

NORTHEAST INDIA WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE



If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that
we belong to each other.

-Mother Teresa



Map of Northeast India

NORTHEAST INDIA WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE

A framework for action for democracy, human rights, economic justice and
Conflict prevention in India's Northeast region



Manipuri women selling food items at the road side

Northeast India and Women's Movement

Northeast India comprising of the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim is facing the onslaught of multiple armed conflicts since the late 1940s. No other part of India or South Asia has been subjected to such a prolonged violent struggle, which have held development to ransom, as the Northeast. The fire of insurgency has for long engulfed this strategic region for the last half a century or more making it one of the South Asia's most disturbed regions.

And it is not likely that this violence will end soon. In fact, the violence seems to be increasing with each passing day and the situation is becoming more and more complex. A level of militarization has engulfed India's Northeast under the garb of insurgency and counter-insurgency. And in the process women are assaulted, humiliated, raped and murdered during conflicts which are not of their making. In the words of Dr Anuradha Cheno, "In 99 per cent of the world's wars, the decision to wage them has been taken by men; women have only supported "men's wars". Women are used by the state and non-state actors in different ways during conflict and in the practice of militarism without being conscious of it". Women in the region need to understand the political economy of militarism, to look at measures to bring peace and justice in the region.

Women groups in Northeast India have developed many a powerful programme of direct, non-violent, action designed to confront the armed violence of both insurgents and the security forces. However, most of their actions remain in "protest" form and after the initial action dies down, nothing much happens. The women's movement in India's Northeast that have emerged in response to the ongoing armed conflict is still now confined to "saving the sons of the soil" syndrome. We need to make ourselves; we the women in India's northeast understand the issues of war, conflict, peace. We need to understand the political economy of violence, the militarization of Northeast societies. Besides, we also need to understand many of the internationally known United Nations Resolutions on women and peace building which remains just on paper such as United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820.

In India's northeast, women have always played a major role in many peace and social movements. Concepts of solidarity amongst women's groups are very strong in the region. This is often illustrated in the existence of self-help groups, traditional cooperative systems, women's markets and other forms of cooperative village action. Women's contribution in the economic sphere is great and women have some amount of economic autonomy.

Northeast Women Initiative for Peace (NEIWIP) is a network of women organizations that are working for peace in the northeast region of India. It is an initiative of Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN) and Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI), New Delhi formed on 13 June 2009. It is the first collective women-led response for reducing armed violence and bringing peace in Northeast India.

The network was formed on with the following objectives:

1. To provide opportunity to bring together women from all walks of life including peace makers, academicians, researchers, policy makers, lawyers, social activist and students to share knowledge, raise issues, to listen to one another and determine ways to promote peace in the region.
2. To strategise an action plan for building peace, providing justice and political rights in a society ruptured by years of conflict.
3. Start dialogue with all stake holders to end conflict.
4. To find solutions to promote empowerment of women in the region by involving them in decision making.
5. To analyse and recommend the best ideas to the Government of India, our policy makers media, scholars and people in order to promote peace in the region.

Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network and Control Arms Foundation of India have been organizing Consultative Conclave Meetings on North East Women Initiative for Peace since three years. The following is the sequence of the consultative conclaves organised in several states of Northeast India like Manipur, Tripura, Assam as well as in the capital city Delhi so far.

- 1) First Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace, 13 June 2009, India International Centre, New Delhi. Please see photos below.



Ms Binalakshmi Nepram , Ms Ketaki Bordalai(L-R)



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

- 2) Second Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace, 7 August, 2010 Bosco Reach Out, Guwahati, Assam. Please see photos below.



Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Mr Subhir Bhaumik(L-R)



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

- 3) Third Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace on the broad topic 'AFSPA', 8 September, 2010 at India International Centre, New Delhi. Please see photos below.



Mr B.S. Malik, Mr Yambem Laba, Ms Chandrajini(L-R)



Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Mr. Iftikar Gilani(L-R)

- 4) Fourth Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace, a 2 days seminar cum workshop 18-19 January, 2011, India International Centre, New Delhi. Please see photos below.



Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Mr Pradyot Debbarman, Ms Anuradha Chenoy, Mr B.S Malik(L-R)



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

- 5) 4th September 2011: Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace: an effort of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network & Control Arms Foundation of India organized, a strategic debate to create awareness about Anna Hazare Vs Irom Sharmila. Please see photo below.



Ongoing meeting, 4th September 2011 at CAFI office

- 6) Fifth Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace, a 1 day conference on "Women Negotiating Peace: Effort to get North-East Women from their villages to the Negotiating Table" at Chandra Mahal, Opposite Ujjayanta Palace, Agartala, Tripura.



