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Agenda Item 4(a) Economic & Social Development
Statement by Mrinal Kanti Tripura, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti
(PCJSS)

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me the floor.

I on behalf of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh would like to congratulate you on your election as chair for the 2nd session, and I extend my thanks to the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Indigenous Populations for the financial support to come here.

Mr. Chairman I am speaking on behalf of PCJSS and Bangladesh Adivashi Forum (Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum) on Agenda item 4(a), Economic and Social Development.

Mr. Chair, whenever we talk about economic and social development of any nation it reminds the importance of interrelationship of right to self-determination, right to access to land and resources, right to access to adequate funding, concrete policy etc.

Mr. chair, we the indigenous peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts, for reestablishing our rights had to go through a long more than two decades armed conflict between the IPs and Bangladesh government, which ended in 1997, 2nd December through signing an Accord. This accord was hailed by local, national and international peace loving people. But, after five years of the signing of the accord, most of the provisions of the accord remain unimplemented and in some cases there have been violations of the provisions of accord.

Mr. Chair, for the socio-economic development of the 45 different indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, there is no government policy towards Indigenous Peoples. Because of lack of policy, little benefit from the development activities reached the Indigenous peoples and in some cases development projects have adverse impacts as indigenous peoples are not consulted and they are not involved in all levels development program.

Mr. chair, like other parts of the world, the indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh also live in forest, as forest is their life. But, the Indigenous Peoples have suffered and continue to suffer due to discriminatory policies and arbitrary acts of Forest department personnel. Even today, a little less than 24% of the CHT is categorized as "reserved forest". This means that the Forest Department without any local involvement of any sort administers these huge areas. Indigenous inhabitants of these areas have very limited access to lands and government social services.

Because of nonrecognition of our traditional customary laws and social institutions, indigenous peoples land is grabbed by Bengali and we are losing our control over our ancestral territory.

So, for the social and economic development of Indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh we have the following recommendations:

1. Constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples
2. Proper and speedy implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997
3. Recognition of the traditional ownership over lands and territories
4. Involvement of Indigenous Peoples at all level of development
5. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples traditional institutions