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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, distinguished Government delegates, honorable members of the Permanent Forum, representatives of UN specialized agencies and NGOs, and indigenous sisters and brothers

I on behalf of the Peace Campaign Group would like to make the following intervention on the agenda item with special reference to the recent developments in the post accord situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chairman,

Indigenous peoples continue to be subjected to colonial practices despite many international treaties and conventions and development programs recommending promotion and protection of their rights and socio-economic condition and universal enjoyment of human rights. These practices have been affecting their lives, systems and values in many forms. Its impacts on their socio-economic condition are damaging.

In Bangladesh, there are 45 distinct indigenous peoples, but their distinct identity, language and culture are not recognized. The Government of Bangladesh neither has any policy on them nor it applies international conventions on the rights of indigenous peoples such as, ILO 169 with regard to them. It resulted in total economic marginalization of the indigenous peoples (I should note here that yesterday the distinguished delegation of Bangladesh came to meet us immediately after presentation of a statement at this forum by a representative of the indigenous peoples from the CHT, and raised the problem of her delegation with the definition of "indigenous people" in Bangladeshi context. I thank her delegation to share its views about the issue with us at a time while the forum is on.

Mr. Chairman,

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), southeastern part of Bangladesh, the indigenous peoples waged an armed struggle for autonomy for 25 years. Finally, in 1997, a peace agreement was reached between the two sides. But I regret, Mr. Chairman, to report you and this distinguished forum that the agreement failed to bring about the expected changes in the situation of the indigenous peoples. The Government continues to maintain a double standard on the accord. Some two years or so back, a Government spokesperson publicly claimed that 98% of the accord was implemented, and the CHT was "peaceful". But in reality, it is not the case. Most of the fundamental points of the accord remain unimplemented till today. Such points, among others, include **effective enforcement of the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils Acts of 1998, settlement of land-disputes between Jummas and Bengali Muslim settlers, rehabilitation of the Jumma refugees and internally displaced Jummas,**

withdrawal of the Bengali Muslim settlers and the “temporary” military and paramilitary camps from the CHT etc. Rather, the Government has been **manipulating** the whole implementation process of the accord in a way in which more Bengali Muslims are migrating into the CHT and development programs are becoming increasingly Bengali Muslim-oriented.

Examples of how the Government is manipulating or violating the peace accord are given below:

1. The Government held the 2001 general elections with a voter list, in which all the “non-permanent residents” (Bengali Muslim settlers and the members of the security forces) of the CHT were included in violation of the accord. For this reason, the PCJSS boycotted the elections. A Bengali Muslim settler, **Wadud Bhuiyan**, was elected from the Khagrachari hill district of the CHT as member of the Bangladesh National Parliament! In violation of the accord, he was subsequently appointed as the Chairman of the **CHT Development Board (CHTDB)**, the institution responsible for major development programs in the region!
2. As per the accord, three Hill District Councils are to be formed with directly elected members. But the Government formed these councils with its selected party workers! Now these bodies are functioning as a regional political party office of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This is how democracy has been killed in the region.
3. As per the accord, an indigenous MP is to be appointed as Minister to the **Ministry on CHT Affairs**. But the Prime Minister **Ms. Begum Khaleda Zia** has kept the forth-folio under her charge, and appointed MP **Moni Swapan Dewan** to the post as Deputy Minister, who has practically no decision-making power. The Ministry works against the interest of the indigenous people. For example, on 21 December 2000, it served a notification No. 62/99-587 empowering the District Commissioners (DC) of the three hill districts in the CHT to issue “**permanent resident certificate**” to the Bengali Muslim settlers! It should be noted that all the DCs of the three hill districts are Bengali Muslims.

A systematic Bengali Muslim demographic and cultural invasion is being carried out against the indigenous people to destroy their ethnic identity.

Mr. Chairman,

The indigenous peoples in the CHT are neither enjoying the benefits of development programs nor they are getting back their lands (their main source of livelihood) from the occupation of the Bengali Muslim settlers and military. Many indigenous youths are finding themselves in a difficult socio-economic situation in which they are losing their traditional ways of livelihood without any sustainable alternatives. As a result, crime rate is increasing rapidly, while unemployment is increasing in hitherto unknown rate. Cases of mental disorder and suicide of youths due to lack of living conditions within the CHT have been reported. Many indigenous women are being forced to work in private and corporate sectors run and managed by Bengali Muslims in cities outside the CHT, for example, garment factories in the Chittagong city, where they are grossly exploited economically and sexually.

There can be no development in the CHT without proper implementation of the CHT peace accord. So it is vital to implement the accord fully for sustainable development and peace in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to inform you that international aid agencies and donor countries are meeting on 17-18 May 2003 at the **Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF)** in Dhaka to provide aid to the Government of Bangladesh for development for the financial year 2003-04. It is extremely imperative to understand the development perspective of the indigenous people for any development in their ancestral homeland. In the past, the Government of Bangladesh used a major part of the international development aid in militarization and settlement of Bengali Muslim settlers in the CHT. It resulted in displacement of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people from their ancestral lands and homesteads. Such practices must be stopped from being repeated again. To ensure it, full and effective participation of the local Government (CHT Regional Council and other people representative bodies) and indigenous NGOs in the development process is vital.

Peace Campaign Group therefore recommends the followings:

1. Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be adopted and translated into action soon;
2. Indigenous people should be given the right to design, implement and evaluate their own development policies and programs according to their needs, aspirations and cultural values. The state parties and international aid agencies such as, World Bank and UNDP and donor countries should support them financially and technically in this regard to help them realize the Millennium Development Goal;
3. UN agencies such as, World Bank, UNDP and ILO should persuade the Government of Bangladesh to comply with its policies on indigenous peoples; and
4. Permanent Forum should recommend the Special Rapportuer on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples to urgently undertake a comprehensive study on the human rights situation of the indigenous peoples in the CHT and other parts of Bangladesh.

Thank you, Mr. Chair for your kind attention.