Mr EN Rammohan, Mr Subir Bhaumik, Mr Pradyot Debbarman, Ms Binalakshmi Nepram(L-R)



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

- 7) From Village To Neotiating Table - Community Consultation for Livelihood and Legal Redressal of Women Survivors of Armed Violence, a 1 day conference on 24 September 2011 at Classic Hotel, Imphal, Manipur; it's a part of Fifth Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace. Please see photo below.



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

- 8) Working together for a vision for peace in Northeast India- Peace Conference and Livelihood training, a 2 day conference 12th and 13th of October 2011 at International Centre, New Delhi; it's a part of Fifth Consultative Conclave Meeting on North East Initiative for Peace. Please see photo below.



Dr. Axel Harneit- Sievers, Mr B.K. Hrangkhawl, Ms Binalakshmi Nepam(L-R)

- 9) 2nd October 2009- Save Democracy Repeal Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 Campaign: Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network and Control Arms Foundation of India were part of Save Sharmila Repeal Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 from Jantar Mantar to Parliament Street, Delhi. Please see photos below.



Ms Binalakshmi Nepam giving speech to the participants



Participants at the Consultative Conclave

Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace published monthly newsletter, positive news of Northeast India and rest of the world to renew our hopes and strengthen our efforts to work towards peace making.

RESOLUTIONS FROM THE CONSULTATIVE CONCLAVES OF NORTH EAST INDIA WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE HELD AT DELHI, ASSAM, TRIPURA AND MANIPUR DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS, 2009 to 2011

- 1) Recognition of women role in peace processes and ensuring the participation of women as decision makers in peace negotiations and present and post conflict reconstructions by both the Central and State Governments.
- 2) Appeal to all ethnic groups, communities in Northeast India to rise above the greater common goal of peace and prosperity for all in the Northeast. Women across ethnic, community, religion, state lines to unite to work together to make this possible.
- 3) To start a database of Northeast India Women Professionals in Delhi and NCR for a start and to reach out to thousands of women from Northeast India who are in different parts of the globe.
- 4) Women in Northeast India region to start using “Technology for Peace”. Creation of centralized info-activism so that it reaches out to millions of people. Setting up of a website of Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace. Documenting and disseminating information using new media such as blogs.
- 5) To work towards empowering women survivors of guns and other forms of violence in the region with emphasis on economic justice and rights. Special emphasis on women with disabilities and efforts to improve the mental health situations of many of these women living in armed conflict situation.
- 6) The Government of India must look into the issues of Northeast region squarely in the face and make a sincere effort to find a political solution to the armed conflict in Northeast India.
- 7) The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 must be repealed immediately as recommended by the government-appointed Jeevan Reddy committee.
- 8) The Human Rights Protection Act must be amended to allow the National Human Rights Commission to independently investigate allegations of abuse by members of the armed forces.
- 9) Indian security forces involved in military operations should take all necessary steps to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. India should ratify the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.
- 10) If the Indian Government truly believes that the only way to handle the governance of the North Eastern states is through force, then it must allow the ICRC to intervene. This can only have a calming influence. Acceptance of ICRC services would demonstrate that the fighting parties want to bring an end to the violence. The ICRC's involvement could help protect the residents of the North East who are currently trapped in the middle between insurgents and the military.

- 11) Non-state armed groups to take all necessary steps to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, specifically common article 3 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law.
- 12) Non-state armed groups to end human rights abuses and laws of war violations against civilians, including killings, the use of threats, extortion, and reprisals against individuals suspected to be informers or supporters of another group.
- 13) Non-state armed groups to cease using landmines, cluster bombs, other bombs and other forms of attack in a manner that does not discriminate between military objectives and civilians.
- 14) Non-state armed groups to permit civil society organizations to undertake the full range of protection activities including investigations of abuses committed by militants.
- 15) The reformation of the security sector, involving a boosted morality especially when it comes to the protection of women. Their security needs to be ensured by increasing the amount of female police officers in the stations and guaranteeing their presence at all arrests of women.
- 16) To work towards ending the exclusion of women from non-traditional roles in society, especially in the governing sector. The legal rights of women in conflict zones also need to be strengthened by their promotion. This can be advocated by an appropriate implementation of the United Nations Security Council 1325+ and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- 17) For all women to work on a shared vision, through re-establishing relationships, networking and interacting with other workers in the regional, national or international level. Misguided perceptions can end when we learn about and from each other, and this interchange can begin through efforts such as community exchange programs
- 18) To build a positive peace starting from developmental aspects.
- 19) To address the main identity issue within each state. Divisions are easily made because of this problem especially when it comes to people's common interests. Alliances should be made across communities and state borders.
- 20) To break the connection between drugs and arms, both of which are utilized by state and non state actors. Currently, borders around states such as Manipur are blocked off from receiving commodities that people need to live but drugs and guns are going through...what about a zone of free trade?
- 21) All sectors (security, judiciary, legislative, and executive) need to be reformed and made to be democratic instead of militarized. Resources and mindsets are controlled by those with guns or those in office. The common people need to educate themselves, and so resources such as the Laws of War need to be distributed in local languages.

