



KUKI ORGANIZATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TRUST (KOHUR)

A Member of UN Special Consultative Status Since 2016

[Registered under the Indian Regulation Act, 1908. Regd. No.963 (V), 08, May, 2009]

FORMAL REBUTTAL

Prefatory Statement

The Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) issues this rebuttal in discharge of its mandate to defend the rights, dignity, and historical record of the Kuki-Zo people. KOHUR has examined the document circulated by the Media Cell of the Working Committee of the United Naga Council (hereinafter “the UNC document”).

KOHUR records at the outset that the UNC document is not a factual account. It is an advocacy text constructed on three foundations, each of which is unsustainable: (i) a selective and discredited reading of colonial-era ethnography; (ii) a constitutional claim — that the Kuki-Zo are “foreigners” and not indigenous — that is foreclosed by settled Indian law; and (iii) a one-directional casualty timeline that omits the documented deaths, abductions, and displacement of Kuki-Zo civilians in the very same period.

KOHUR rebuts the document below on grounds of historical record, constitutional law, the published terms of binding agreements, and the verifiable factual sequence of events. KOHUR does not reciprocate the UNC document’s dehumanising vocabulary. It answers assertion with evidence.

Part I – On the Historical Claims

CLAIM 1 (UNC): *That the Kuki-Zo “came to Manipur in the 19th century” and were permitted to settle within “Naga homeland” by paying a “nominal annual rent/tribute” of paddy and livestock to Naga landowners.*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

This claim is contradicted by the primary historical record and is unsupported by any documentary source.

- 1.1** The colonial census disproves a uniform 19th-century arrival. The Gazetteer of Manipur (Dun, 1886), drawing on the 1881 Census, recorded a substantial pre-existing Kuki population — distinguishing roughly 8,000 long-resident “Old Kukis” from later-arriving “New Kuki” groups. A community recorded in the tens of thousands in the 1881 Census is not a community that “settled” as recent rent-paying intruders.
- 1.2** The colonial archive records the Kuki-Zo as long-established, not migratory. William McCulloch, Political Agent of Manipur (1844–1863), stated explicitly in his Account of the Valley of Munnipore (1859) that the Kukis were “originally not migratory.” R. Brown (1874) recorded the Khongjais as already “scattered over nearly the whole” of Manipur’s hill territory. R. B. Pemberton (1835) had earlier recorded the same population extending



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from south of the Imphal valley toward the Arakan range. These are observations of an established population, recorded by the colonial officers the UNC document itself relies upon.

1.3 The Kuki-Zo presence predates the written Meitei record. The Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur, records interactions with the hill people the Meiteis called Khongjai / Khongsai — the population later subsumed under the Bengali exonym “Kuki” — from the early period of its record. Reputable historical commentary has noted that the “19th-century settler” narrative ignores Kuki presence in Manipur before 1485, the year from which the Cheitharol Kumbaba begins its official written record.

1.4 The Manipur State settled the Kuki-Zo by sovereign act — it did not lease land to them. McCulloch, under the authority of the Manipur Maharaja, actively recruited and settled Kuki villages in the foothills as guard settlements to protect the Imphal valley from raids. Land was therefore granted to the Kuki-Zo by the sovereign authority of Manipur. To the extent customary dues (“khajan”) were paid, they were paid to the Manipur Raja — not to Naga chiefs. The UNC document produces no treaty, no revenue record, and no settlement document evidencing tribute to “Naga landowners,” because none exists.

1.5 An eighteenth-century account places the Kuki hills around Manipur, and makes no mention of the Nagas. Major Michael Symes, in his *Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava* — the published record of the 1795 embassy — records that in the spring of 1763 an officer named Swinton was placed in command of an expedition to “Mackey” (Manipur), which the account describes as a hilly country bounded on the north, south, and west by large tracts of “Cookie” (Kuki) mountains, and on the east by the Burampooter, with Assam beyond the hills to the north and “Cashar” to the west. As early as 1763, therefore, a contemporary account describes the Kuki hills as encircling Meckley (Manipur) on three sides — while the Nagas are not mentioned at all. A community recorded as defining the very geography of Manipur in the mid-eighteenth century cannot credibly be characterised as a body of nineteenth-century arrivals admitted on sufferance.

