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Human Rights

Presented by Mrinal Kanti Tripura, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti
(PCJSS)

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

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 organizations of Bangladesh.

We urge the Permanent Forum to make the following recommendations to the relevant UN bodies and fora:

1. To urge states to withdraw all military personnel/armed forces from indigenous areas. In this context I draw your attention to Chittagong Hill Tracts where there are over 450 military camps – we indigenous Peoples are 700,000. This remains one of the most highly militarised regions in the world, despite a Peace Accord signed in 1997;
2. To request UN and international human rights bodies to carry out fact-finding missions in indigenous areas in order to examine allegations of gross human rights violations;
3. To request the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples to give urgent attention to the issue of armed conflict and militarization particularly its impacts on women, children and youth;
4. To request the OHCHR and other UN bodies and international agencies, including donors to strengthen the implementation of basic human rights instruments and in strengthening the capacity of indigenous peoples and their organizations in promoting and defending their human rights at country level;
5. For the UN agencies, funds and programmes to support initiatives of indigenous organizations to monitor, document and report the situation of indigenous human rights and to cooperate with national and international human rights organizations regarding these issues.
6. For the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations to undertake a study on peace accords, agreements, settlements and other constructive arrangements between states and indigenous peoples that are not generally regarded as "treaties", especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Mr Chairperson and members of the Forum, we are making these recommendations with the hope that the worsening situation of human rights of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh will be given special attention and resolution. Militarization in Chittagong Hill Tracts continues to violate the human rights of indigenous peoples. There are more than 450 military camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts now. I will quote a few incidents of recent human rights violations in CHT.

On 26 August 2003, more than 350 houses of indigenous Jummas of 14 villages were burnt, Buddhist temples and statues of Lord Buddha were destroyed, and two people, including one eight-month old child were killed and 10 Jumma women were raped by the members of the Bangladesh military (21 East Bengal Regiment).

We have asked the government to conduct an impartial and independent inquiry into this communal attack and to take speedy action against the perpetrators of crime. But the government did not take any steps in this regard. Mr. Chair, this incident is not a new case in the CHT, it is the continuation of Bangladesh government's master plan/blue print to destroy the indigenous Jumma people of CHT. Very recently, on the 8 May 2004, the Bengali settlers attacked Jummas when they were peacefully observing a general strike to demand the implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997.

In Madhupur area of Mymensing region, Mr. Piren Snal, an indigenous Garo was shot dead by armed Forest guards while peacefully demonstrating against the construction of a concrete wall on indigenous lands that the government now calls a "national park".

Mr. Chair and the distinguished delegates, some of you might already have heard that Mr. J. B. Lama, the President of JSS, my organization, who signed the historic Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997, was not given the necessary permission by the Government of Bangladesh, to attend this session of the Permanent Forum.

All these incidents demonstrate how the Bangladesh Government is wantonly violating the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens.

Mr. chairperson, we hope the forum will give due consideration to our recommendations.

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, shows the gravity of the matter.

It is in the light of these circumstances that the recommendations that we have made earlier are crucial to the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, and other parts of the world.

Thank you.