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SPEECH OF PU LALDUHOMA, CHIEF MINISTER, MIZORAM INDIANAPOLIS, USA, 4.09.2024

My dear friends,

I am truly honored to be here with you today and deeply humbled by the opportunity to speak and engage with this distinguished gathering of the Zo diaspora in the United States of America. On behalf of my wife and my entire team, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for the warm reception and generous hospitality you have shown us during our visit. We are sincerely thankful to each of you who has taken the time out of your busy schedules to attend this event today. Your presence means a great deal to us.

Our community in the United States has grown significantly over the years. I am pleased to learn that there are now over 30,000 of us residing in Indianapolis alone. Many of us have achieved great success in our various fields, contributing to the growth and prosperity not only of our community but also of this great nation. Furthermore, a significant number of us are now proud citizens of the United States, truly embodying the phrase "responsible and productive citizens" and enjoying the many privileges that citizenship offers, including the important right to vote. I am hopeful that as our numbers continue to grow, we recognize that by staying united, we can become a powerful demographic force—one that will not be overlooked, whether politically or in other areas.

With that said, let me dive right in to one of the main topics I want to address today- religion in the context of the Zo people. There are thousands of distinct religions in the world today. Even the major religions are further divided into different denominations, sects, belief systems and

groups. It is also an undeniable fact that religious division has been one of the main causes of strife, conflict and bloodshed throughout history. The mushrooming of different denominations and churches even within Christianity in our context is evident from the sheer number of such denominations here in the United States. I am told that in Maryland alone, there are 20 different denominations/churches.

I would like to take this opportunity to address the elephant in the room and convey my apprehension that there is a real danger of our religion becoming a source of disunity and division, rather than being one that shepherds the flock and transforms the church into a united, strong and impenetrable fortress, which it should be.

Unity of the Church, which is the objective of the Ecumenical Movement, is ongoing. Even back home in India, different churches in Southern India came together to establish the Church of South India. Similarly, the Church of North India has been instituted as a result of similar efforts in this direction but unfortunately, the Church of North East India remains an unrealized dream.

The Ecumenical Movement has its proponents in Mizoram as well and in this regard, I am pleased to say that the Mizoram Council of Churches (MCCC) is now a reality as a result of efforts on the part eight denominations, and that a grand inauguration is planned on 27th October 2024 at the Mission Veng Presbyterian Church. In the same vein, it would be a huge positive if our denominations in the United States come to a similar arrangement and organize ourselves into a coalition - an umbrella organisation or body without necessarily dismantling individual denominations.

We are currently witnessing a widening of the gulf between members of our community as a result our different doctrines and beliefs, to the extent that it has even become a roadblock to marriage for some. If only we could find solace and comfort in the doctrine of Christ and not the doctrine of our individual denominations, these divisions would disappear - we would not

have to have separate churches, offices or pastors. In my humble opinion, those who think that only they are right or superior in matters of the spirit, quite often turn out to be wrong.

We also have far too many associations, groups and NGOs catering to our communities here in the United States. Would it not be better if we had one inclusive, all-encompassing organization instead?

Closer to home, and in much the same vein, it is observed that there are several revolutionary groups in the Chin Hills. There even are instances where two or three CDFs exist and operate within the same township. We belong to the same ethnic group and yet, for some reason, cannot work together. Leave aside cooperation, we have even spilled the blood of our brothers and sisters on occasion and this is a shameful, regrettable fact that we as a people have to face and take accountability for.

The same can be said of our people in Manipur and different groups and organisations formed by us, often working at cross purposes. However, I am glad to note that steps are being taken towards unity and I am sure I speak for all present today that I eagerly await the outcome of these overtures.

At the same time, I am very happy to learn that in the face all these divisions, 13 different organizations formed the NUA – Network for Unity Association on 23rd June, 2023 and that among other things, the association has undertaken a lot of relief work for refugees. You have also celebrated Chin National Day twice and I am grateful to acknowledge these moves towards unity. I would also like to commend the Chin Relief Committee of Mizoram and Myanmar Relief Committee of Mizoram that have done much to help. I take comfort in the fact that you have opened your hearts and your wallets for our refugee brothers and sisters.

I cannot leave out the Government of India as it has always listened to our pleas for assistance with a sympathetic ear, followed up on our problems and provided much needed assistance in cash and in kind. I am especially grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, the Hon'ble Home Minister and the Hon'ble Finance Minister in this regard.

I am informed that two of our largest churches in the United States – CBC USA and CBA NA – will be working as ambassadors for peace and I sincerely hope that their efforts will be the answer to our prayers.

In Mizoram too, ZORO is working hard towards unity for our extended community.

CMI Finland is undertaking efforts aimed at bringing about peace and I am pleased to inform everyone that we intend to work with them in consultation with the Government of India.

We established the Chin Unity Forum on 28th July 2018 at Mya Chapel, Methodist Church, Tahan, where our brothers and sisters were well represented. The gathering was very well attended in general and I will always cherish the different traditional attire presented to me that day. The Forum is still functional and I had a meeting with some of its members in my office chambers just the other day.

As I approach the end of my speech, I want to let everyone here know that the primary reason I accepted the invitation to visit the United States is to seek a path towards unity for all of us. We are one people—brothers and sisters—and we cannot afford to be divided or apart from one another. I want us to have the conviction and confidence that one day, through the strength of God, who made us a nation, we will rise together under one leadership to achieve our destiny of nationhood. While a country may have borders, a true nation transcends such limitations. We have been unjustly divided, forced to exist under three different governments in three different countries, and this is something we can never accept.

We are fortunate that we are still connected through our lands and that there are no pretenders to insert themselves in our midst and cause division – this truly is a blessing from God. I, therefore, sincerely urge you to engage your hearts and minds towards the concept of unity for our people and to continue to work together in pursuance of this goal. God has many tools and in this context, the Bible verse, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” should always be our refuge in good times or bad . Let us continue to pray to our God, ceaselessly.

May God bless all of you.

Thank you.

Posted by: K. Saitluanga, MIS, PIO to Chief Minister (https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/posts?author_user_id=21)

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