CLAIM 2 (UNC): *That the Kuki-Zo were “wandering,” “peripatetic,” “principally vagrant,” “mercenaries,” and self-declared “refugees.”*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

This is the uncritical reproduction of discredited colonial caricature.

2.1 These descriptors are drawn from selected colonial texts and are contradicted within the colonial archive itself — directly by McCulloch’s statement quoted above. Modern academic historians, including scholars at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Manipur University, have specifically identified and rejected this “wandering race” framing as erroneous and one-sided.



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2.2 The same colonial ethnographic apparatus that branded the Kuki-Zo as “vagrant” simultaneously branded the Naga peoples as “head-hunters” and “savages.” A document that selectively revives colonial racism against one community, while no community would accept those terms applied to itself, cannot be regarded as a serious historical account. KOHUR notes that no human rights body, and no responsible representative organisation, should circulate language of this character about any people.

CLAIM 3 (UNC): *That the 1917-1919 Anglo-Kuki War was merely a “Naga-Kuki conflict” and a “concoction of history.”*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

The 1917-1919 conflict is established academic and archival history — a war of resistance against the British Empire, not against the Naga people.

3.1 The conflict was a rebellion by the Kuki tribes against the colonial state, triggered by the British demand for forcible recruitment of Kuki labour corps for the First World War. It is documented across British colonial records, which themselves describe it as a “rebellion” and as the largest series of military operations conducted in the region until that time.

3.2 The historical record is anchored in peer-reviewed scholarship — notably *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919: A Frontier Uprising against Imperialism during the First World War* (Routledge, 2018) and the companion volume *Against the Empire* (Routledge, 2020) — the product of archival research in Indian and British records covering a theatre of roughly 6,000 square miles over three years.

3.3 The colonial state tried named Kuki chiefs and transported them to distant jails for multi-year terms. A penal response of this scale is incompatible with the suggestion that the conflict was a mere inter-community dispute. To label this documented anti-colonial war a “concoction” is itself the act of historical revisionism the UNC document professes to oppose.

Part II — On the Constitutional Claim that the Kuki-Zo are “Foreigners”

CLAIM 4 (UNC): *That the Kuki-Zo are “foreigners originating from Myanmar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh” and possess “an identity that is neither historically nor culturally theirs.”*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

This claim is foreclosed by the Constitution of India and by settled administrative law.



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- 4.1** Scheduled Tribe status is constitutional and long-settled. Kuki-Zo tribes are recognised Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, and its 1956 Modification, which listed numerous Kuki-Zo tribes individually — among them Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gangte, Kom, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Koireng, Lamkang, Mate, Maring, Simte, Zou and others. The Kuki-Zo hold Scheduled Tribe status across the States of Northeast India.
- 4.2** Indigeneity is not a legal criterion for Scheduled Tribe status. The criteria applied by the Office of the Registrar General of India derive from the Lokur Committee (1965): indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. “First arrival” or “indigeneity” is not among them. The UNC document’s argument therefore conflates two entirely separate questions — ethnic-origin folklore and constitutional ST eligibility — and rests its case on a test that does not exist in law.
- 4.3** Citizenship and Scheduled Tribe status are governed by separate statutes. The status of any individual as a foreign national is adjudicated under the Foreigners Act, 1946, on an individual basis. It cannot be the basis for the collective reclassification of a recognised Scheduled Tribe. The deliberate conflation of long-settled Kuki-Zo Indian citizens with post-2021 Chin refugees from Myanmar is a category error, and a serious one.
- 4.4** No competent authority has reclassified the Kuki-Zo. A community holding Scheduled Tribe status throughout Northeast India, listed for nearly seven decades, cannot be redesignated as “foreign occupiers” by a civil-society pamphlet. Such a determination lies solely with Parliament and the President under Article 342 — and no such determination exists. The UNC document adopts, as though it were settled fact, the very contention advanced in contested political petitions seeking to strip Kuki-Zo ST status — petitions that tribal apex bodies have condemned as a violation of constitutional safeguards.

