

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Eleventh Session
7-18 May 2012, UN HQ, New York

Agenda Item 3: Report on the expert group meeting: combating violence against indigenous women and girls, article 22 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Study on the extent of violence against indigenous women and girls in terms of article 22 (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Joint Statement by:
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Thank you Mr. Chair,

My congratulations to the chair and newly appointed members of the Bureau.

Today when we are gathered here to discuss violence against indigenous women, my indigenous sisters in Bangladesh are passing their days in fear of rape and other forms of violence against them. As my indigenous sister Ellen from Asia Caucus mentioned yesterday, even on last Wednesday, we received the news of an eleven year old indigenous Jumma girl, who was allegedly raped, and then murdered, by a non indigenous Bengali settler, Ibrahim in Longudu subdistrict of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region (May 9th 2012), who has apparently been arrested. It is further alleged that he was earlier charged with the rape of another Jumma girl and was released on bail.¹ This clearly tells a story of impunity and absence of deterrence measures.

Though Bangladesh is a party to several international human rights treaties, including CEDAW, CERD, ICC Rome Statute, ILO Convention 107 and the two international human rights covenants, the strong trend of violation of indigenous peoples' rights, including violence against indigenous women in Bangladesh continues. This includes rape, murder, sexual assault, trafficking and abduction by non-indigenous Bengali settlers. The major concern is that very few of these violations are impartially and independently enquired into. Thus the perpetrators remain at large and un-punished; such example is the last rape case that happened last Wednesday. This culture of impunity gives the impression that such violations against indigenous women and children are normal and acceptable to state and society.

Violence against indigenous women in Bangladesh has been going on for decades, including during the internal conflict from the 1970s to the 1990s. Here are some statistics. The international CHT Commission, in its groundbreaking report of 1991, mentioned that the

¹ Rape, murder of indigenous girl sparks protest *Alleged criminal arrested* <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=233621>

military systematically used rape as a weapon against women in CHT.² According to the Hill Women's Federation, "security forces were responsible for over 94% of all the alleged rape cases in CHT between 1991 and 1993. Out of all these allegations of rape, over 40% of the victims were children".³

Before the CHT Peace Accord was signed in 1997, from 1971 to 1994, approximately 2,500 indigenous women were allegedly raped by the military, and by non-indigenous Bengali settlers, as estimated by Ume Mong, an indigenous woman leader.⁴

These violations continue in the period after the signing of the CHT Accord. According to statistics provided by Jummanet, over 57% of the rape victims in CHT between 2003 and 2006 were children in their teens or below. According to a report from Kapaeeng Foundation (a human rights organization of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh), non-indigenous Bengali settlers carried out violence against 66 indigenous women, including a three and a half year old child,⁵ between 2007 and February 2012, out of which six were murdered after rape. These statistics show how insecure indigenous women of CHT are today.

Despite the provisions of section 376 of the Bangladesh Penal Code, which mentions high punishment for the rapist, there is not a single case where the indigenous women were provided with justice, except for court martial of some military personnel more than ten years ago.

I call upon the Government of Bangladesh to punish the perpetrators by following its own Constitution, to stop all kind of violence and racial discrimination against indigenous women immediately, and to follow the UN Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has provisions for security and protection of indigenous women.

I urge the Forum and member states of the UN to encourage the Government of Bangladesh to implement the recommendations made by the Forum on the implementation of the CHT Accord, following a study by Mr. Lars-Anders Baer in the last session of the Forum. (E/C.19/2011/6)

I also call upon all my fellow indigenous brothers and sisters to lend their hands to prevent all forms of violence against our indigenous women and children not only in Bangladesh, but also around the world.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

² Life is not Ours", 95

³ 'Autonomy for Peace in the CHT', Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Women's Federation, Bangladesh, 30 August – 10 September, 1995, UN World Conference on Women, NGO Forum on Women, Beijing. According to ICRC women under 18 are regarded as children.

⁴ Ume Mong, "*Bangladesher Adibasi narider nirapatta: Parbattya Chattagramer adibasi pahari nari* (Security of Indigenous Women in Bangladesh: Hill Women of the Chittagong Hill Tracts)", *Bangladeshe adibasi narir nirapatta* (Security of Indigenous Women in Bangladesh), (Dhaka: Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs, 2000).

⁵ "Horrific", *The Daily Star*, 10 March 2009. <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=79164>