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# BANGLADESH

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Statement by Ms. Ishrat Jahan Ahmed, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations at the Seventh Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on 01 May 2008, New York

Madam Chair,

Since I am taking the floor for the first time in this session, allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's satisfaction on seeing you chairing the Forum's sessions for these consecutive years. Our appreciation is also owed to your colleagues and the distinguished members of the Forum.

Bangladesh attaches importance to the proceedings of this Forum. We also commend the holding of the timely discussion on special theme on 'climate change' this year. As you are aware, Bangladesh will be the hardest hit by the adverse effects of the climate change particularly the global warming and sea-level rise. We believe that the Forum's outcome will contribute in addressing the issues related to the consequences of the climate change in general as well as in the context of the indigenous peoples around the globe in particular.

Madam Chair,

In Bangladesh we have some tribal peoples. These tribes are the descendants of the settlers who had come from the region east of Bangladesh a few centuries back. They now live in different districts of the country.

Since her independence, Bangladesh is committed to maintain a society free from exploitation and discrimination. Bangladesh Constitution guarantees equal rights for all, but some special provisions are kept for particular section of citizens, including the tribal peoples. The tribal communities are accorded various special privileges in order to enable themselves to attain sustainable development. These include fiscal, educational and social privileges and benefits. Five percent government jobs are reserved for the tribal people who constitute approximately 1.5% of the total population.

The majority of some two million tribal people in Bangladesh, lives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Peace Accord signed in 1997 with the hill inhabitants ending 25 years of insurgency in the region is a unique example of the continued efforts by the Government to ensure their political, social, educational and economic rights.

Following the Accord, the Government declared general amnesty for the insurgents who surrendered their arms. Under a 20-point package programme it also provided financial grants and other benefits to 65,000 refugees who returned to their homes. More than 700 members of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) have been given jobs in various departments of the Government including Bangladesh Police.

The Chittagong Hill District Regional Council, constituted by the leaders of tribal community, has been supervising and coordinating the development activities in the three hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. It is guided by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act 1998. A Land Commission has been established under the Land Commission Act 2001 to resolve land disputes in the region. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900 is also amended in 2003 to set up District and Session Judge Courts in three hill districts.

Madam Chair,

In order to facilitate the implementation of the Peace Accord, the Government has established a separate Ministry for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs. The development activities in the region have also been accelerated. The development budgets for CHT have been increasing each year. Various agencies including UNDP, UNICEF and ADB are implementing development projects in the region. Many national and international NGOs are also active in the region.

Madam Chair,

My Government remains in close consultations with the tribal communities and their representatives. The Hon'ble Chief Adviser of the present Caretaker Government Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed held a dialogue with the tribal communities on 27 March 2008 in Rangamati and took stock of the progress made in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The present Government will further develop the communication particularly the mobile network, digital telephones, roads and bridges as well as education and tourism in the region.

We, Madam Chair, take pride in having versatile cultures and pluralist values in our society. These remain tuned with our democratic ideals. Our efforts towards the socio-economic emancipation of tribal peoples as well as the commitments to preserve their inalienable rights and diversity are unflinching.

I thank you, Madam Chair.

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