

REJOINDER TO STATEMENTS OF NSF IN LOCAL DAILIES:

REGARDING THE INSTITUTION OF THE NAGA CLUB AND ITS LEGACY.

History must be narrated in its bare and brutal truth in the most accurate manner at all costs. It is for this reason that this rejoinder article is necessitated to put the matters in the right perspective in the midst of many misinformation and distortion campaigns launched to tarnish and assassinate the image of the Naga Club (NC) and its history and legacy, and to perpetuate the propaganda of the NSF that the NC Office incumbents without mandate are claiming the NC Building and the plot of land as their own as alleged. However, nothing can be farther from the truth.

1. History of Naga Club and Mandate of the People:

(NSF Public Declaration 30th May 2023)

The NC formed on 7th Jan. 1918 laid the foundation of the Naga peoples' rights to self-determination. It was not formed by a mandate of all the Nagas, but that did not deprive anyone from partaking and becoming an equal member of the NC and all that it represented. "The Naga Club made it possible for every Naga to have a mandate in their right to self determination. The Naga Club did not demand the mandate of the people for its formation and existence. Rather, it gave the mandate to the Nagas to exist as free people, free from dominion, to be left alone to determine for themselves as in ancient times". This is clearly stated in the Simon Commission. The political consciousness expressed in the Simon Commission shaped the political course of the Nagas.

It represented and spoke and stood up for all the Nagas wherever they were. It is an undeniable fact that over the course of time, the NC fostered unity and brotherhood of the Nagas. It was the institution of the NC that became significant and it was the ideology that was put into action that formed the legacy of the NC. It is this legacy that gives the Nagas the uniqueness of its political struggle. It was never the people who were holding office that was important. It is the revered institution of the NC that is important and therefore pertinent to preserve its legacy at all costs and by all means. The legitimacy and the relevance of the NC is evident by what it has achieved for the Nagas and what it envisions for the Nagas, and not necessarily by a mandate of the society that has undergone many fractures which the NC desires to heal.

2. Formation of Naga Club and Legitimacy of Office Bearers:

(Nagaland Post dated 25.07.22)

The NC was formed under the Chairmanship of Rheichalie Pienyü, peshkar, and his team served the NC from 1918 to 1942. The humble yet erudite members of the Club, conscious of the consequences that would follow the departure of the British from the Naga Hills, submitted a Memorandum to the British Statutory Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir John Allsebrook Simon, commonly known as the 'Simon Commission', on the 10th Jan. 1929 which became the written Magna Carta of the Naga National Politics, and which has chartered the political history of the Naga people. From 1942 to 1948, Krusiehou Belho became the Chairman and Ziekro-o Theünuo Angami was made the Secy. From 1948 to 1956 Thepfurüya Haralu was the Caretaker, 1956 to 1960 Lungshim Shaiza was Caretaker, 1960 to 1964 Riga Thong was Caretaker, and from 1965 to 1969 Satuo Kuotsu was President and Khymo Lotha, former MP was made Secy. cum Caretaker. For further information, one may go to nagaclub.in for Naga Club Archives

For a brief period from 1969 to 1981-82, the NC remained hiatus as the atmosphere was not congenial to hold various activities due to hostile military operations by the Indian security forces against the Naga National Movement (NNM), the intensity of which will never be fully understood by those who were not born at that time to witness. The Naga Elders' Conference under the Chairmanship of Peselie Suokhrie took the responsibilities of NC. There was a lapse of about 12 years from 1969-1982. On 7th Jan. 1982 at Kohima Vill. Panchayat, under the auspices of the Naga Elders' Conference including public leaders such as Khymo Lotha, Dr Satuo Sekhose, Satuo Kuotsu, Azüto Rengma, Khriesavisie Hieme, Vilavor Liegise, Kewezü Mero, Pudile Angami, Pastor G Shihani Igha, etc, a large general public meeting was convened consisting of almost all the tribal Hoho representatives, Naga Club members and descendants of Simon Commission signatories, then NC was revived with Azüto Rengma as the Chairman, Vilavor Liegise as the Gen. Secy. and Kewezü Mero as Joint Secy. Mero held his post as Joint Secy. cum Caretaker till 17.08.2017.

