

## **THE INSTITUTION OF THE NAGA CLUB AND ITS LEGACY:**

A rejoinder to the various press statements by NSF.

History must be narrated in its bare and brutal truth in the most accurate manner and at all costs. It is for this reason that although these facts are already in public domain, this rejoinder article is necessitated to put matters in perspective in the midst of many misinformation and disinformation campaigns launched to tarnish the image of the Naga Club and its legacy, and to perpetuate the propaganda that the Naga Club office incumbents are claiming the Naga Club building and the plot of land as their own. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

### **1. Historical background of the Naga club and clarifications regarding the mandate of the people:**

*(NSF Public Declaration 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023)*

The Naga Club formed in 1918, laid the foundation of the Naga political 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 Naga Club 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. 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”*** which 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 Naga club fostered unity and brotherhood of the Nagas. It was the institution of the Naga Club that became significant and it was the ideology that was put into action that formed the legacy of the Naga Club. 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 Naga Club that is important and therefore pertinent to preserve its legacy at all costs and by all means. The legitimacy and the relevance of the Naga club 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 Naga Club desires to heal.

### **2. Formation of the Naga Club and clarification regarding the legitimacy of the office bearers:**

*(Nagaland Post dated 25.07.22)*

The Naga Club was formed on 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1918 under the Chairmanship of Rheichalie Pienyü, peshkar, and his team served the Naga Club 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 Thepfürüya Haralu was the caretaker, 1956 to 1960 Lungshim Shaiza was caretaker, 1960 to 1964 Riga Thong was caretaker, and from 1965 to 1969 Khyomo Lotha, former MP was made Secy. and Caretaker.

For a brief period from 1969 to 1981-82, the Naga Club 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, the intensity of which will never be fully understood by those who were not born at that time to witness. The Naga Elders' Conference took the responsibilities of Naga Club under the Chairmanship of Peselie Suokhrie. There was a lapse of about 13 years from 1969-1982. On 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1982 at Kohima Vill. Panchayat, the Naga Club was revived with Azüto Rengma as the Chairman, Vilavor Liegise as the Gen. Secy. and Kewezü Mero as Joint Secy. He held his post as Joint Secy. till 17.08.2017 when the new team of Naga Club 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 Khyomo Lotha (who served the Naga Club as Secy and caretaker from 1965-1969) and Kewezü Mero (who served the Naga Club as Joint Secy from 1983-2017) are part of the present office of the Naga Club as Advisors till today. Kewezü Mero was part of the team that allowed the NSF to occupy the Naga Club building on rental basis. The Present incumbent office bearers are duly elected and are a part of the succession of the office lineage of the Naga Club to protect and preserve the legacy of the Naga Club 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 in 2017/18 as had been alleged by NSF. It is also disrespect to the Naga Club then and the Naga Club now to state that the office bearers are not legitimate.*

## **2. The Naga Club Building and clarification regarding occupation by NSF as tenants:**

*(Nagaland Post dated 25.07.22)*

Prior to the World War II, the Naga Club building was situated below the Mission Compound and which was used as a *Morung* as well as Guest House with cooking facilities for travelers coming from remote villages. However, during the war, the building was completely destroyed and the present Naga Club building 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 he personally supervised the construction of the building. 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 building, 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 borders.

During the early period of Naga National Movement, the building served as a meeting place for the functionaries of NNC as well as the Naga people. As a matter of fact, even the speech of NNC President, A Z Phizo on the occasion of Naga Plebiscite on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1951 was delivered from this building. Taking advantage of the political turmoil following the departure of the British from the Naga Hills, the Indian army forcibly and illegally occupied the building till the formation of Nagaland Statehood. In 1963, the Directorate of the Forest Dept. occupied the building till the early part of 1983. On learning that the Forest Dept. were to vacate the Naga Club Building by the end of March 1983 and that the Govt. is contemplating to hand over the building to the Directorate of Education, a prominent concerned Naga citizen, alerted Peselie Suokhrie, Chairman, Naga Elders Conference and Azüto Rengma, Chairman, Naga Club 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 Naga Club Building, thereby preventing another Dept. of the Govt. from reoccupying the building. As per the statement of the person who alerted the aforementioned elders, a sum of

Rs 600/- (six hundred only) was also given to the NSF which facilitated in the transportation and mobilization of youths and to purchase an oversized lock to lock the building. After the Naga Club Building gate was locked, the DC's police came and found the youths around the Naga Club Building and saw an unconscionably disproportionately large lock barring the entrance to the Naga Club Building. Then they left saying "Oh, it is locked".

