HERSTORY

Indigenous Women



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POINT is an organization that continually focus to empower Indigenous women in Myanmar to improve their roles in decision making processes. In collaboration with the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, POINT documented the role of some indigenous women in Myanmar as part of regional publication that aimed to share about the successful Indigenous women leaders as good examples. Here again POINT prepared a collection of Indigenous women leaders' story as a combined one as the first time so that good examples can be spread out to wider society not only among indigenous communities. Since this is the first-time production, if there are any gaps, we hope everyone will understand. In the future, POINT hope and believe that there will have more and more stories to share about indigenous women leaders! We are one for this to create a society of equality and

empowerment.





Lwin Mar Aye

A fighter against discrimination on Indigenous Women

Name: Lwin Mar Aye

Ethnicity: Danu Address:

Ting Kung village, Ywar Ngan Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar

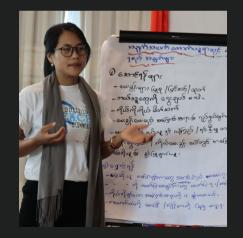
She also learned about customary land tenure and gender issues, and has received training on advocacy, leadership, and assessment and documentation of traditional skills. She is now affiliated with Green Rights Organization and actively working for Indigenous Peoples' communities and women in Ywar Ngan Township, Southern Shan State. She also learned about customary land tenure and gender issues, and has received training on advocacy, leadership, and assessment and documentation of traditional skills.

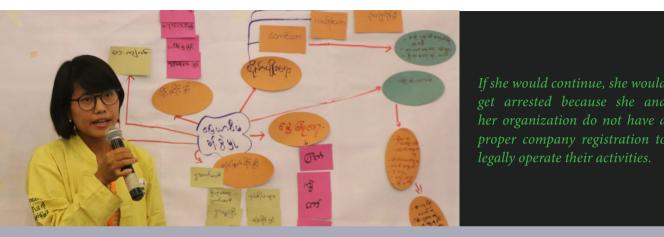
Subsequently, she shared her knowledge and trained young women and community members on REDD+, CF, FPIC, gender issues and climate change impact. As a result, she gained the trust and respect from the Danu community. They started to consult and follow her advice when they had a problem. For example, when a young married woman from Ting Kung village was abused by her husband, she consulted and sought advice from Lwin Mar Aye. With support from Lwin Mar Aye, she reported the case to the village authorities and the husband was fined for his offense.

She is not only invited by her own village Ting Kung but also by other villages from Ywar Ngan Township such as Kyuak Taw, Taphanpin and Phekin village, for training on CF when the villagers wanted to know CF establishment and implementation. She provided technical support on how to establish CF, and via Green Right Organization, she supported villagers to draw a map of the intended area of CF establishment. She became more active and recognized. She was panelist during a 'regional Learning Workshop on Indigenous Women and Customary Land Tenure' organized by POINT at Inya Lake hotel, from the 28-30 August 2018. The government, CSOs and local NGOs, along with many Indigenous Women from different parts of the country participated in the workshop. They shared their experience and traditional knowledge on the protection and conservation of forests and land management and advocated for the recognition of the traditional way of land ownership rights practiced by the Indigenous Peoples.

Lwin Mar Aye is a twenty-three-year-old single lady from Ting Kung village, Ywar Ngan Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar, and belongs to the Danu Indigenous Peoples. The Danu have managed to turn Ywar Ngan Township into a self-administration zone. It is the main dwelling place of most Pa-O and Danu Indigenous Peoples. For many years, Myanmar was shut down in terms of politics, economics and education. This has caused the Myanmar people to become very poor in many ways such as lacking wealth, education, and recognition of Human Rights. On the other hand, the patriarchal system is still strong among the Myanmar people. Through empowering Indigenous Peoples and women, Lwin Mar Aye as a young and energetic lady, wants to stand up against the discrimination of women and rural people who are being looked down.

Since 2016, she has been engaged with Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together (POINT) and learned about Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). This is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples and recognized by the UNDRIP. It allows Indigenous Peoples to give or withhold their consent to projects which may have a negative impact on their subsistence. She has also been introduced to the REDD+ program, which is a program to reduce carbon emission, and to Community Forestry (CF), which is one of the ways (and likely the only way currently in Myanmar) that allows forest dwellers the right to manage and use forests for thirty years, which can be extended.