On 17.08.2017, again a general public meeting was convened at Red Cross Building Kohima with the representatives of almost all the tribes including Naga Club members and descendants of Simon Commission signatories at the initiative and the ideology given by public leaders like Khymo Lotha, Dr Satuo Sekhose, Krurovi Peseyie, Niketu Iralu, Rev. L Sorhie, Lhuvitsü Kesiezie, Dr Dietho etc. And the new team of NC took charge of Office headed by Krurovi Peseyie as President and K.N. Mhonthung Lotha as Gen. Secy, who were revered for their 'unpurchaseable integrity'. The elderly former Office Bearers such as Ex-MP Khymo Lotha and Kewezü Mero are part of the present Office of NC as Advisors till today.

Mero has kept the flame burning and the spirit of Naga Club alive since 7th Jan. 1982 and handed over the mantle to the new team in 2017. He was part of the NC office team that allowed the NSF to occupy the NC Bldg on a rental basis. The present incumbent Office Bearers are duly elected and are a part of the succession of the Office Lineage of the NC to protect and preserve the legacy of the NC and to proactively work for the period of time they have been elected to hold Office. Therefore, it is absurd, ignorant and misplaced to assume that the Naga Club was formed only in 2017/18 as had been alleged

by NSF. It is also arrogant and disrespectful to the Naga Club then and the Naga Club now to state that the Office Bearers are not legitimate.

3. Naga Club Bldg and Occupation by NSF as tenants:

(Nagaland Post dated 25.07.22)

Prior to the World War II, the NC Bldg was situated below the Mission Compound and which was used as a Morung as well as free Guest House (GH) with cooking facilities for travelers coming from remote villages. However, during the war, the Bldg was completely destroyed and the present NC Bldg in its current location was constructed in 1946 on the land provided through the benevolent goodwill of Kohima Village. A Kevichüsa in 1983 had categorically stated that the materials were brought from Dimapur after dismantling a British Officer's Club which was transported to Kohima using the DC's pool vehicle. The CGI sheets were purchased by him from Kohima. As for the ownership of the Bldg, A Kevichüsa stated (quote) "It does not belong to the Angamis in particular. Neither does it belong exclusively to the Kohima people nor to the Christians. It belongs to the Naga people as a whole" (unquote). It is for a Pan-Naga community without discrimination.

During the early period of NNM, the Bldg also served as a meeting place for the functionaries of NNC instead of GH due to the political turbulence but was used for all the Naga people without discrimination. In fact, the speech of NNC President, A Z Phizo on the occasion of Naga Plebiscite on 16th May, 1951 was delivered from this Bldg. Taking advantage of the political turmoil following the departure of the British from the Naga Hills, the Indian Army forcibly and illegally occupied the Bldg till the formation of Nagaland Statehood. In 1963, the Directorate of the Forest Dept. occupied the Bldg till the early part of 1983. On learning that the Forest Dept. were to vacate the NC Bldg by the end of March 1983 and that the Govt. is contemplating to hand over the Bldg to the Directorate of Education, a prominent concerned Naga citizen, alerted Peselie Suokhrie, Chairman, Naga Elders' Conference and Azúto Rengma, Chairman, NC of the impending taking over by another Govt. Dept.

The two leaders on affirming the facts immediately met NSF leaders and directed them to lock up the NC Bldg, thereby preventing another Dept. of the Govt. from reoccupying the Bldg. As per the statement of the person who alerted the aforementioned elders, a sum of Rs 600/- was also given to the NSF which facilitated in the mobilization of youths and to purchase an oversized lock to lock the Bldg. After the NC Bldg gate was locked, the DC's Police came and found the youths around the NC Bldg and saw an unconscionably disproportionately large lock barring the entrance to the NC Bldg. Then they left saying "Oh, it is locked".

On vacation of the Bldg by the Forest Dept, the NSF vide letter dt 4th April 1983 wrote a letter addressed to the Gen. Secy, NC with the subject "Application for renting the Building of Naga Club". Accordingly, the NC through an Order Dt 07/04/1983 allotted some rooms of the Bldg to NSF under the condition which states (quote) "with the good consent of mutual understanding under rental basis with effect from the date of issue of this order" (unquote). Thus, it is evident that while the inherent and

intrinsic nature of relation between NSF and NC is 'familial father-son relationship', the relation between the two entities with regard to the occupation of the NC Bldg by the NSF is that of a 'transactional Landlord-tenant relationship'.

