



Forest Peoples Programme

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Urgent Communication submitted by Women Action for Development (Manipur, India) and the Forest Peoples Programme to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples

Summary:

1. This urgent communication is respectfully submitted to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples ("the Special Rapporteurs"). It is submitted by Women Action for Development (Manipur, India), an NGO advocating for the rights of women and children in Manipur, and the Forest Peoples Programme, an international organisation based in the United Kingdom ("the submitting organisations").¹

2. This urgent communication concerns the trafficking of five indigenous women between the ages of 18 and 26. Four are from Manipur and one is from Assam. These women are now living in a shelter for victims of trafficking in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia having escaped from the traffickers after a period of severe physical abuse. Their passports have been confiscated by the traffickers, they have no permission to be in Malaysia, and they have no means to return home to their families in India. They are in need of urgent assistance.

3. The submitting organisations respectfully request that the Special Rapporteurs contact the Indian and Malaysian governments at the earliest possible opportunity and encourage these governments to expedite the process of returning these women to northeast India and their families. Additionally, the trafficking of women and girls is becoming a serious problem in the northeast of India and the submitting organisations further request that the Special Rapporteurs issue recommendations to India aimed at ensuring that this practice is better controlled and punished. Specific requests are set out in paragraph 10 below.

Identification of the Victims:

4. This communication concerns five victims:

a. **MS. JASMINE GONMEI**

Age: 18 years

Parents: Mr. Apabou and Ms. Amana Gonmei

Address: Forest Gate, Ward No. IV, Tamenglong District, Manipur, India.

Indigenous nation: Rongmei

b. **MS. MEICHUANLIU GANGMEI**

Age: 20 years

Parent: Nganjinang Gangmei

Address: Power House, Near Dailong Fellowship, PS. & P.O. Tamenglong, Tamenglong Sub-Division, Tamenglong District, Manipur, India.

¹ Women Action for Development, Purana Rajbari, Nongmeibung, Imphal - 795001, Manipur State, India.
Email: wad_imphal03@rediffmail.com.

Indigenous nation: Rongmei

c. **MS. GAIKHANGSINLIU GANGMEI**

Age: approximately 24 years old

Parents: Mr Khiubuan Pamei & Ms Miusingliu Pamei

Address: Khongjarong Village, Tamenglong Sub-Division, Tamenglong District, Manipur, India.

Indigenous nation: Rongmei

d. **MS. JEANIMEI GANGMEI**

Age: Approximately 26 years

Family of: Jianimei Gangmei

Address: Gaidimjang Khoupum Valley, Nungba Sub-Division, Tamenglong District, Manipur, India.

Indigenous nation: Rongmei

e. **MS. LUNGLIAKAMLE**

Residence: Assam NC Hills

Indigenous nation: Zeimei

Situation:

5. The five women identified in paragraph 4 above were part of a group of 150 women taken from northeast India to Singapore in January 2008. These women, who are mostly from a remote district of Manipur and are predominantly members of the Rongmei and Zeliangrong Naga indigenous people, were allegedly recruited by an agent known as Phillip Gangmei. They were told that they would obtain employment as domestic labourers once they arrived in Singapore. According to Manipur newspaper, the Imphal Free Press, Phillip Gangmei works for a recruiting agency called Abel & Zeo Private Ltd., which is reportedly led by a Mr. Ricky Ho and has a strong presence throughout northeast India.²

6. According to a phone interview conducted with Jasmine Gonmei and Jeanimei Gangmei by the Imphal Free Press on 25 September 2008, the women were forced to work very long hours without rest.³ Sometimes they were fed once a day, other times they had no food at all. The women were told that their wages were taken by the agents as reimbursement for travel and other expenses.

7. In August 2007, a number of women, including those identified above, were taken without explanation by the traffickers to Malaysia. Their passports were confiscated on arrival. Jasmine Gonmei confronted the agent demanding an explanation of their situation. This led to severe and repeated physical abuse, torture, and sexual violence, especially directed towards Jasmine, who was segregated and subject to prolonged solitary confinement.⁴

8. The five victims listed above managed to escape from the traffickers and sought refuge in the Indian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The Embassy referred the women to the Sunbeam Home, a shelter for victims of trafficking in Kuala Lumpur, where they remain today. The return of the women to their families is reportedly delayed due to the non-payment of immigration fees (estimated to be US\$500), their lack of passports, and various diplomatic protocols.⁵

² See 'Local girl escapes traffickers in Malaysia, local recruiting agent arrested' *Imphal Free Press*, 25 September 2008. Available at: <http://ifp.co.in/FullStory.asp?NewsID=3189>.

³ See "'We are safe now but want to come home" say girls stranded in Malaysia', *Imphal Free Press*, 26 September 2008. Available at: <http://ifp.co.in/FullStory.asp?NewsID=3192>.

⁴ Supra notes 1 and 2.

⁵ Supra note 2.

Widespread practice of trafficking in women and girls in Northeast India:

9. The situation of the five victims described herein is simply one example of many of the trafficking of women and girls in northeast India. This practice especially affects indigenous women and girls in the northeast due to the effects of discrimination in education, disproportionate economic disadvantage, and pervasive predation by traffickers in the rural areas that are almost exclusively occupied by indigenous peoples. In 2008 alone, at least five 'shipments' of women by traffickers, including by the same Abel & Leo Private Ltd., involved in the case described herein, have been intercepted by the authorities in Nagaland and Manipur. It is expected that many more 'shipments' are not intercepted.

Request:

10. The submitting organisations request, as a matter of urgency, that the Special Rapporteurs:

- a) contact the Indian and Malaysian governments at their earliest possible opportunity and encourage these governments to expedite the process of returning the five victims listed herein to northeast India and their families;
- b) recommend that both governments ensure that the women have access to medical and other assistance, and take effective measures to ensure the women's safety in Malaysia and subsequent to their return home in India;
- c) urge both governments to fully investigate this situation, prosecute those responsible, and compensate the victims; and,
- d) urge both governments to increase their efforts to combat trafficking and to ensure that special attention is paid to the needs of indigenous women and children in this respect.

Respectfully,

Sobita Mangsatabam
General Secretary
Women Action for Development

Fergus MacKay
Coordinator,
Legal and Human Rights Programme
Forest Peoples Programme