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Agenda Item :

Statement On behalf of
Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati
Samiti (PCJSS), Jumma Peoples' Network, Trinamul, Taungya and Bawm
Literature Forum

Salnam, Greetings from the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh,

We take the floor to draw your attention to the serious situation facing our peoples, and our women in Bangladesh. This is a joint statement from the indigenous NGOs of Bangladesh.

We support the recommendations to this Forum of the Indigenous Women's Caucus at this session to :

- Urge the CEDAW committee to pay special attention to the needs of indigenous womens
- Support recommendation no. 81 of the 2nd session of the Permanent Forum and a new recommendation of the indigenous womens caucus to undertake a special study on genocidal, ethnocidal practices on indigenous peoples, and ecocide on their lands and their territories
- Furthermore we urge the permanent forum to consider th recommendations of the Baguio Declaration of 2004

Women in Society

Patriarchy is pervasive and dominates every area of life in Bangladesh. Women also face discrimination within their own societies, even when they are matrilineal.

Women are excluded from the decision making processes, with their sphere of influence largely limited to the home and family.

Indigenous women in Bangladesh are harassed and victimized on the basis of gender and ethnicity, in their daily lives at work in factories, fields and forests. Sometimes they are exposed to the risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking. They have no security and are the most vulnerable of society.

Forest Livelihoods

An area of intervention with severe consequences for indigenous people in general and women in particular is state forestry programmes.

Women bear the major burden of these programmes as they go about their daily chores, collecting firewood, water and forest products.

The worst of such cases is that of the so called National Park in Modhupur. Not only have the customary lands of the indigenous Garo people been appropriated by the Government, but a concrete wall erected to exclude them.

Conflict and Militarization

Kalpana Chakma illustrates the struggles against oppression and militarization faced by indigenous women in Bangladesh. A young student activist she was abducted by the military and disappeared in 1996.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts remains one of the most highly militarized regions in the world today. Other areas of Bangladesh are not under direct military rule, but the indigenous peoples and women still suffer from numerous acts of violence and discrimination from police, and other security personnel.

Rape

On 26th August 2003 ten indigenous villages of Mahalchari in the Hill Tracts were destroyed in a series of arson attacks carried out by settlers and personnel from the military.

One community leader was tortured and died, and a baby was strangled to death before her grandmother was gang raped by four to five military personnel. Eight other women were raped whilst fleeing the violence.

There is no accountability for this gross abuse of human rights. This follows a pattern of violence. And all this in Peace time, following an Accord signed in December 1997, to end 25 years of internal conflict.

It is in the light of these circumstances that the recommendations that we have made earlier are crucial to the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh especially the women.