

PRESS RELEASE AND CONFERENCE REPORT:
Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination

PNSD and UNPO to take forward National Self-Determination

LONDON - May 14, 2006: The launch of 'Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination' (PNSD) took place this Thursday 11th May in Committee Room 4 in the Houses of Parliament, Westminster. Representatives from aspiring nation states speaking on behalf of the Welsh, Scottish, Naga, Sikh, Kashmiri, Assamese, Manipuri, Kosovar, Kurdish and Tamil nations, as well as other contributors, welcomed the formation of this new cross party group and wished it success in its mission. PNSD, a cross party group of Westminster parliamentarians, aims to highlight the importance of self-determination as a fundamental human right, as prescribed by international law, as well as to promote it as a means of conflict resolution by peaceful and democratic means.



Article 1 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has become the bedrock of international humanitarian law, states that “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”. Article 4 goes on to state that “The State Parties to the present Covenant ... shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination and shall respect that right in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations”. The implementation of this right often involves a complex consideration of political and legal considerations and has, apart from application in the decolonisation in recent years led to freedom for a number of nations held captive by the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia; the UN took a direct role in overseeing a plebiscite in East Timor which led to its independence. There remain however a number of other unresolved conflicts where the international community needs to promote peaceful, equitable settlements and PNSD will, in cooperation with others such as UNPO, seek to play a role in that process.

Lord Nazir Ahmed, Chair of the new group, opened the conference and spoke of this responsibility on the part of the international community; he pledged that PNSD will engage with governments and international bodies to take forward national self-determination and made it clear that its work will emphasise the need to achieve settlements by exclusively peaceful means. That was echoed by Vice Chair of PNSD, Elfyn Llwyd MP who said that the packed venue reflected the importance this issue has for UK citizens, Diaspora communities, as well as those beyond our shores as demonstrated by the many international delegates who had travelled long distances to share their experiences.

Marino Busdachin, General Secretary of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), thanked the UK parliamentarians who had established PNSD and pledged that the UNPO would work closely with the new group in furthering the peaceful settlement of many of the world's conflicts through the implementation of the right to Self-Determination. He said “For peace, security and stability to exist, any associations between peoples and communities or between them and the state must be based on genuine and continuing consent, mutual respect and mutual benefit. Peace cannot exist in states that lack legitimacy or whose governments threaten the lives or wellbeing of a section of the population. The international community, its members and institutions have an obligation to act where international law, including human rights and the right to self-determination, is violated.”

Lord Rea, who has taken a long term interest in the Chechen conflict as well as the cause of the Kurds, was only able to attend for a short while but informed the Chair that he thoroughly supported the aims of PNSD believing that the majority of the conflicts in the world today are due to repression of minority populations. Both PNSD and self-determination as a basic foundation of democracy were lauded by Pete Wishart MP who spoke of the Scottish National

Party's belief in this key principle not only in the UK context but as an ideal to be applied across the world. Daniel Hannan, a Conservative Member of the European Parliament, fully backed the right to self-determination for the many oppressed, occupied and minority nations. Supported by Douglas Carswell MP he strongly advocated the nation state as the natural and most effective political structure in terms of meeting the aspirations of the people as opposed to artificial structures which often lacked the legitimacy of having the consent of the governed.

Guest Naga, Kashmiri, Sikh, Kosovar, Kurd, Assamese and Manipuri speakers, many of whom had travelled from abroad to attend the launch of PNSD, put forward the basis on which their nations are endeavouring to exercise their respective rights to self-determination and expressed their solidarity with their fellow nations engaged in similar struggles. They expressed appreciation for those who have sought to protect their human rights despite the predictable response that would flow from apologists for states actively seeking to deny self-determination to those and other nations, often through violence or other forms of unlawful persecution.

Mr Rh. Raising, Secretary of the Steering Committee of the NSCN, described the plight of the Nagas who for over 50 years have been struggling for the independence of their homeland having voted overwhelmingly for that in a referendum conducted in 1951. Whilst hoping that the ongoing Indo-Naga talks would secure a just settlement in accordance with Naga rights in international law, he expressed full support for Kashmiri self-determination and the Sikh struggle for Khalistan. Frans Welman of the Amsterdam based Naga International Support Center took the view that the former colonial powers such as Great Britain and his native Netherlands are to some extent responsible for many of the world's conflicts that have sparked self-determination movements and therefore have a moral responsibility to play an active role in helping to resolve such conflicts; he saw the establishment of PNSD in the UK Parliament as an important step in that direction.