It must be reiterated here for posterity that neither the NC, nor its Bldg belongs to individuals or Office Bearers at any point in time. It belongs to the Naga people without borders and will continue to belong to the Naga people as a whole irrespective of tribes, communities, domiciles, organizations, religions, genders, age groups, political affiliations including all the diasporas, overseas Naga citizens and communities.

4. Clarification of House Rent:

(Nagaland Post article dated 25-7-2022)

Some people have been misguided to believe that the NC is in a tussle with NSF to gain possession of the land and the Bldg for commercial interest. Kegwayhun Tep, President of NSF had stated, (quote) "The main allegation was the reported non-payment of a monthly rents of Rs 500/- from May 1983 to date" (unquote). The objective of the NC is solely to reconstruct the NC Bldg and give it back to the people to collectively own the property through the NC, and not for commercial profits unlike the NSF, who without authorization has been found to be renting the NC Bldg and Plot for commercial self-interests, and the rent of which has never been given to the NC. For the sake of posterity, it must be stated for the record that the NC received a sum of Rs 500/- from NSF as house rent payment only for the month of April 1983, and on demand of monthly rent during the tenure of Shri Vilavor Liegise, the then Gen. Secy NC, a mere Rs 50/- or Rs 100/- was paid citing that they do not have money which is a mockery to their elders. However, the Forest Dept. paid a sum of Rs. 1,66,603/- by cheque on 28.03.1988 towards house rent, for a period of over 19 years wef 1963 to 1983, records of which testify.

However, because the NSF is a Students' Organization on one hand, where the financial stringency stated in the rental application is duly noted and therefore the non-payment of house rent was never made an issue, nor has it been made an issue even today despite the NC having the legitimacy to do so. Also, on the other hand, every member of the NSF is our own Naga children and Members of NC who will be handed down the legacy of the NC as they represent the coming generations and will lead our society into the future and for which, the incumbents of the Office of the NC have not passed the burden of paying the house rent despite the payment default for 40 years. And not only that, the NC as the paternal and parental body desires to hand over a well-constructed NC Monumental Bldg befitting the present Naga society for the younger generation to inherit.

5. Need for Reconstruction of Naga Club Bldg and Demolition of the Old dilapidated Bldg:

(Nagaland Post news item dated 29-05-23)

With the passage of time, the NC Bldg had undergone the severest of depreciation and stood dilapidated, without proper amenities, projecting the Naga people and particularly NC and all that it

represents, in a very poor light, and the Bldg in very poor shape for the younger generation to inherit unless rebuilt. It is with this concern that the recent Executives of NC have undertaken the burden, the daunting task and responsibility of demolishing the dilapidated old Bldg, to rebuild a befitting building, commensurate to the tall stature of the institution of the NC, to assert the rightful and distinguished image of the NC and to serve as a monumental asset as well as to honor the illustrious legacy of our pioneer leaders and forefathers who established the Institution of the NC to represent the Nagas with much wisdom and foresight.

The reconstruction of the NC Bldg is a long-felt need which is much overdue. It is, therefore, imperative and inevitable to demolish the existing Bldg in its entirety and build a totally new Bldg, well-equipped with modern amenities for the welfare of all the Naga communities. Prior to the demolition, several request letters and pleadings including notices to vacate have been communicated to the NSF whereby, sufficient time was given in each case but was never responded and there was absolute silence by the NSF.

The demolition of NC Bldg has been misinterpreted and sensationalized with emotional rhetoric for vested interest by the Tenant/NSF Officials who were collecting monthly rentals by un-authorized renting of the whole Bldg. Such shameless nature is alien to the Naga culture. The demolition of the old and dilapidated NC Bldg can never be called an act of vandalism because, primarily vandalism involves the destruction of public or private property without intent to restore or rebuild. Secondly, in the instant case, it is demolished at the behest of the Officials of the NC. Thirdly, due notice has been served and time has been given to all tenants to vacate the premise and which many did. There is no controversy with regard to the timing of demolition in the morning hours which is chosen to avoid traffic congestion and public inconvenience. Needless to say, the place has many important Govt Offices, political party office, shopping complexes, a public ground, State Bank and military barrack in the vicinity.