- 22) Encouraged by the Government's recognition that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 in its present form is problematic and its initiatives to amend the Act. However nothing that it is not only civil society organisations but several important government reports like B.P. Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005), Administrative Reforms Committee headed by Veerappan Moily (2007) and Working Group on Confidence-Building Measures in Jammu and Kashmir headed by Mohammad Hamid Ansari (2007) have all called for repeal of AFSPA. Hence the Act should be repealed.
- 23) Noting that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 was passed in haste, on May 22, 1958, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act was passed by Parliament. After three hours of discussion in the Lok Sabha and four hours in the Rajya Sabha, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 was approved even though several Members of Parliament opposed the Act on the ground that it would lead to violations of Fundamental Rights and that it would get around the Indian Constitution by effectively imposing an Emergency, without actually declaring one.
- 24) Aware of the fact that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 is based on a 1942 British ordinance intended to contain the Indian independence movement (Quit India movement) during WWII. Concerned about the fact that AFSPA having in legacy from a colonial legislation was enacted in independent India and gross human rights violation taking place all over the north eastern states and Jammu and Kashmir both by the state and non-states actors.
- 25) Concerned that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 has been abused and misused and decades, becoming a much despised Act. Long dependency on the Act for the solution of a problem political in nature and long term enforcement of 'disturbed area' status are unconstitutional and is not a solution. Human rights abuses have created more separatists than resolving the issue.
- 26) Noting that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 contravenes Articles 14, 21, 22 and 32 (A) of the Indian Constitution.
- 27) Internationally, repeal has been called for by the: UN Special Rapportuer on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2006); Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2007); Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2007).
- 38) The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, by its form and in its application, violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the "UDHR"), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the "ICCPR"), the Convention Against Torture, the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement

Officials, the UN Body of Principles for Protection of All Persons Under any form of Detention, and the UN Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal and summary executions.

- 29) Concerned that there is a need of responsible leadership among armed forces taking part in counter insurgency operations and the Act is counter productive in its application since its application from 1958
- 30) Recognizing that there is a need of legal mechanism for the armed forces to work in insurgency prone areas and constitution of grievance cell as recommended by the Jeevan Reddy commission report to be taken into account.
- 31) Calls upon Government for safeguards to people of the country living under Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 that Indian armed forces should not be used against movements inside the country.
- 32) Suggest that human security should prevail over national security. Military is not a solution to the current programme. Also noting that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 was passed in a hurried manner and every section of the Act requires wide review. Every section must be widely debated and discussed with the civil society in a transparent manner before passing any legislation with 'special powers'. Ambiguous provisions like what constitutes disturbed area, 'least possible delay, prior sanction etc must be clearly defined with an up gradation of section 6 of the Act.
- 33) Initiative to be taken in every wings of administration: executive, legislative, military and Judiciary and their functions are reviewed and must take initiative to restore stability in the governance.
- 34) Accountability is the core of rule of law and governance and must be a part of any special law before putting in into force.
- 35) Till the state builds up a dedicated capacity for restoring governance, stability, development and rule of law in disturbed areas, the armed forces leadership will have to engage the state and civil society in the disturbed areas. The primary problems of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 can be reduced by reducing the frequent use of the military for tasks that should be performed by the states armed police forces.
- 36) Restoration of internal security, stability, and justice delivery is the ultimate objective of the state in its disturbed areas. Deploying the armed forces in aid to civil authority is a make-do approach to the problem.
- 37) The state needs to acknowledge that primary reasons for internal conflict and demands for secession could be due to issues of political identity; economic deprivation; maladministration or bad governance. Employing the armed forces or imposing Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 will not remove these basic causes.

- 38) Military is too blunt an instrument for nation-building tasks, which require policing, mediating and reconciling. The state has to deploy appropriate resources for development administration and democracy institution building as well as the security system that can restore public safety and stability.
- 39) There is a need to examine deployment of specially designed 'stability units' to build coherence between the security, socio-economic development and public safety needs of disturbed areas. These 'stability units', while having sufficient combat robustness to counter an armed attack, need to approach the problem of civilians in disturbed areas from the perspective of developing public access to justice, minority and women rights, human and socio-economic development, etc.
- 40) Noting that the test of a law is its effectiveness and that Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 through the five decades of its existence has become more complicated than resolving problems and hence the Act should go.
- 42) Calls upon the setting up of a network of grievance cell that will meet the long standing anguish of people who have lost their near and dear ones; just basic information where their loved ones are.
- 43) Recognising the efforts of all those who have campaigned for long to make the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 a national issue, especially women of Manipur
- 44) Resolve to assert that nobody is above the law.
- 45) Civil society must come together to join hands together to work on removal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958
- 46) Recommend to work with Northeast Member of Parliaments Forum and other parliamentarians on this Act and suggest that the Northeast Member of Parliaments Forum takes a stand on this.
- 47) Should the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 be repealed, any future legislation aimed at dealing with militancy in areas currently subject to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 must comply with international human rights and humanitarian law. Such laws must ensure that the reporting, investigation, and prosecution of unlawful acts by members of the armed forces are not impeded.
- 48) Create network of solidatory and negotiation to resolve any issue.
- 49) There should be a proper documentation, research of the facts and studies of the problems in Northeast India.
- 50) Livelihood/youth employment, social entrepreneurship training to youths of Northeast India. More than 30 lakh youths in northeast are unemployed. Most of them see a bleak economic future for which many of them take arms in their hands. This