Part III – On the “Demographic Invasion” and Poppy-Cultivation Claims

CLAIM 5 (UNC): *That there is a coordinated “demographic invasion,” an “abnormal growth of Kuki villages,” and a “Zalengam” project to absorb Naga territory.*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

- 5.1** The “abnormal village growth” statistic is methodologically void. Comparisons of village counts across a five-decade span ignore three decisive facts: (i) the hill districts were extensively reorganised, with several new districts created as recently as 2016, rendering pre-2016 baselines non-comparable; (ii) Kuki-Zo settlement historically takes the form of small, dispersed hamlets that subdivide as lineages grow, so that village



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counts systematically overstate population change; and (iii) no comparable published settlement-census methodology is offered for Naga-dominated areas. A raw village-count ratio is not evidence of “invasion.”

5.2 “Zalengam” is not a governmental or recognised project. It is an ideological proposition in the writing of a single individual. It is distinct from, and not endorsed by, the legitimate demands of Kuki-Zo civil society. The actual constitutional demand of the Kuki-Zo people — for a Territorial Council, or a “Separate Administration under Article 3 of the Constitution” — is an arrangement within the Indian constitutional framework and within the Union of India. It is not a secessionist project and does not threaten the territorial integrity of any State beyond an internal administrative re-arrangement of the kind the Constitution expressly contemplates.

CLAIM 6 (UNC): *That Kuki communities are collectively engaged in illicit poppy cultivation encroaching on Naga land.*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

6.1 Poppy cultivation in Manipur is a cross-community, cross-district law-and-order problem, and the Government of Manipur’s own remote-sensing data establish this. Government eradication records covering 2017–2024 show destroyed poppy acreage distributed across both Kuki-dominated and Naga-dominated districts — with Ukhrul, a Naga-majority district, ranking among the highest by destroyed acreage. The official figures themselves disprove the attempt to brand narcotics cultivation as a single community’s activity.

6.2 The collective attribution of a criminal activity to an entire ethnic group is a recognised marker of hate propaganda. KOHUR rejects it on principle, whichever community is targeted. Narcotics enforcement must be community-blind, evidence-based, and paired with livelihood alternatives — not weaponised as an ethnic accusation.

Part IV — On the Suspension of Operations (SoO) Framework

CLAIM 7 (UNC): *That Kuki armed groups under the SoO pact are a “proxy” used to “suppress the Naga Movement,” with covert Government of India support.*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

This claim is contradicted by the published terms of the SoO agreement and inverts both its purpose and its current status.

7.1 The SoO is a tripartite ceasefire, not an offensive instrument. Formalised on 22 August 2008 among the Government of India, the Government of Manipur, and the Kuki-Zo



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umbrella organisations (the KNO and the UPF), its purpose was to halt hostilities and initiate political dialogue.

- 7.2** The Agreed Ground Rules expressly prohibit precisely what the UNC alleges. The Ground Rules bind the signatories not to associate, at organisational or individual level, with any other armed group inside or outside the country; and not to undertake any offensive operations — ambush, raid, sniping, or attack — against security forces, other groups, or the public. A “proxy war” against Nagas would itself be a ground-rule violation. The Joint Monitoring Group, on which the Government and security forces sit, is the body contractually empowered to certify any breach. The UNC produces no Joint Monitoring Group finding of systematic proxy warfare, because the published record contains none.
- 7.3** Designated SoO cadres are confined and disarmed under official supervision. Cadres are confined to designated camps; weapons are held in double-locked armouries; arms are issued only for the guarding of camps and leaders. The framework is the opposite of a roving offensive force.
- 7.4** The SoO binds signatories to the territorial integrity of Manipur. The agreement, including its renewed terms, commits the signatories to the Constitution of India and to Manipur’s territorial integrity. It is, on its face, an anti-secession instrument.
- 7.5** The “proxy” vocabulary is contested rhetoric deployed by all sides. Allegations of proxy dynamics have been made by multiple parties and denied by multiple parties. KOHUR does not ask anyone to accept a mirror-image accusation against the Naga side. It asks only that the UNC’s own version not be presented as neutral, established fact when the evidentiary record is genuinely contested — a contestation reflected even in the public statements of Kuki organisation spokespersons themselves.

