

Meeting Note - Inter-Faith Dialogue on Manipur

This note is providing a description of a special inter-faith forum, “**Mourning and Forgiveness for Manipur,**” held in New Delhi as part of a nationwide campaign expressing collective concern and anguish for the ongoing crisis in Manipur by various voices of Civil Society Organisations.

Date: Saturday, 14th December 2024

Time: 11:00 AM

Venue: Centre for Equity Studies, 24, Adhchini, Adhchini Rd, Block A, Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi, Delhi 110017

About the Event

This initiative, organized by **Karwan e Mohabbat** and **Wada Na Todo Abhiyan** featured a spirited discussion around the following themes

1. Reflections on the ongoing crisis
2. Context setting of the causes and the devastating impacts of the violence in Manipur
3. Deliberations on actions towards peace
4. Solidarity messages from Civil Society Organisations

Meeting Content: Addressing the Crisis in Manipur

Introduction to the Crisis

Dr. Babloo Loitonglam opened the discussion by outlining the severe ethnic conflict in Manipur, ongoing since May 3, 2023. Over 18 months of continuous violence have gripped the state, with the Meitei and Kuki communities locked in conflict.

Historical Context:

Manipur, once known for its syncretic and cooperative culture, saw harmonious inter-group trading and collaboration among Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas. Colonial rule and religious influences led to the geographical and social segregation of communities, with Meiteis in the valleys and Kukis and Nagas in the surrounding hills and forests. Post-1950s, involvement in the Naga self-determination movement further deepened inter-community rifts.

Current Situation:

- The conflict has escalated into a cycle of inhuman acts of violence.
- Fear of reprisal and ostracization has silenced voices advocating for peace. Dr. Loitonglam shared his personal experience of being driven out of his home state for speaking against violence.

Underlying Causes

1. Illicit Drug Trade:

The estimated turnover of Manipur's drug trade (₹60,000–70,000 crores) exceeds the state's budget (₹35,000 crores). Vast tracts of poppy cultivation fuel this economy, which remains unaffected by the ongoing violence.

2. Land Exploitation:

The conflict serves as a smokescreen for land grabs. Protected forests and tribal lands are being converted for palm oil plantations and other cash crops, with various stakeholders benefitting at the expense of warring communities.

Suggestions for Actions Towards Peace

1. Investigating Root Causes:

Thoroughly document and analyze the interplay of illicit drug trade, land disputes, and their role in perpetuating violence.

2. Reconciliation Efforts:

Three-Tier Peace Talks:

Suggested by Brother Peter (Fr. Stan Swamy Foundation), this approach includes:

- Engaging sympathetic leaders from both communities to initiate dialogue.
- Gradually incorporating moderates and eventually hardliners, including parliamentarians.
- Focus on fostering goodwill and mutual trust.

3. Leveraging Trade Union Networks:

Fr. P.T. John recommended activating trade union networks to organize peaceful demonstrations, pressuring authorities to discuss ceasefire and reconciliation terms.

4. Amplifying Positive Narratives:

Human rights activist Ranjeeta Sadokpam stressed the need to highlight stories of cooperation between communities, such as Kuki families safeguarding Meiteis and vice versa, which are currently suppressed due to fear of reprisal.

Counter the animosity with stories that show humanity and shared values.

5. Cultural Solidarity Initiatives:

Create public forums featuring music, art, and performances promoting peace and unity which celebrate Manipur's shared cultural heritage as a foundation for reconciliation. Songs

written by and performed by children trapped at IDP camps were a suggestion to be included as an effective message for peace.

6. Media Engagement:

Collaborate with journalists to initiate discussions on:

- Larger issues such as land exploitation and the use of private militias.
- Positive and impactful human-interest stories that humanize the victims and reduce hostility.

7. Tribunal for Victims' Stories:

Establish a tribunal to document the lived realities of victims, particularly women and families in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Record testimonies for public awareness and historical accountability.

8. Solidarity Events:

Plan peace and solidarity events leading up to May 3, 2025, the two-year anniversary of the violence. This milestone to build momentum for peacebuilding efforts.

ATTENDEES

1. Brother Peter, Fr Stan Swamy Foundation
2. Vijayan MJ
3. Roma, AIFWP
4. Aashima, PSA
5. Ashok Chaudhary, AIFWP
6. Priya Darshini, Delhi Solidarity Group
7. Anandi, Apunba Manipur Kanba Ima Lup
8. Ranjeeta Sadokpam, Human Rights Alert
9. Joe Chongtham
10. Babloo Loitonglam
11. Avinash Kumar
12. Loukrakpam Hillary Chani
13. Imaad ul Hasan, Karwaan e Mohabbat
14. Evita, SASC
15. Adrian