is serious concern for all of us. As peace workers, we have a special responsibility to bring the belligerent youths on the main stream by non-violent means.

- 51) To push the agenda of ethnic reconciliation to create inter-community structures for dialogue in the Northeast to be able to resolve outstanding disputes through peaceful means.
- 52) To form a legal redressal team of women gun survivors in order to help them claim rehabilitation related government schemes and also to make them aware other legally related issues faced by them.
- 53) To activate women based Human Rights team of Manipur as right now they seems to be dysfunctional.
- 54) Continue to strengthen women survivors team for a collective work.
- 55) Resource to fight legal cases for women affected cases in Manipur.
- 56) Continue to provide livelihood measures for women affected by violence.
- 57) Women should have to the right to own land.

MEDIA COVERAGES OF NORTH EAST INDIA WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE CONSULTATIVE CONCLAVES

Women groups seek dialogue to end northeast's insurgencies

Date: 13 June, 2009; Publication: Indo Asian News Service

Northeast's Women Take Peace Initiative

Date : 07 August, 2010; Publication: Sinlun

Date: 08 August 2010; Publication: Sentinel



Conference on Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in New Delhi

Date: 6 September, 2010; Publication: Kangla-online

Changes to AFSPA may make it milder

Date: 7 September, 2010; Publication: Morung Express

'Northeast women playing key role in peace process'

Date: 19 January, 2011; Publication: Webindia123.com

Peace-The language at Women's meet

Date: 20 January, 2011; Publication: E-pao

Women from northeast India meet to improve their lot in conflict zones

Date: 20 January, 2011; Publication: News Live

Let's walk for peace

Date: 27 September 2011; Publication: Observer

Community consultation for women survivors of armed violence held

Date: 25 Sep 2011; Publication: Eastern Mirror

Widows of Conflict

Date: 16-31 Oct 2011; Publication: The Northeast Sun



Widows of Conflict: Cover Story

Date: 16-31 Oct 2011; Publication: The Northeast Sun

Government must repeal AFSPA: Northeast civil society

Date: 12 Oct 2011; Publication: MSN

Timing of blockade removal questionable: Binalakshmi

Date: 1 November 2011; Source: CNN IBN

Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfV5BOd_rMs

People first: The economic crisis in Manipur

Date: 30 September 2011; Source: CNN IBN

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1SbwpzVeRM>

Real Heroes: Bina helps militancy scarred widows

Date: 5 September 2011; Source: CNN IBN

Link: <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/real-heroes-bina-helps-militancy-scarred-widows/170851-3.html>

Is Manipur falling off the country's map?

Date: 8 November 2011; Source: CNN IBN

Link: <http://ibnlive.in.com/videos/200512/is-manipur-falling-off-the-countrys-map.html>

AWARDS



Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network awarded best Humanitarian Initiative of the year 2010 at Women Leaders in India Conference held in Delhi.



NEIWIP, Chief Co-ordinator Ms Binalakshmi Nepram was awarded Sean MacBride Peace Prize for 2010 on 23 September 2010 at Nobel Peace Centre, Oslo, Norway.



Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, received the CNN IBN Real Heroes Award in Mumbai, 17 August 2011

PUBLICATIONS



Blog: www.neiwip.blogspot.com



Newsletter

Books by MWGSN



Women Surviving Conflict Zones



The Story of Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network



Comic Book on Arms Trade treaty



We shall find our peace



NORTHEAST INDIA WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE

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Cover: Nupi-Lal-Memorial in Imphal remembers the rise of Manipuri women against British colonial rule in 1939. The uprising is known as Nupi Lal or Women's War. Photo by B. Nepram

Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network and Control Arms Foundation of India thank India International Centre, New Delhi for their initial support for the First Consultative Conclave on Northeast India Women Initiative For Peace, 2009 and Heinrich Boll Stiftung for their solid subsequent support in our women-led search for peace in Northeast India.