One of the significant cases, she was involved and successfully supported her community members, was on defending of their land rights. A mining company, called Wongpi, claimed its rights to start a mining project in Ting Kung village. They presented the acceptance signatures from more than fifteen villagers. However, they had manipulated those signatures from villagers who worked for the company as daily laborers and had signed to acknowledge the receipt of their wages. Moreover, they neither had information nor properly consulted with the workers as well as all community members on the project.

Lwin Mar Aye as heard about the project, went to her village and explained the community members about the requirements of FPIC and the risks, advantages and disadvantages of the mining project. She organized three meetings with the community, the village authorities and the mining company in order to share community's perspectives on the project start up. When the community refused to provide their consent, she wrote a letter of objection to the Shan State government and Nay Pyi Taw government office on the 6 December 2018. Now they are still waiting for the reply from the government, but the mining company has already withdrawn and stopped the implementation of the project.

Through the work of Lwin Mar Aye her community has gained knowledge and has become aware about the FPIC as well as the possible consequences of the mining project. However, even though the mining company has stopped the implementation of the project, she still has been threatened and frightened by the local authorities and the company. The local authorities have asked her to stop doing what she has been doing. If she would continue, she would get arrested because she and her organization do not have a proper company registration to legally operate their activities. Likewise, an employee of the Wongpi mining company once pointed a knife at her and threatened that she would get sexually abused. `ye and Mu Htet Myat participating in a panel discussion.

Notwithstanding these challenges, she has made an agreement with the village leaders (village administration) that she would share the information in any events. Through these regular contacts with the village leaders, she has gained their trust, respect and protection which has empowered her to continue her initiatives regardless she has faced threats of death and imprisonment. She has been acknowledged and recognized as a young women leader. There is still a lot to be changed and done so that women can get explicit leadership roles in the community, and discrimination and Human Rights abuse against women and Indigenous Peoples' communities will be stopped. This is why the young and energetic Lwin Mar Aye is determined to continue her work of fighting against discrimination of women and Human Rights abuses on Indigenous Peoples' communities.



Nan Nge Nge

Indigenous Peoples' Rights promoter

Name: Nan Nge Nge

Ethnicity: Pa'O

Address: Aung Pang City, Shan State, Myanmar

Myanmar is the dwelling place of various Indigenous Peoples, or also called ethnic minorities. It is said that Myanmar is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse countries in the world. After World War II, the country gained their independence from British colonial rule. However, there were many internal conflicts within the country and in 1962 the military junta took over power. Around that time a lot of Human Rights abuses started. In 2010, the country was transformed into a democracy. During the military rule, politicians, anti-military and Human Rights activists were systematically persecuted and forced to leave the country. Even after the democracy, there were still a lot of Human Rights abuses. Many people were afraid to raise their voice to claim their rights or to protest against Human Rights violations. Moreover, Myanmar still has a strong patriarchal system which considers women to be inferior to men. So, women are excluded from leadership and decision-making roles and are not authorized to own land. However, in Southern Shan state, where most Pa'O and Danu Indigenous Peoples are living, there is one woman actively working as a 'Human Rights defender' and an 'Indigenous People's Rights promoter'.

A mother of five daughters, Nan Nge Nge is now 39 years old and belongs to the Pa'O ethnic group from Aung Pang City, Kalaw district, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. She was married to a man from the Chin ethnic minority in 1999. Her husband passed away in 2007and left her with four daughters with nine years old eldest daughter and the youngest one was only one month. As a strong Indigenous woman, she managed to raise her children by using her traditional farming skills. She remarried in 2012 and had another daughter. The year 2010 was a historical year for Myanmar as it was the first time the military junta held free and fair elections and U Thein Sein was elected as the eighth president of Myanmar. He was the former Prime Minister of the military junta. From then onwards, the people of Myanmar could enjoy freedom of expression through the media and also online, however, there were still some restrictions. Nonetheless, violations of Human Rights such as domestic sexual abuse towards women, land confiscation by development companies, deforestation and degradation of eco-systems because of mining operations or extraction of natural resources, were exposed publicly more often. Those rights abuses mostly happened in areas where Indigenous Peoples were living. Likewise, there were many projects and investments for mining operations, agriculture and tourism in Shan State which resulted in a lot of land confiscation cases.

