



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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CONDEMNATION

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) vehemently condemns last night's burning of at least five churches, one school, a petrol pump and 14 homes belonging to the Kuki-Zo community in Jiribam by Meitei miscreants.

We also question why security forces stationed in Jiribam town failed to protect the buildings despite a Supreme Court order to protect structures abandoned due to the ongoing conflict in Manipur. And why are churches repeatedly being targeted (360+ churches have been burned since the conflict) as if this is some kind of religious war?

The latest round of violence started with the unprovoked attack by Meitei militants on Zairawn village in Jiribam, in which a combined force of Arambai Tenggol and proscribed Meitei terrorist groups burned the village and brutally murdered a 31-year-old woman. It is baffling that CRPF personnel stationed near the village who patrol the area daily refused to come to the aid of villagers and stayed in their camp during the entire duration of the attack without firing a single shot to repel the attackers.

Arambai Tenggol militants also killed Haojoel Doungel, 27 (a native of Pangmol village in Tamenglong district) in Jirihat in Assam's Cachar district last night. The dead body of Haojoel has been recovered in Jiribam with his hands tied and the telltale signs of torture. We urge the Assam government to be more vigilant so that violence does not spill over into the state.

With the Meitei-centric state government fully supporting Meitei militants and the attacks on minority Kuki-Zo civilians, the central government must clamp down on these extremist groups who are armed with weapons looted from state armouries and are continuously looking for opportunities to attack tribal settlements and keep the pot boiling. Until the armed Meitei groups are reined in, violence in the state will not stop. Kuki-Zo volunteers have no choice but to arm themselves to protect their land and their families.

It is high time that the central leadership clamp down on Meitei extremists. Once the attacks on the tribal people stop, violence will dissipate. This must be followed by a long-term political solution. It should be noted that every round of violence in the past year started with Meiteis attacking and killing tribals. If the present situation is allowed to go unchecked, the minority Kuki-Zo tribes, who have faced the brunt of the suffering, will have no choice but to retaliate in a more forceful manner.

Issued by —

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