



Chin National Front  
General Headquarters  
CHINLAND

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**A Speech Delivered by Zing Cung, Vice Chairman of Chin National Front,  
Chinland at the 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations  
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Thanks you, Madam and my fellow indigenous people for giving me this privilege to present the situation of Chin language and education under the successive military regime of Burma.

I am Zing Cung, Vice- chairman of the Chin National Front. The Chin national front is struggling against the military regime of Burma in order to restore genuine democracy and the Self- determination of the Chin people. I come here from Chinland to represent the Chin indigenous people.

Education is the backbone of any society structure and all other social elements are the flesh, which are embedded in the framework called education. As I present the topic on indigenous peoples, their language and education. I would like to view this in terms of formal and informal education. Formal education simply includes basic schooling from kindergarten to college, and informal education includes cultural values and traditional wisdom which are passed on through education is designed by the dominant racial group.

For example, in Burma, formal education is taught in Burmese even in the small villages of Chinland where even teachers barely speak Burmese. As a result, in that system of formal education, there is no room for the traditional values and wisdom of the indigenous people. For the Chin indigenous people, preserving their languages is essential to maintain their distinct identity, because their identity is intertwined with their culture, which is an integral part. Without the traditional values and cultural wisdom, which are preserved in their language, the Chin indigenous people would lose their identity.

For a large and powerful group of people, there seems to be no problem in preserving their identity and their language because they can create and educational system that support this in many dimensions including politics, economic and many other social factors. They build their formal education in support of their language and cultural identity. As a result, there arises an interaction between their formal education and their cultures, which further enhances and nurtures their language and their knowledge.

In Burma, Chin people are denied the possibility to learn and nurture their native language in a formal education setting. This is a very unfortunate situation, because once a language is dead, it can never be recovered. Chin language is push to the brink of extinction; their cultural values and traditional wisdom are left un-nurtured. With the demise of any language however small it may seem, a priceless wisdom of a culture is

lost which has been passed through the language. If big and powerful language group succeed to eliminate other smaller, it will be like creating a one color system flower in a garden because every language has its own unique color and beauty.

Madam Chairperson, the military regime in Burma has been closing colleges and universities for some years beginning in 1988. It is unfortunate that the military government has not yet established any college or university in Chinland for more than 2 million Chin people who do not have access to higher education.

Therefore, we are committed to the task of preserving the native languages of the Chin while promoting our cultures and traditions. In order to achieve that goal, we are planning to provide schools with learning materials, which include Chin traditional stories. The main component of our curriculum will be to educate the young Chins about the beauty and value of their language and culture, to critically think, which was not taught them in their formal education.

However, the first task is to establish democracy so that there will be freedom of learning and teaching in Chinland. We urge you to continue your support in our struggle for democracy and self-determination.

Thank you.