Ghulam Mohammad Safi, a former General Secretary of the All Parties Hurriet Conference, congratulated PNSD for organising such an important event and spoke of the clear need to resolve the Kashmir conflict on the basis of the people exercising their right to self-determination in accordance with international law. Nazir Quarashi of the World Kashmir Freedom Movement appealed to the world community to take urgent notice of the massive use of state terrorism to crush the legitimate struggle for freedom in Kashmir which was identical to the means adopted by India to counter the Sikh struggle for Khalistan. Zafar Khan of the JKLF implored the world community to look beyond the current Indo – Pakistan diplomatic dialogue and ensure the engagement of the people of Kashmir so that their fundamental civil and political rights were secured by their freely given consent.

Speaking passionately on behalf of the Peace in Kurdistan Project, Estella Schmidt, lamented over the unjustified attempts to criminalize and equate self-determination movements with terrorism; a serious problem faced by self-determination activists across the world including the Kurds. She pledged to work closely with PNSD on behalf of Kurdistan but also in support for the other nationalist movements. Zymer Salihi of the Kosovo Islamic Centre, UK spoke of self-determination being recognised as the only way forward for the people of Kosovo in order to escape the oppression they had suffered; he hoped that the territory would secure full independence within a short timeframe having already benefited from UN intervention and hoped PNSD would succeed in its mission.



Jaspal Singh Dhillon, Vice-President of the Dal Khalsa based in Punjab referred to the Sikh national gathering at Amritsar in January 1986 which unanimously declared for an independent Sikh state, Khalistan, and said that remains the Sikh nation's freely determined goal, to be secured by peaceful and democratic means in accordance with international law. He called on those concerned about human rights to protect human rights activists by taking up their cases, such as that of Sharmila Devi, a young lady from Manipur who was arrested as she protested against the Indian Special Powers Act (which has provided the Indian army immunity from prosecution for actions such as rape, torture and murder in Manipur). She continues to be held in detention without access, and is being force-fed as she enters her 4th year on hunger strike. Justice (Retd) Ajit Singh Bains gave an insight into the background and cause for the Sikh

nationalist movement including details of how the Indian state had sought to crush it by abuses of human rights including extra-judicial killings of Sikh activists on a mass scale. Navkiran Singh, an eminent practising lawyer from Punjab who is defending many Sikhs currently charged with sedition for simply calling for Sikh self-determination by peaceful means, pointed out that this persecution was politically motivated as the Indian Supreme Court has ruled that merely calling for Khalistan by peaceful means is not a crime but must be permitted if democracy and free speech is to have any meaning.

Oinam Bhogendra Singh, Chairman of Human Rights Alert, Manipur described the rights abuses in Manipur and appealed to PNSD to seek the removal, by India, of draconian legislation aimed at crushing the indigenous freedom struggle by force. He said “A democratic and permanent solution would happen only when the people concerned are allowed to exercise freely their inherent right to self-determination”. Dr Mukul Hazarika of Assam Watch applauded PNSD and spoke about the struggle for self-determination in Assam again being met with by large scale human rights abuses rather than any attempt by India to find a peaceful negotiated solution.

A number of resolutions were read out and overwhelmingly passed by the Conference on a show of hands by the delegates, some of which were representing other national groups such as the Tamils and the Ahawzi Arabs. These supported the human right of national self-determination as a basis for peaceable conflict resolution, support for PNSD to actively lobby for the implementation of this human right and to support political prisoners who are being persecuted for their stand on self-determination. Other key resolutions included: a call for the prosecution of those guilty of human rights abuses so that the rule of law is upheld and justice is served; a call to reject India’s pursuit of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council until it signs up key human rights commitments in UN treaties; a mutual recognition by the various national representatives of each other’s nationhood and a pledge to support their respective struggles for national self-determination.

Simon Hughes MP, President of the Liberal Democratic Party UK, closed the conference reiterating his support for the right to self-determination as enshrined in international law, and exercised by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. He warned against the singling out of any particular state but that supporting the principles of self-determination was legitimate and important, and that raising examples where such rights have been denied was fair and reasonable. Lord Ahmed concluded by thanking the organisers, speakers and the parliamentarians who had attended to lend their support as well as the delegates almost all of whom had remained throughout the conference, clearly inspired and visibly moved by the excellent contributions that had been made.

R.S. Srail
Administrative Secretary,
PNSD.