Part V — On the Claim of One-Sided “Armed Aggression”

CLAIM 8 (UNC): *That the violence since 7 February 2026 constitutes a one-directional “war” of Kuki “armed aggression” against the Nagas, evidenced by the UNC document’s two-phase timeline.*

KOHUR’S REBUTTAL

The UNC timeline is a partisan account that suppresses the documented, multi-directional character of the violence — including the deaths, abductions, and displacement of Kuki-Zo civilians in the very same period.

- 8.1** The origin of the February–March 2026 escalation was not a Kuki offensive. KOHUR records, on the basis of accounts from the affected villages, that the immediate trigger at Litan Sareikhong was a drunken altercation in which an inebriated Tangkhul individual



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provoked local Kuki youths — not an organised armed campaign. Although the Kuki youths were not at fault, the Kuki side, in the interest of peace, agreed to settle the matter with the Tangkhul village authority and accepted all the customary conditions imposed by that authority. Notwithstanding this settlement, Tangkhul parties thereafter attacked and burned Kuki houses without further provocation. Two Kuki civilians who had gone out to repair the village water pipeline — Thengin Baite of Thawai Kuki village and Thangboimang Khongsai of Shangkai village — were then seized and killed. Even so, and again for the sake of peace, the Kuki side acceded to a Government request and released more than twenty Tangkhul civilians held in its custody — all of them unharmed. The conduct of the Kuki side throughout this sequence — settlement, restraint, and the safe release of civilians — is irreconcilable with the UNC document’s portrayal of a Kuki “war of aggression.”

8.2 The violence has perpetrators and victims on multiple sides. Senior security officials have publicly stated that insurgent involvement spans all three communities and that ground-level attribution is extremely difficult. The UNC document, by contrast, names only Kuki perpetrators and only Naga victims. The factual record does not.

8.3 The UNC document omits Kuki-Zo dead. In the very incidents the UNC cites, Kuki-Zo civilians and volunteers were killed. KOHUR places the following on record for the February-mid-May 2026 window on the Naga front:

- **March 2026, Litan Sareikhong / Ukhrul** — Two Kuki men who had gone out to repair a village water pipeline — Thengin Baite of Thawai Kuki village and Thangboimang Khongsai of Shangkai village — were seized and killed, as set out in paragraph 8.1 above. The recovered bodies bore signs of grave assault before death. This killing followed a settlement the Kuki side had already accepted, and preceded the Kuki side’s release of more than twenty Tangkhul civilians unharmed.
- **24 April 2026, Mullam / Songphal, Ukhrul** — In the early hours of 24 April 2026, armed Tangkhul militants launched an unprovoked and premeditated attack on the Kuki villages of Mullam and Songphal while residents were asleep. The assailants opened heavy and indiscriminate fire, set houses ablaze, and injured several villagers, including women and children. Two Kuki-Zo village volunteers on duty to protect their community, Paominlun Haolai and Letlal Sitlhou, were waylaid and killed. The Kuki villagers did not initiate this violence; the attack was begun entirely by the Tangkhul side, and the villagers acted only in lawful self-defence, using licensed arms to repel the assault and neutralising one of the armed assailants in the process. KOHUR records the killing of the two Kuki-Zo volunteers, the burning of Kuki homes, and the wounding of Kuki women and children as facts the UNC document omits in their entirety.
- **13 May 2026, Kotlen-Kotzim “Zero Point,” Kangpokpi-Churachandpur road** — An armed group ambushed a convoy returning from a peace and reconciliation meeting in Churachandpur. Three Kuki Christian leaders were killed: Rev. Dr. Vumthang



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Sitlhou, a serving Baptist Association president; Rev. Kaigoulun Lhouvum; and Pastor Paogoulen Sitlhou. Four others were injured.