In 2012, Nan Nge Nge noticed that people were not speaking up against these Human Rights abuses due to lack of awareness on Human Rights and the kind of judiciary protection from the existing legal framework. This make her strong will to protect Indigenous Peoples through the existing legal framework and raise the capacity of their communities so they could protect their land and rights whenever development companies would come and harm their rights or damage their livelihood. She joined the Farmers Land Union Organization (FLU) and worked together with U Win Shin Myat. She trained and built capacity such as Training of Trainers (TOT) on land law and customary tenure, gender and women rights, and environmental conservation. She has also organized workshops encouraging people to share their experiences and discuss the challenges, concerns on laws and policies implementation at community level. Further, she raised issues with parliament members in both formal and informal settings. This way Indigenous communities were able to report their challenges to the relevant government authorities and received support to defend their rights whenever the communities' rights were abused. Ever since, she has been actively working as Indigenous Women representative and an Indigenous Peoples Human Rights defender.

Occasionally she was blamed, criticized or even asked to stop interfering. They urged her to let the men do what she was doing.

Regardless of her dedication, she faced many challenges and difficulties. As mentioned earlier, Myanmar has a strong patriarchal system and does not accept women in leadership roles easily. The first challenge she faced came from her relatives and community. Occasionally she was blamed, criticized or even asked to stop interfering. They urged her to let the men do what she was doing. Many people thought that it was not appropriate for a woman to travel all the time without a man by her side. Secondly, she faced difficulties in winning trust from her community as a woman. However, she overcame all obstacles with her dedication and passion to raise awareness amongst Indigenous communities on Human Rights, laws and policies including the existing national and international legal frameworks including UNDRIP. She explained everything patiently and eventually gained the trust from her community and other Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). As women, she optimized her talent to communicate, natural patience and ability to deal calmly with many people, the government or other organizations. So, when cases of Indigenous Peoples had to be represented, as a woman, she did it more easily and adequately.

After years of struggle Nan Nge Nge now has good relationship with government authorities and many organizations, such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Metta, Land Core Group (LCG), Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG), Myanmar Center for Responsible Business (MCRB), Paungku and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) from different regions that are working on land, women, environment and Indigenous Peoples' rights. In 2015, she engaged with POINT and gained more knowledge on Indigenous Peoples and the rights under the UNDRIP and the REDD+ program. The UNDRIP provides rights such as the right to self-determination, land ownership and forest and resource management. The REDD+ program, which follows the UNDRIP, was set up in order to reduce carbon emission from forest degradation and deforestation in developing countries.

It made her realize the important interrelationship between the environment and women. She therefore became even more eager to strengthen the women's role in environment protection and promote Indigenous Peoples rights. Besides her skills and knowledge, she was able to defend and promote Indigenous Peoples rights more adequately because of her network and relationship. As a result, she was invited for a regional workshop on the implementation of REDD+ in Myanmar, participated as an Indigenous People's representative for the formation of the Safeguards Technical Working Group (Safeguards TWG), and in the preparation of Safeguard Information System (SIS).



She provided inputs from the Indigenous Peoples' point of view and lobbied policy makers for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in laws and policies during the workshop.

