors were arrested in Thantlang because they refused to remove crosses recently erected on hilltops to commemorate the Centennial Jubilee. Citing security reasons, the regime did not allow foreigners to take part in the Jubilee celebrations. Furthermore, the junta did not allow the gathering of more than 5000 people in Haka to participate in the Jubilee festivities. Therefore, on February 9, 1999, the CNF declared a unilateral cease-fire effective from 15 February 1999 to 15 April 1999, so that they will not be used as an excuse, in the name of security, by the military junta for denying visas to foreign guests and for refusing permission for the celebrations. But this did not alter the regimes's considerations so far. It is now very uncertain if the Centenary could be celebrated as joyfully as expected.

Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance submitted a report on 11 January 1999 (E/ CN.4 1999/58) to this session. It stated under the Myanmar heading that the State reportedly practices a policy of intolerance and discrimination against Christian minorities (destruction of places of worship, conversion of children to Buddhism) in the States of Chin and Karen and the Sagaing Division.

Madame Chair,

Even though religious persecutions are persistently occurring in Chin State, it was not mentioned in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Burma. Therefore, I would like to request the Special Rapporteur of Burma to investigate religious persecutions suffered by the Christian in Burma and to include his findings in future reports. Again, I asked the military regime of Burma to stop religious persecution against Christian in Chinland and other part of Burma.

Thank you.