



NAMTA

NORTH AMERICAN MANIPUR TRIBAL ASSOCIATION

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NAMTA Calls for US Government Action over the crisis in Manipur, India

OAKLAND, CA – The US House of Representatives must take up the issue of the crisis in Manipur, India and pass a resolution condemning the state-sponsored atrocities that has afflicted the minority ethnoreligious Kuki-Zomis.

The European Parliament took a bold a step on July 12th in [deliberating on a resolution on the violence in Manipur](#) and [passed a resolution criticizing the Indian government's failures](#) the next day. The UK Prime Minister's [envoy for religious freedom, Fiona Bruce](#), has also raised the Manipur issue in the British parliament.

Since the 3rd of May 2023 the minority Kuki-Zomi Tribals in Manipur, India have been the victims of a [deliberate, coordinated, and in many regards, premeditated campaign](#) of ethnic cleansing. Kuki-Zomis, who are predominantly Christians, form about 16% of the population of Manipur and the Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindus, make up about 53 %.

While the Kuki-Zomi and Meitei conflict has caused profound losses within both communities, Kuki-Zomis have borne the brunt of the violence despite being in the minority. We have lost more than [100 lives](#) out of a reported 140 deaths and seen [317 churches](#) destroyed, [6,137 homes](#) set ablaze, and 41,425 people internally displaced, out of a total 60,000.

Underlaid with a [long history of grievances](#), the current crisis was [triggered](#) after the Manipur High court directed the state government to give “scheduled tribe” (ST) status for the majority Meiteis. An Affirmative-Action-like program, ST status entitles historically marginalized communities to educational and employment benefits, as well as constitutional protection of their ancestral lands.

Tribal students from both the Kuki-Zomi and Naga communities protested the court's decision, arguing that it would permit dispossession of their ancestral lands. They also argued that Meiteis should not be entitled to the same kinds of benefits that we have been afforded by the Indian Constitution due to our relative disadvantages.

Though the Indian Supreme Court later stayed the lower court's decision, calling it “[factually wrong](#)”, the flame had already been lit. Violence following the protests escalated, until we arrived where we are now: a whole state in flames, friends and neighbors pitted against one another in an ethnic conflict with no end in sight.

The violence we are witnessing today is a product of disparities in power and wealth that have afflicted Manipur throughout its history. For decades, Meiteis have held [a permanent majority of political positions in Manipur, received far greater budgetary allocations than Kuki-Zomis](#), and have controlled the most fertile and productive land in the state.

Regardless of which side initiated the violent turn of events, the failure of the state machinery to contain the conflict in its early stages is ultimately responsible for the ongoing crisis. When the troubles began there were zero efforts by local authorities to douse the flames of violence, instead, [state security forces actively abetted](#) violent Meitei groups. Throughout the state, police stood idly by while mobs [walked into police armories](#) taking with them caches of munitions.

The militant Meitei group most responsible for violence against Kuki-Zomis, [Arambai Tenggol](#), previously enjoyed the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Chief Minister [N. Biren Singh](#), as well as BJP parliamentarian Leishemba Sanajaoba, the titular Meitei king. Pramot Singh, the leader of the [Meitei Leepun](#), regularly spews hateful utterances and has brazenly [threatened a civil war and annihilation](#) of the Kukis.



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Although Kuki-Zomis and Meiteis have attacked and killed one another, there is widespread evidence that Meitei militant groups have targeted non-combatant civilians, while there is no evidence that Kuki-Zomis have. A Kuki-Meitei family was torn apart when a 7-year-old-boy, [Tongsing Hangsing](#), his Meitei mother Meena and their friend Lydia were all burnt alive by a Meitei mob, leaving behind [Joshua Hangsing](#), the Kuki father. The [beheading of David Thiek](#) pushed the conflict to newer depths of barbarism. A disabled woman, [Debora Donngaihching Hangzo](#), was murdered in a particular affront to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

After [false rumors spread of Kuki men raping Meitei women](#), young [Kuki women were raped and murdered](#), with Meitei women egging on the male perpetrators in some instances. In fact, the [viral video of two Kuki women paraded naked and raped that emerged on July 20th](#) jolted the Indian consciousness to life and evoked worldwide condemnation. This horrific crime was reported in a letter along with several other cases to the [National Commission for Women \(NCW\)](#), on June 12th, co-signed by the North American Manipur Tribal Association (NAMTA). To date, there has been no effort on the part of any government agency to reach out to the victims.

It is an outrage that the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, [maintained his silence on Manipur](#) for almost 80 days. His eventual [comments on Manipur may be worse than this silence](#). His government has perfected the art of tacit approval as far as the crushing of minority rights are concerned. It is in sharp contrast to the unthinkable response such a crisis would elicit in the United States where he was recently given a warm welcome.

U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti has [shown more public concern](#) for the suffering in Manipur, saying, "You don't have to be Indian to care when you see children and individuals die in the sort of violence that we see..." in a press briefing. Reacting to the recent viral video of the two Kuki women he further said, "...[our hearts break whenever there's human suffering, whether it's in our neighborhood or across the globe](#) or in the country where we're living."

Today's violence can be seen as a product of the deep ethnic and religious polarization that has swept India under Modi's rule. Whether it is Dalits, Adivasis or minorities of all kinds – sexual orientation, religion – everyone has very little space to have a dignified existence.

Modi's silence in the face of the Manipur crisis, and the complicity of local BJP politicians both eerily resemble the massive Gujarat pogrom of 2002. Then serving as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi allegedly ordered [police to not intervene](#) while armed Hindu-supremacist groups allied with his party killed more than 1,000 Muslim Indians. Following the pogrom, Modi aggressively censored all evidence of his culpability, including by issuing a nationwide ban on a recent [BBC documentary](#) which criticizes his inaction during the pogrom.

Government officials have similarly launched an assault on freedom of expression in Manipur, imposing [internet blackouts](#) that have prevented millions from communicating with loved ones and accessing essential services. Manipur [courts have also issued summons](#) against critics of the violence, including Kuki-Zomi academic [Prof. Suan Hausing](#) whose analysis was featured in [one of India's most respected investigative news outlets, The Wire](#), along with Mary Grace Zou, convener of the Kuki Women's Forum, and Wilson Lalam Hangshing, general secretary of the Kuki People's Alliance.

As the conflict rages on, both warring parties are adopting hardline positions that will make it much harder for any sort of peaceful settlement. Manipur is one of the latest victims of governance by hysteria where a ruling majority can be made to feel under siege from the marginalized minorities they rule over.

To make good on its democratic commitments, India must protect its minorities in Manipur and across the country. As a minority which has been outnumbered and overpowered in Manipuri politics since Indian independence, Kuki-Zomis must be given greater autonomy under the Indian constitution. In the meantime, continued international pressure and solidarity in all forms remains incredibly urgent.

For NAMTA and its Members