When the day came to be, Kohima was resplendent in sunshine. It was January 10, 2018, the first Naga Day. At the Kohima Local Ground, Khuochiezie, music played from the early morning hours.In the surrounding market area, people hummed the tunes as they set up shop. Some planned to go to the ground, some planned to watch from their terraces—everyone had heard this one thing, Nagas from everywhere were coming together.

They were. Some came all the way from Myanmar, travelling through land, water and air for days. Others came from the underdeveloped Naga areas on the Indian side of the international border—from the states of Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Assam to the west, Manipur in the south and the disjointed parts of Nagaland State. Reduced to minorities in these neighboring states, Naga people took considerable risks of intelligence tapping and flaring neighborhood sentiments to make it to Kohima for the first ever Naga Day.

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) had taken great efforts to make this possible. Naga Day emerged as a sprout at the Shalom Bible Seminary, Zübza, on September 2, 2017. Later, Kohima-based (tribe) unions accepted the idea. It was felt that Nagas need to transcend the reiteration of positions towards understanding Naga values, etching out what is most needed in Naga society today.

The need for Unity and Reconciliation—beyond national groups, among the people—stood out. Can the FNR design a mechanism that will allow Naga people, separated by boundaries of states and hearts, to feel and understand each other’s needs?

Responding to the call, as they have since the Forum was given form in 2008, the FNR embarked upon the task of consulting with representatives of the Naga people.

In October 2017, 35 Naga apex organizations met with the FNR in Chümoukedima; in November 2017, 29 such organizations came together at the same place to reiterate the need for a Naga Day.

What would such a day look like?

The Naga Shisha Hoho, whose visions laid basis for Naga Reconciliation, had prophesized that unless Nagas come together, there would be no sovereignty; the first mandate of the Naga people will be the last. While this has often meant the Naga Plebiscite of 1951, the FNR proposed that they go back to the first written document to articulate the Naga dream. The Naga Hills Memorandum to the Simon Commission emerged as the way forward.

On January 10, 1929, 20 visionaries of the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission—a Statutory Commission constituted of seven British Members of Parliament of the United Kingdom to study constitutional reform in the, then, British-occupied Indian subcontinent. The Naga Hills Memorandum asked the Commission to “safeguard our (Naga) right(s) against all encroachment.”

On January 10, 2018, this hallmark would turn 89 years old.

Empowered by the vision and stand of the Memorandum, it was agreed that Nagas from across borderlands—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Myanmar and Nagaland—should come together in a celebration of togetherness each year to ignite the fragrance of collating as ONE PEOPLE. Thus came the theme of the first Naga Day: Nagas Without Borders.

Given the condition of infrastructure in all Naga areas, it was no easy task to prepare for the Naga Day within a short span. Once everyone had agreed that the day should be observed at the historic Khuochiezie (Kohima Local Ground), to be hosted by the Angami Public Organization, hectic preparations ensued.

The first step was to introduce the concept to the people. Thus, on December 9, 2017, the FNR released a book of essays and poems written by several authors to give body to the concept of Naga Day. A Journey of Reconciliation and Healing took over from its predecessor, an FNR initiative, termed the Journey of Common Hope. History was to be created in an intentional manner for it to become “the light of the future,” in the words of FNR Convener, Rev. Dr. Wati Aier. Under his leadership, it was important to move away from the “contemptuous culture” of focusing on differences to participate in “a shared humanity of belonging.”

The FNR team—that began with 14 members in 2008 and expanded to 34members in 2017—commenced the ground work needed for the first Naga Day.

A day before, on January 9, Kohima was ready to chill the bones. The FNR had ensured that the venue was all set for January 10, 2018—chairs, music systems, stalls, water bottles, had been laid out at Khuochiezie and performers practiced for the big day into the night.

The public and private Naga sectors merged to lend a helping hand—equipment came in, publicity went out. Students’ bodies chipped in with volunteers. Tribe based institutions offered to make food for the Naga Day feast. Some performing artists produced original songs and music for the Day, others reproduced relevant renditions of previous works. Various partnerships helped produce ‘Naga Day’ memory merchandise.

It was evident what the Naga people could achieve in coming together beyond borders of the state, capital, community, church or class, in collective love, solidarity and goodwill. In the glee of the morning sun, each wished the other, “Happy Naga Day!”

For those who were unable to attend, the Day’s proceedings were streamed live through the Internet; the footage of the whole program is available on YouTube. In a further attempt to bring everyone into the conversation, the FNR decided to publish this book. It is a collection of voices that were heard on the first Naga Day—messages delivered, songs written specifically for the day, photographs and reflections are presented in this book to help us access and recall the voices of solidarity that emerged on the Day.

Words and sounds are a dynamic force. They weave the speaker and listener into building common action, into building community. The Naga brass gongs, muzzle loading guns, drums, flutes, songs and speeches sounded on the Day became a fresh call of hope, particularly for the youth, to win back their agency, lost to years and layers of violence, politicking and bureaucracy. The fulcrum, on which the Naga momentum revolved, one that had gathered the dust of time and memory, lay bare as the speakers/performers and listeners came together as one.

This book will help the reader plug into that conversation—a Reconciliation Process that is a “call to common action” for the Nagas and their neighboring peoples.

The Naga Day program on January 10, 2018, continued for more than five hours. Old men and women took great pains to walk to the ground, a Naga national flag in hand, as did mothers with children who waved their little blue sky-rainbow-star flags. Young volunteers distributed water and lunch, wrapped in leaf. ‘Kuknalim’, victory to the land, rang out. As the Naga people embarked on a journey of healing wounded relationships, hope sprang in ripples—hope that the Naga lands, as well as their neighborhoods, go beyond divide and suspicion, into the realm of peace, unity and reconciliation.

How this can be done—a possibility turned real—was for all to witness on

NAGA DAY.