



**Permanent Mission of Bangladesh**  
**Geneva**

*Please check against delivery*

**Statement by Ms Rabab Fatima, Member of Bangladesh Delegation to the  
21st Session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations during  
general debate (agenda item 4 (a), Geneva, 22 July 2003**

---

Mr. Chairman,

We are very happy to see you back in the Chair. We are confident of a productive outcome of this session under your skillful leadership.

At the outset, I would like to reaffirm my delegation's full support to the work of this important Working Group.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly share with this Group some of the important initiatives undertaken with regard to the promotion and protection of the rights of the tribal communities in Bangladesh.

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 public services. An important policy objective is the preservation of the cultural heritage and traditions of the tribal communities.

Most tribal communities in Bangladesh live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. In 1997, a landmark Peace Accord was signed between the government and the representative of the tribal people that ended a long festered insurgency problem and successfully addressed other concerns in the area.

I am happy to inform this Group that considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the Peace Accord. Some significant achievements include:

- The creation of a separate Ministry for CHT affairs, which is headed by a person from the tribal community;

- The 3 Hill District Councils, the Regional Council and the Land Commission have been constituted. The Hill District Councils and the Regional Council are fully operational, with representatives from the tribal community in charge. Recently, the Land Commission Act has been passed. Under the provision of the Act, the Land Commission would be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court, and would be mandated to resolve land disputes in the three hill districts. It will be operative soon;
- The 3 Hill District Councils have been conferred with power and autonomy according to the provisions of the Accord. Fifteen departments out of 33 have already been transferred to the Hill District Councils. Formulation of policies and functions of these departments are being carried out under the direct supervision of the HDCs;
- Special priority has been placed by the government for enhancing the facilities and services in the education, agriculture and health sectors in the hill region. A large number of teachers, doctors and field workers have been appointed recently for the hill districts, to make these service sectors more efficient and effective there;
- Following the signing of the Accord, a total of 705 tribal people have been appointed in the government services. All concerned ministries and government departments have been directed to appoint tribal people in the district level government bodies and autonomous organizations with a view to mainstreaming the participation of the tribal people in the development process;
- The government has provided Taka 50,000 to each of the listed members of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) who have surrendered their arms and returned to normal life;
- Nearly 65,000 refugees have returned to the Chittagong Hill Districts. They have been rehabilitated under a 20-point package programme;
- A Task Force has been established to identify internally displaced persons and make recommendations for their rehabilitation.

Mr. Chairman, a high-powered committee headed by a Cabinet Minister has been constituted to examine and recommend measures for the early implementation of the remaining provisions of the Accord in consultation with tribal representatives. Emphasis is given to implementation of development projects, which will lead to poverty reduction in the region. Development activities have been accelerated by enhanced budget allocation and through new projects relating to socio-economic and infrastructure development.

The government's priority attention to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the significant improvement of the situation in the area is demonstrated by some recent positive developments, including resumption of programmes by UNDP in the area from June this year. Other donor agencies and NGOs have also resumed their activities. The UNDP is working with the government, NGOs, the donor community on developing community-driven development planning and capacity building programmes in the region. A "quick impact fund" has been created with support from the donor community to provide development assistance to local institutions and communities. These initiatives are aimed at building confidence and to turn the peace initiatives into development realities for the benefit of the people of the hill districts.

Mr. Chairman, we recognize that while much progress has been made, more remain to be done. It is not a task that can be accomplished overnight. Obviously, major steps have been taken towards what is widely perceived to be in the right direction. The government remains firm in its commitment. However, for the desired sustainable development of the hill region, the help and assistance of all concerned, including the cooperation and support of the tribal people themselves, would be essential. Only through a collaborative and productive partnership based on mutual trust, we can bring about lasting peace and development in the hill region.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.