

**10th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
May 16-27, 2011
New York**

Agenda Item 7: Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues of the Economic and Social Council and emerging issues

Special Rappoteur's study on the status of implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997

Asia IP Caucus Statement

Delivered by Rukka Sombolinggi

Madame Chair, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus would like to call for international solidarity to our brothers and sisters in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to express our serious concerns for the appalling situation in that region.

Since the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord (CHTs Accord) was signed in 1997, there has been no sign of progress in the implementation process of the Accord. In fact, we have witnessed the worsening situations faced by indigenous peoples in the CHTs.

The CHTs Accord granted the status of the "Tribal Inhabited Area" and support necessary administrative institutions such as Hill District Councils and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council to be set up, however the government has so far failed to actualized them to protect and safeguard the tribal-inhabited status of the region.

Land Grabbing and influx of Bengalis settlers continue to post threats to indigenous peoples in the CHTs – even more the settlers are frequently involved in perpetrating human rights violations and attacks against the indigenous peoples with the primary aim to grab indigenous lands. Five large-scale attacks were carried out by the settlers against the indigenous peoples since the signing of the Accord. It is unfortunate that the government turns a blind eye to all these incidences, which are at times assisted by the members of the armed forces. The flow of migrants from the plains into the CHTs should be stopped to restore peace and to preserve the tribal character of the region.

Additionally, the systematic raping of indigenous women and extra-judicial killing of indigenous leaders and ordinary persons facilitated by militarization in the region is of grave concerns to us.

We are observing with serious concerns that the Bangladesh government is more interested in relocating the Bengalis settlers in the CHTs violating the provisions of the Accord rather than rehabilitating 9,780 India Returnee Refugee families and 90,208 Internally Displaced families who are waiting to return to their own lands for the last three decades.

It is unacceptable that the affairs of the Chittagong Hill Tracts should continue to be run by the military even after the Accord was signed. One-third of the Bangladesh Army is alleged to be deployed in the CHTs though the country is not at war, and is at peace with its neighboring countries and there is no insurgency prevailing. There are more than 400 military camps in

addition to 6 Brigade headquarters in the CHTs, which are little more than 5 thousand square miles in area. We are alarmed at the news that heavy military presence in the CHTs contributes to severe human rights violations.

There have been repeated outbreaks of violence in the last few years, which have led to Bengali settlers grabbing even more indigenous peoples' land, with the active or tacit support of the state security forces. The media has reported many incidents of state bias in these incidents, where Bengali settlers have carried out arson or other violent attacks on indigenous peoples, but security forces tend to arrest only Indigenous People, the victims, rather than the perpetrators of the attacks.

Given the above, we endorse the recommendations made by Special Rapporteur Mr. Lars-Anders Baer and highlight the following,

1. We call for immediate withdrawal of all army camps from the CHT leading to demilitarization of the lands and territories of indigenous peoples to peace, economic and social progress and development, understanding and friendly relations among nations and peoples of the world, as enshrined in the UNDRIP.
2. We call for constructive dialogues to be organized immediately between the Government of Bangladesh and indigenous peoples of CHTs to move forward with the implementation of the CHTs Accord,
3. We call the attention to all UN agencies, incl. UNDP-CHTDF, to fully support and promote the implementation of the CHTs Accord,
4. We call the attention to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop a mechanism to strictly monitor and screen the human rights records of national army personnel prior to allowing them to participate in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations,
5. We call upon the UN Permanent Forum to dedicate a special theme or a technical seminar to peacebuilding process, the implementation of peace agreement and conflict-prevention initiatives in indigenous peoples territories.
6. We demand that the international and internal refugees are properly rehabilitated without further delay. The Bangladesh government that is obliged to various international human rights treaties should not buy time and prolong the miseries that the refugees are suffering from.

Thank you Madame Chair