These safeguards include policies and measures that address the impacts of the REDD+ program on local communities and ensure Indigenous Peoples and women rights are respect. They are considered as one of the keys for a successful

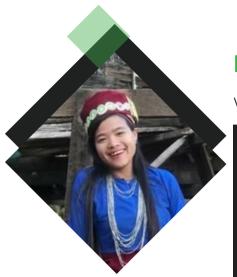
program implementation. She provided inputs from the Indigenous Peoples' point of view and lobbied policy makers for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in laws and policies during the workshop. She also participated in the national Forum on Forestry, the strategic implementation of the CF and the workshop on Indigenous Peoples Customary Conserved Area (ICCA). Under the current forest law, protected community areas are recognized, however there is no information on how to recognize and manage these areas. Hence, the CF provides an extendable land ownership right for thirty years which is managed by the Government. The ICCA, on the other hand, is a form of land ownership which recognizes and gives full rights to the community to manage and benefit from the land without a time limitation. She actively advocated for the recognition and implementation of ICCAs and continued to raise awareness amongst Indigenous communities. In 2016, she attended the sixth 'ASEAN Social Forestry' meeting and the 'CSO Forum on Indigenous Peoples in ASEAN' in the Philippines. She met many Indigenous Peoples' leaders from ASEAN countries and learned more about other Indigenous Peoples from ASEAN.

Nan Nge Nge is dedicated and passionate to end discrimination and violations of Human Rights of Indigenous communities. She hopes, all the Indigenous Women are empowered and have equal access to education and leadership roles. She aims to support Indigenous Women to participate in leadership roles concerning land and environmental conservation, forest management, and in decision making-roles in the current formation of the federal democracy, reconciliation and peace processes with EAOs. She suggests, 'Indigenous Women should unite and work together to demand and promote their rights'.



Nan Nge Nge is dedicated and passionate to end discrimination and violations of Human Rights of Indigenous communities. She hopes, all the Indigenous Women are empowered and have equal access to education and leadership roles.

She learned from her experience that it is important for Indigenous communities to know their rights and speak up for themselves to claim those rights. She adds needs for platforms where Indigenous Peoples can exchange their experiences and lobby relevant policy makers and stakeholders. As Myanmar is in the process of reforming the country into a democracy and reconciling with EAOs for peace, it is also crucial to consider the expectations of the Indigenous Peoples' communities and learn from experiences of Indigenous Peoples from across the world.



Mai Pan Yee

Women Human Rights Defenders and IW's role in COVID-19

Name: Mai Pan Yee

Ethnicity: Asho Chin

Location: Nag Phe township, Magway region, Myanmar

Mai Pan Yee is a twenty-seven year old lady from Nwe village. She belongs to the Asho Chin ethnic minority. Next to her farm work, she decided to work as a health volunteer to educate her community members about health issues, such as malaria and dengue fever. Later, she involved herself with a CSO as an environmental activist. As the community members are not aware of the existing forest laws and policies, they do not know what reserved forests are and how they are managed by the government. She has explained the villagers that no one can take their ancestral lands. Even though the government has created a Form 7 certificate to register land, the villagers have to provide the evidence about the ownership of the land. Especially customary ownership is difficult to prove and often leads to discussions. In 2016, Mai Pan Yee attended a workshop on "Women's Participation in Climate Change" and has been engaged with POINT ever since. She actively participates in trainings, workshops and meeting sessions organized by POINT. In particular, she joins media and journalism trainings, climate change and REDD+ workshops, gender workshops, and community forestry trainings. She shares the knowledge gained from those trainings and workshops with her community as well as other organizations and individuals. Besides this, she provides information on how to apply community forestry methods and lends a hand to villages interested to apply those methods. From time to time, she raises awareness on the relationship between women and forest management during village meetings.

She has also taken up a leadership role in the Yoma Youth Rayway network which provides support to communities in need. She decided to engage herself with the network after she noticed that there were many health problems, and transportation and education-related difficulties in her village. For example, teachers from outside the village did not want to come to teach in her village, even though they were receiving a salary from government to do so. She started to collect evidence and has sent a letter of complaint to the Education Department. Furthermore, she has requested midwifes and health care staff for every village because the bad transportation infrastructure makes it difficult for the community members to access health care facilities. Since 2008, there has been a health care center, and now there is health clinic in her community. She has also urged the government to repair and construct roads, and provide access to water in her village.