On vacation of the building by the Forest Dept, the NSF vide letter dt 4<sup>th</sup> April 1983 wrote a letter addressed to the Gen. Secy, Naga Club with the subject "**Application for renting the Building of Naga Club**". Accordingly, the Naga Club through an Order Dt 07/04/1983 allotted some rooms of the building 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 Naga Club is '*familial father-son relationship*', the relation between the two entities with regard to the occupation of the Naga Club Building by the NSF is that of a '*transactional Landlord-tenant relationship*'.

It must be reiterated here for the record and for posterity that neither the Naga Club, nor its building belongs to individuals or any office bearers at any point in time. It belongs to the Naga people 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.

### **3. Clarification regarding House Rent:**

(*Nagaland Post article dated 25-7-2022*)

Some people have been misguided to believe that the Naga Club is in a tussle with NSF to gain possession of the land and the building 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 Naga Club is solely to reconstruct the Naga Club building and give it back to the people to collectively own the property through the Naga Club, and not for commercial profits unlike the NSF, who without authorization has been found to be renting the Naga Club building for commercial self interests, and the rent of which has never been given to the Naga Club. For the sake of posterity, it must be stated for the record that the Naga Club received as sum of Rs 500/- from NSF as house rent payment only for the month of April 1983, and from the Forest Dept. a sum of Rs. 1,66,603/- by cheque on 28.03.1988 towards house rent payment, for a period of over 19 years wef 1963 to 1983, records of which testifies to the fact. During the tenure of Lt Vilavor Liegise as General Secretary of the Naga Club, whenever house rent was demanded, the tenant NSF would merely pay Rs 50 and Rs 100 citing that they do not have money. However, because the NSF is a Student's Organization on one hand, where the financial stringency stated in the rental application is duly noted and therefore the non-payment of house rent never been made an issue, nor has it been made an issue even today despite the Naga Club having the legitimacy to do so. Also on the other hand, every member of the NSF is our own Naga children who will be handed down the legacy of the Nagas and lead our society into the future and for which, the incumbents of the office of the Naga Club have not passed the burden of paying the house rent despite the payment default for 40 years. And not only that, the Naga Club as the paternal and parental body desires to hand over a well constructed Naga Club building for the younger generation to inherit.

### **3. Need for reconstruction of the Naga Club building and Clarification regarding the demolition of the old dilapidated building:**

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

With the passage of time, the Naga Club building has undergone the severest of depreciation and stands dilapidated, without proper amenities, projecting our Naga people and particularly Naga Club and all that it represents, in a very poor light, and the building in very poor shape for the younger generation to inherit unless rebuilt. It is with this concern that the recent office bearers have undertaken the burden, the daunting task and responsibility of demolishing the dilapidated old building for posterity, to rebuild a befitting building, commensurate to the tall stature of the institution of the Naga Club, to assert the rightful and distinguished image of the Naga Club 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 Naga Club to represent the Nagas with much wisdom and foresight. The reconstruction of the Naga Club Building is a long felt need which is much overdue. It is therefore imperative and inevitable to demolish the existing building in its entirety and build a totally new building, well-equipped with modern amenities for the welfare of all the Naga communities. Prior to the demolition, several requests 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 by the NSF.

The demolition of Naga Club Building 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 building. Such shameless nature is alien to the Naga culture. The demolition of the old and dilapidated Naga club building 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 Naga Club. 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 is has many important Govt offices, political party office, shopping complexes, a public ground, State bank and military barrack in the vicinity.

### **4. Clarification regarding vacation notice to the Tenants:**

*(Nagaland post article dated 29-5-23)*

The need for the reconstruction of the building has necessitated the need for tenants to vacate the building to allow demolition and reconstruction. Since the NSF had refused to have any meetings with the Naga Club inspite of repeated requests, it became imperative to serve notice to vacate the building. 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 building. On the contrary, any stay beyond the period granted for vacation is unwarranted and illegal.

