



BANGLADESH

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**Statement by H. E. Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations at the Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 12 - 23 May 2003, New York
21 May 2003**

Mr. Chairman,

Warm congratulations are owed to you upon your, and your Bureau's skilful leadership of these proceedings.

Indigenous peoples by definition are original inhabitants of any given territory or country. While ethnic minorities in Bangladesh may not fit this definition, the government has always been sensitive to their problems, according them priority attention.

My purpose of this intervention is to keep this important forum apprised of steps undertaken with regard to the promotion and protection of the varied rights of the tribal communities.

While the Bangladesh Constitution guarantees equal rights for all, some special opportunities are offered to the ethnic minorities. These include special quotas in educational institutions and in public services.

Most tribals in Bangladesh live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. The Peace Accord signed between the government and representative of the tribal people in 1997 was unique in that it was able to successfully address a problem that had festered for a long time, perhaps too long!

The following have been the progress in the Accord's implementations:

- A separate Ministry has been created and has been with a person from tribal community in charge.
- The Chittagong Hill District Regional Council and Land Commission have been constituted. The Council has been working in full swing with a Chairman from tribal community. Recently the land Commission Act has been passed. It will be operative soon.
- The three Chittagong Hill District Councils have been conferred with more autonomy according to the provision of the Peace Accord.
- The government has provided TK. 50,000.00 to each of the listed members of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Shanghati Samity (PCJSS) who were surrendered their arms and ammunition and returned to normal life.
- Already 705 tribal people have been appointed in the government services.

- Nearly 65,000 refugees came back to Chittagong Hill Districts. They have been rehabilitated and all benefits under a 20-point package programme have been given to them.
- A Task Force has been working to identify the ways of rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons.

The government has taken numerous initiatives for transforming this region into an area of new economic possibilities. It has sought to mainstream the region into the development activities resolving the decade old conflicts prevailing among the various *ethnic groups*. *It is important that the desired sustainable development of the hill region would soon be achieved with the help and assistance of all concerned.*

We have noted the contents of the statements made in this Forum with regard to Chittagong Hill Tracts. We would provide further information to you, Mr. Chairman, in due course upon careful examination of the concerns.

However, it would only be rational to recognise that while much progress has been achieved, naturally more remain to be done. Obviously, major steps have been taken towards what all perceive to be the right direction. The commitment of the government is unflinching. Bangladesh as all the world knows has a vibrant civil society which is encouraged by the government to make their own positive contribution to these efforts. Bangladesh takes prides in her pluralist values. Her people cherish their democratic ideals for which in the past they have struggled so long and so hard. The welfare of all our peoples will forever remain our unshakeable goal.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.