Besides this, she acts as an intermediary for land issues and gives advice on how to solve land issues. She assists villagers to get their land back, and facilitates reconciliation in case of problems. She also prevents and restricts illegal logging and transport of wild animals such as the Auk Chin bird (a bird valued by the Chin peoples). Even though she has been threatened by the loggers, she continues to hand over the wrongdoers to the Forest Department. Mai Pan Yee explains, "Without the forest, we can do nothing, so we will protect the forest as much as we can." This is not the only challenge she has faced. Her culture does not accept women in leadership roles. From 2012 to 2015, her community did not allow her to attend meetings. Even when she did attend, her voice was not heard. Already when she was a young girl, she had faced discrimination, but now she knows her rights. She does not accept discrimination anymore and has been brave to protect not only herself, but also others. Recently, she has been invited to community meetings and now they come together to consult with her.

She is also a human rights defender promoting gender equality, and stands with women who face domestic violence or were a victim of rape. In her area, people do not go to court because they cannot afford a lawyer, contact legal aid or lack support. She therefore advocated with the regional government and approached the relevant government bodies to ask for help and financial support. She has called on lawyers to provide free legal advice and assistance during court proceedings for child rape and domestic violence victims. If they are not supported, the victims would end up with a compensation of only 1000000to 1500000 Kyats (\$700 – 1000). The victims of child rape would be looked down upon by their community if the criminal is not convicted. If only a small amount of money is given as a compensation, the perpetrators will not feel guilty. Those who are imprisoned will come to realize that they can get convicted for child rape and domestic violence which will encourage them to not do it again.

Another big issue in her community is the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been a big challenge for indigenous peoples around the world, including Asia. In Myanmar, the pandemic has impacted many different ethnic groups, however, indigenous peoples have responded with their own strategies. At the entrance of her village, a gate made of large trees has been set up. In this way, the flow of people into and out of the village is restricted and controlled. Moreover, the gate alerts people of the need to prevent the virus from spreading into the village. She urged the community members not to go outside, and to a wear mask and wash their hands often. She also monitors the cars coming into the village. However, as the villagers were not used to do so, there have been some difficulties. Some people did not want follow the rules by saying, "these are useless for us."

as a community and not to go out unnecessarily. The community coming back to the village. On a positive note, the community the forest; and fish, prawns, snails are found in the rivers and the logging operations in the area, which is good news for the

Written by POINT

Naw Khin Moe Aye

Karen Indigenous Woman's Engagement in ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People Forum

Name : Naw Khin Moe Aye

Ethnicity: Karen

Location : Insein Township, Yangon, Myanmar

Naw Khin Moe Aye, who is a Karen Indigenous Women, serving as a program coordinator for POINT, which is a locally based organization in Myanmar and promoting Indigenous Peoples' roles to claim their rights and express their realities with nature in the sustainable development initiatives at national, regional and international level. Therefore, the organization has started its engagement with ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN People Forum since 2015, where Naw Khin Moe Aye was assigned as focal person to meet programme requirement as well as personal development.



The ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/ APF), is a place where a diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) from ASEAN countries, gathered annually and showed solidarity. A selected ASEAN country hosted the forum and it carried a strong mandate in representing and strengthening ASEAN people voices especially the voices of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. It also provided spaces of strong engagement among ASEAN member states and mechanisms, by honoring mutual respect, integrity, joint development and promoting peoples' solidarity. It brought ASEAN's commitment on its people using the principles of human rights, democracy, equality, and development.

The engagement of ACSC/APF in the ASEAN process also brings attention to the issues and concerns of its constituents – the working class, the peasantry, urban poor, fisherfolk, women, children, LGBTIQ community, indigenous peoples, the elderly persons, persons with disabilities, employees, professionals, migrants, and students.



As focal, Naw Khin Moe Aye has engaged with ACSC/APF starting from 2015 to 2016. Due to her strong engagement with APF, she was invited to be the panelist in the side event with a topic of "Struggle for Self Determination of Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia", in the APF forum held in Quezon City, Phillippines, in 2017. This was the first time for her to be as panelist at the regional level forum but she has shared the cases and issues of Indigenous Peoples happening in Myanmar with courage.