6. Vacation Notice to the Tenants:

(Nagaland post article dated 29-5-23)

The need for the reconstruction of the Bldg has necessitated the need for tenants to vacate the Bldg to allow demolition and reconstruction. Since the NSF had refused to have any meetings with the NC inspite of repeated requests, it became imperative to serve notice to vacate the Bldg. Two notices were served on 12-7-22 and 6-03-23. Sufficient time has been given in both cases. The statement of the NSF Officials that 'the vacation notice had expired long time back' is absurd and does not give any legitimacy to occupy beyond the sufficient time granted for vacating the Bldg. On the contrary, any stay beyond the period granted for vacation is unwarranted and illegal. Other tenants who vacated one third of the NC Bldg were demolished peacefully in the preceding weeks. But when the demolition came closer to the NSF/tenant Office, they kept on obstructing the work without any communication to Naga Club.

7. Regarding Another NC (NFA) of 1979 Alleged by the NSF.

(Nagaland Post article dated 25-7-2022)

The statement of the NSF (quote) 'the building then was being claimed by another group of individuals, in the name of another Naga Club, and the dispute was in the court of the Kohima Deputy Commissioner, for hearing' (unquote), implies that either the NSF is not aware of the matter in toto concerning the claim of the Bldg by some individuals, or it is speaking half truths to distort the facts and thus its repeated statement of 'individuals laying claim as the owner of the NC Bldg'. It may be stated here for the enlightenment of the office of the NSF and also the public that this incident dates back to 1979 in the period when the NC laid hiatus. The Naga Football Association (NFA) on 8th Sept. 1979 led by a group of few individuals had allegedly claimed to have formed a Naga Club to stake claim as the legitimate owner of Naga Club. This so-called Naga Club was actually a Naga Football Club and has no relation to the socio-political Naga Club formed in 1918 and well known for the Memorandum to the Simon Commission.

On revival of the NC on 7th Jan. 1982 at Kohima Vill. Panchayat under the auspices of the Naga Elders' Conference who took the responsibilities of NC when it laid hiatus, there ensued a claim of legitimacy of the Naga Club by the so-called Naga Club formed by the NFA and a case was filed in the Court of DC, Kohima. Subsequently at the initiative of Angami Public Organization (APO), the two contending parties met on 20th Aug. 1983 and resolved the dispute. This matter of some individual laying claim of ownership of the Naga Club property therefore has been disposed off and the so-called new Naga Club formed by the NFA was dissolved and the original Naga Club which was revived under the patronage of the Naga Elders' Conference on 7th Jan. 1982 was bestowed the legitimate rights of the Naga Club. The NSF has been trying to delegitimize the rightful Office of Naga Club so as to stake claim of the NC Bldg and the plot on which it stood.

8. The Naga Club Centenary Monolith.

The NC, in the early part of 2018 conveyed to the NSF of its plan to erect a monolith to commemorate 100 years of NC and had even requested the NSF to come forward as partners of NC to which their response was very positive. However, after the Federal Assembly of NSF held at Senapati Dist, Manipur in the month of Sept 2018, the NSF took a 'U-turn' and refused to meet the NC, stating that their meeting with the NC would legitimize the NC, a stand which they have adamantly taken to this day, and refused to even respond to the Club's various letters of requests for meetings or eviction notices.

Furthermore, the NSF refused to allow the NC to erect its 100 years Centenary monolith at the rightful site of the NC Bldg. It mobilized innocent students to be used as human shield anticipating violent conflicts with the NC. The NC in order to prevent further escalation of physical confrontation into violent conflicts, decided to erect the monolith at Jotsoma near the tomb of Zasibeito Nagi, the first Naga Martyr for Naga Political cause. History will not be kind to NSF for this deliberate act to obliterate and erase the legacy of the NC and will go down as a very unfortunate 'black incident' in the Naga history that the NSF had committed on the legacy of Naga people.