- 8.4** The most prominent single incident of this period is incompatible with the UNC’s narrative. On 13 May 2026, the three named dead were Kuki Christian clergymen, killed while returning from a peace meeting. A community whose senior pastors are ambushed and killed on their way home from a reconciliation effort is not the author of a one-sided “war.”
- 8.5** Abductions and hostage-taking occurred on both sides. The hostage situation of mid-May 2026 involved detentions of civilians by both communities — a symmetrical crisis, not a unilateral act. Arson against Kuki-aligned villages is also on the record in this same window.
- 8.6** The displacement burden falls heavily on the Kuki-Zo. Government data place the cumulative toll of the conflict since 3 May 2023 in the hundreds of dead and tens of thousands displaced, with thousands of homes destroyed. The Kuki-Zo constitute a large share of the displaced. A timeline that records only Naga suffering is not a record of the conflict; it is a brief for one party to it.
- 8.7** Official attribution remains largely open. Independent commentators have documented that a great many incident FIRs in this conflict name only “unknown miscreants.” The UNC document’s confident assignment of every listed attack to “Kuki militants under SoO” exceeds what the police record itself establishes.

Part VI — Summary of KOHUR’s Position

- The “19th-century settler” and “foreigner” framing of the Kuki-Zo people is contradicted by the colonial census, by the colonial officers’ own writings, by the Meitei royal chronicle, and by modern scholarship. It revives a discredited colonial caricature.
- The Scheduled Tribe status of the Kuki-Zo is constitutional, decades-settled, and pan-regional. Indigeneity is not a legal criterion for that status, and no community can be reclassified as “foreign” by a civil-society document. Only Parliament and the President may amend a Scheduled Tribe list.
- “Demographic invasion” and blanket poppy-cultivation allegations are unproven political contentions and collective accusations against an entire people. The Government’s own data refute the poppy claim.
- The Suspension of Operations framework is a constitutional, tripartite ceasefire that expressly prohibits offensive operations and association with other armed groups, and binds its signatories to Manipur’s territorial integrity. The UNC’s portrayal of it as a covert state-backed offensive instrument is unsupported by its published terms.



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- The post-7 February 2026 violence is, on the independent and governmental record, a multi-directional cycle of retaliatory killings — with Kuki-Zo dead, burned Kuki-Zo villages, abducted Kuki-Zo civilians, and slain Kuki-Zo clergy that the UNC document omits in their entirety.

Part VII — KOHUR's Call

KOHUR records its grave concern that a document which denies a constitutionally recognised people their indigeneity, reproduces colonial dehumanising language, and presents a one-sided casualty account is liable to inflame the present crisis rather than resolve it.

KOHUR affirms that **every community in Manipur — Naga and Kuki-Zo alike — has suffered loss in this conflict.** The dead of all communities are owed the same justice. KOHUR extends its condolences to every family, of every community, that has lost a member in this violence.

In the interest of truth and of peace, KOHUR calls for:

- A judicially monitored, impartial investigation — by the National Investigation Agency or a Special Investigation Team under the supervision of the Supreme Court of India — into all incidents of violence in the February–May 2026 period, with the 13 May 2026 Kotlen–Kotzim ambush of church leaders referred for priority investigation.
- The publication of the Joint Monitoring Group's findings on all alleged ground-rule violations, so that responsibility is established by the contractually competent body rather than by ethnic assertion.
- An end to collective characterisation of any community as “foreigners,” “aggressors,” or criminals — and a return, by all representative bodies, to the language of evidence and of peace.

KOHUR remains willing to engage with the United Naga Council, and with every community body in Manipur, on the basis of the verifiable factual record and a shared commitment to the safety and dignity of all peoples of the State.

Issued in defence of the historical record and the constitutional rights of the Kuki-Zo people.

Department of Information & Publicity, KOHUR