Furthermore, she engaged as a Steering Committee Member of Myanmar Civil Societies Core Group on ASEAN (MCSCGA) in Nationally process. Being engagement with APF as not only the participant but also as Steering Committee Member, which made her to be expanded self-confident from the process that she engaged in. The following year, in 2019, she participated in The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum, which was held in Bangkok, Thailand as a representative of Myanmar Civil Society Groups together with Indigenous Peoples Leaders from Myanmar. From that engagement, she has learned how the regional statement related to ASEAN issues had developed in highlighting and bringing different voices and experiences from ASEAN State Members.

Moreover, she was nominated to join ASEAN Summit as a representative of Myanmar as well as a representative for Myanmar Civil Society Organization in Bangkok. Naw Khin Moe Aye, out of the three nominated persons, was selected to attend that ASEAN Summit dated on November 3, 2019. Although she was pregnant for eight months by the time of joining ASEAN Summit, her enthusiasm and eagerness to fulfill her role and responsibility fruitfully by challenging all the difficulties and inconvenience facing due to her pregnancy.

By actively participating in series of preparatory meeting for 2020 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum not only as a National Level Steering Committee but also as a member of regional Program Committee, this regional position brings lots of advantages for her as well as for the Indigenous Peoples of Myanmar. Opportunities and changes have been made and rights and voices of Indigenous Peoples could be raised through producing information, data and facts of the ground.

Returning to point of participation in APF forum in 2015, she had faced many challenges in terms of understanding on process and language barriers. However, by active participation and strong cooperation in Myanmar Civil Societies Core Group on ASEAN, national level, she came to realize the way it works and how it was carried out. She also realized that there was no one who spoke for the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the APF forum and she even could not raise such issue due to language barriers. Nevertheless, years and experiences of engagement with APF, which made pulled factors to organized workshop and submit a statement along with Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), which is working for indigenous peoples in the region to the cause of promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights and human rights and articulating issues of relevance to indigenous peoples.

Being as a steering committee member of Myanmar Civil Societies Core Group on ASEAN, Naw Khin Moe Aye, an Indigenous woman as well as a representative of POINT, could actively empower other Indigenous women residing in POINT target communities and contribute in promoting the issues and voices of Indigenous Peoples of Myanmar, who are suffering from different human rights violation in the regions. Through her own experience learning from APF, she is encouraging other Team Members to use the "regional channel or platform" to promote the lives of Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar and their voices to be heard in policy making and development justice effectively.

Naw Ei Ei Min

Developing Indigenous Women's Leadership in the Fight against Climate Change

Name : Naw Ei Ei Min

Ethnicity: Karen

Location : Insein Township, Yangon, Myanmar

I was brought up in the old capital city of Myanmar, Yangon, however I am an Indigenous Karen woman and I was raised surrounded by the social and cultural practices of my ethnic group. Karen is one of the ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. My people traditionally live on an area of land in Eastern Myanmar, at the border with Thailand, as well as in parts of Bago and Ayarwaddy. As these are rural and forested areas, much of our indigenous culture is connected to the forest ecosystem and our traditionally rural livelihoods.



Now my work, as Director of POINT NGO, involves supporting Indigenous women across Myanmar. Throughout my career, I have found that my ethnic background has made it challenging to assume a role as a leader. I have often worked with men who were raised with traditional values which attributed certain gender roles within society. As such, it was difficult for them to work in subordinate positions to a woman.





For example, when I began my role as Director, I spent much of my time convincing my team to work on my ideas and plans. In addition, managing my work life and bringing up two children has been challenging. My team, and some donors, can be unsympathetic to the strains of my home life. With time, I have been able to overcome these attitudes. Yet, in order to do so I have often had to take strong actions to prove my knowledge and experience so that I can demonstrate to my team that I am capable. I have also had to respond to feedback provided by the team, dress differently and change some of my behaviours in the office, in order to gain their respect.

I see many echoes between my personal experience and the obstacles and barriers that Indigenous women in our project areas face to become leaders, or even to express their ideas and influence decision-making in their communities. This paper seeks to draw on my observations of working with Indigenous women in different regions of Myanmar. The paper will show the importance of Indigenous women's leadership for forest conservation and climate change prevention. It will also suggest how to better support Indigenous women in leadership roles.



POINT (Promotion Of Indigenous and Nature Together)

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