### **5. Clarification 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*), suggests that either the NSF is not aware of the matter in toto concerning the claim of the building 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 Naga Club building’. It may be stated here for the enlightenment of the office of the NSF and also the public that the incident of some individual laying claim of the Naga Club building dates back to 1979 in the period when the Naga Club lay hiatus. The Naga Football Association (NFA) on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1979 led by a group of few individuals had allegedly claimed to have formed a Naga Club to stake claim as the legitimate Naga Club. This so-called Naga Club is 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 Naga Club on 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1982 at Kohima Vill. Panchayat under the auspices of the Naga Elders’ Conference (who took the responsibilities of Naga Club when it lay 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 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1983 and resolved the dispute. This matter of some individual laying claim of ownership of the Naga Club therefore has been disposed off and the so-called new Naga Club formed by the NFA was dissolved and the old Naga Club which was revived under the patronage of the Naga Elders’ Conference 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 Naga club building and the plot on which it stands.*

#### **6. Clarification regarding the Naga Club Centenary Monolith.**

The Naga Club, in the early part of 2018 conveyed to the NSF of its plan to erect a monolith to commemorate 100 years of Naga Club and had even requested the NSF to come forward as co-owner of Naga Club to which their response was very positive. However, after the Federal Assembly of NSF held at Senapati, Manipur in the month of Sept 2018, the NSF took a ‘U-turn’ and refused to meet the Naga Club, stating that their meeting with the Naga Club would legitimize the Naga Club, 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. Furthermore, the NSF refused to allow the Naga Club to erect its 100 years Centenary monolith at the rightful site of the Naga Club building. It mobilized innocent students to be used as human shield anticipating violent conflict with the Naga Club representatives. The Naga Club in order to prevent further escalation of confrontation, 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 Naga Club 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.

#### **7. How NSF tried to obliterate the existence of the Naga Club and push it to oblivion.**

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

- a. It refuses to allow the re-construction of the Naga Club building to honour the legacy of the Naga Club, and thereby to continue to humiliate the Nagas and their legacy of Naga Club through the old and dilapidated building. It has already caused enough delay in the re-construction of the building.

- b. It denounced the office of the Naga Club where the living former office bearers are still the advisors to the Naga Club.
- c. It has caused irreparable damage to the legacy of the Naga people and the Naga Club by disallowing the 100 years Centenary monolith of the Naga Club to be erected at its rightful public place beside the Naga Club building 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. It tried to usurp the plot of land of the Naga Club Building 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 Naga Club from such acts of manipulation and distorting the history.
- e. NSF is mischievously using innocent students to hold placard that says NSF has the right to inherit the Naga Club Building. 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.

### **8. Obligation of the Naga Club officials towards the Nagas and Clarification regarding Custodianship:**

The Naga Club Building belongs to the Naga people. The incumbents of the Office of the Naga Club are only mere but rightful custodians of the Institution of the Naga Club entrusted to work for the larger interest of the Naga people through the Naga Club. Kewezü Mero, the Advisor to Naga Club has been residing in the Naga Club Building till recently and has vacated to allow the re-construction of the building. The responsibility of the office incumbents goes beyond the physical building 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, to promote unity and understanding, to be caretaker to Naga Club 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.

### **9. The reconstruction of the Naga Club Building and the vision ahead:**

Although the Naga Club 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 Naga Club lay dormant for some period of time, it has been reactivated into a vibrant functional body. The Naga Club is deeply concerned with the historical significance of the Club and the historical relevance to the Nagas, and the Naga Club Building that projects the image of the Nagas. It is on this account that a reconstruction of the Naga Club building thus gains significance and becomes imperative. It is the earnest endeavor of the officials and representatives of the Naga Club to restore the Naga Club Building 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 building construction permit, the construction committee, the finance committee etc is 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 disinformation. 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 Naga Club Building near the Old Secretariat Complex Kohima is completed, it is envisioned to house a large **MUSEUM** to preserve and display the Naga traditional artifacts 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 Naga Club building 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 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 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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