9. NSF/Tenant attempts to Obliterate the Existence of Naga Club and Push it to Oblivion.

While allegedly claiming to be the custodian of the NC, its legacy and its property, the activities of the NSF/Tenant indicates that it is on a mission to delegitimize the NC so as to usurp its Bldg and the plot of land and then to obliterate the NC. Under mentioned are some of the activities that prove that NSF is making attempts to distort the facts and wipe out NC, thus working against the interest of the Nagas:

- a. It refuses to allow the re-construction of the NC Bldg to honor the legacy of the NC, and thereby to continue to humiliate the Nagas and their legacy of NC through the old and dilapidated Bldg. It has already caused enough delay in the re-construction of the Bldg.
- b. It denounced the office of the NC where the living former office bearers are still the advisors to the NC.
- c. It has caused irreparable damage to the legacy of the Naga people and the NC by disallowing the 100 years Centenary monolith of the NC to be erected at its rightful public place beside the NC Bldg in the heart of Kohima Town, thus preventing a symbolic monolith of the Naga history from being seen, noticed and heard by the public.
- d. NSF also erected a parallel Naga Club Centenary Monolith at Solidarity Park Kohima without authority. This is a theft of a historical landmark, and an act to distort NC history and confuse the upcoming generations.
- e. It tried to usurp the plot of land of the NC Bldg by transferring it into its name, which was admitted by the NSF President himself (Nagaland Post dated 29-5-23) but was stopped by the NC from such acts of manipulation and distortion of history.
- f. NSF mischievously used innocent students to hold placard that says NSF has the right to inherit the NC Bldg. Not only is the NSF misguiding the innocent minds by distortion of facts of history, it is endangering their lives and innocence in conflicting issues for personal gain.

10. Custodianship and Obligation of the Naga Club Officials towards the Nagas:

The NC Bldg belongs to the Naga people without borders. The incumbents of the Office of the NC are only mere but rightful custodians of the Institution of the NC entrusted to work for the larger interest of the Naga people through the NC. Kewezü Mero, the Advisor to NC has been residing in the NC Bldg till recently and has vacated to allow the re-construction of the Bldg. The responsibility of the Office incumbents goes beyond the physical Bldg and the plot of land. They have a burden and a duty to preserve and protect the legacy of the past, to uphold the interest of the whole Naga community wherever they be, promote unity and understanding, be caretaker to NC assets and protect it from being usurped by any person or organization, and to protect the facts of Naga history from distortions and to preserve the rich legacy and present it to the younger generation for posterity.

11. Reconstruction of NC Bldg and the vision ahead:

Although the NC started as a social Club, because of its connection to the Simon Commission, it has been immortalized and has become a living Institution for all the Nagas that became a forerunner to all other subsequent Naga organizations. And though the NC laid dormant for some period of time, it has been reactivated into a vibrant functional body. The NC is deeply concerned with the historical significance of the Club and the historical relevance to the Nagas, and the NC Bldg that projects the image of the Nagas.

It is on this account that a reconstruction of the NC Bldg thus gains significance and becomes imperative. It is the earnest endeavor of the Officials and representatives of the NC to restore the NC Bldg that befits the tall stature of the Institution of the Naga Club and its legacy and to pass it on to the younger generations. In pursuit of this noble task, the land patta, the construction permit, the construction committee, the finance committee etc are all set in place and ready for the benevolent mission. However, it is no surprise that there are selfish and divisive minds trying to create misunderstanding, misinformation and distortion. Even then, we the Nagas shall overcome. As Albert Einstein aptly said, 'Great Spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.'

Once the reconstruction of the NC Bldg near the Old Secretariat Complex Kohima is completed, it is envisioned to house a large MUSEUM to preserve and display the Naga traditional artefacts such as antiques, ornaments, tools and equipments, alongside a LIBRARY where all the literature referring to the Naga people, its history, social, political, economic, literary, and important aspects of the Nagas are made available so as to exhibit and preserve the illustrious history, culture, heritage and legacy of the Nagas for posterity.

In consonance with the old tradition where the NC Bldg served as an amenity for the Naga public, it will also house an Office as a Morung, a Conference hall and also make provisions to house the people coming from the remote Naga inhabited areas as was done in the past and various representation of all the Nagas encompassing an inclusive Pan-Naga community to foster unity and to pave way for better understanding so as to usher in progress, development and peace. It is, therefore, hoped that wisdom will prevail over youthful brashness in the greater interest of the Nagas. In view of this benevolent mission with a vision, the Naga Club welcomes every Naga to be a part of this historical legacy without any misgivings.

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Gen. Secy, NC

3. Kewezü Mero

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