

Joint Statement to the 14th session/ Regional meetings of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

13 July, 2021 (Asia Regional Meeting)

Item 3: Draft Study and Advice on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child

By Mita Hajong
On behalf of Bangladesh Jatiya Hajong Sangathan

Dear EMRIP Chair,

I am Mita Hajong, on behalf of Bangladesh Jatiya Hajong Sangathan, I would like to thank you for the wonderful study report on the rights of the indigenous child. I believe, this study will help to realize the situation and rights of the indigenous child.

All children are not treated and cared for in the same way in the world. The growing experience of the child is different and varies due to political, geographical, economic, social, and cultural differences.

The study report also found that the infant mortality rate in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh is more than double the national average. Indigenous children are at heightened risk of violence, exclusion, discrimination and bullying, and often lack State protection.

When the whole world is infected with unprecedented COVID-19, in Bangladesh we have seen numbers of indigenous children are facing different kinds of challenges. Since mid-March, about 10 Indigenous children are killed and another 200 are infected from a measles outbreak in the Chittagong Hill Tract.¹

It has been reported that 13 indigenous Mro children of four Mro villages of Bandarban Hill District have been rescued from the hands of Islamic converter groups on 20 January 2021. It is learned that the group of Islamic converters took these children from poor and simple Mro families by trying to tempt to provide the cost of living, food, education and financial support.²

The National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh said the policy is to facilitate learning in the mother languages of the indigenous peoples at the primary level of education. Sustainable development Goals (SDG) target 4.5 also said by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for indigenous people. Bangladesh has pledged to implement the SDGs target 2030.

Article 14 of UNDRIP confirms the collective rights to education of indigenous peoples, including the establishment and control over educational systems and institutions, using culturally appropriate methods, in their own languages, without discrimination.

1 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/104206/measles-outbreak-in-the-hills-a-crisis-in-desperate-need-of-attention>

2 <https://hillvoice.net/13-mro-children-of-alikadam-rescued-from-hands-of-islamic-converters/>

Bangladesh government has started a primary education system only for 5 indigenous communities' child (out of 41 languages) through their mother tongues at the first stage. But the matter of regret that like other languages, Hajong children have no opportunity to learn education through their own mother tongue. Some NGOs initiated to teach the pre-primary education for Hajong child as a pilot project but it is also stopped after few years due to lack of funds. We are not sure when the education through Hajong language will be initiated by the government. Now, Hajong language is in a vulnerable situation. There are neither an mother tongue-based education system nor any others support to revitalize and promote the Hajong language and culture.

The dropout rate of Hajong children in education at the primary and secondary level is high. Poverty, language barrier, long distance of educational institutions and racism are the main reasons for their dropout. Most of the Hajong families in villages are living under poverty or extreme poverty line.

Most of the times, indigenous students could not treat according to their needs. For example- during the country-wide lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19, amid the closure, the government started broadcasting classes for students through a TV channel and other online platforms. The indigenous students in the country's remote areas are deprived of TV and internet facilities, and hence they are unable to access the classes.³

It is very important for the government of Bangladesh to take the urgent initiative to start primary education through mother tongue for remaining Indigenous child including Hajong.

End the violence against indigenous child and girl, and government can take a special initiative for supporting Indigenous children ensuring their meaningful participation and consultation in the decision-making processes of the country.

States should take special measures to ensure free and equitable access to education and health for all indigenous children even in the pandemic period.

I would like to request the EMRIP to encourage the government of Bangladesh on the above issues.

Thank you.

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³ <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/left-behind-children-remote-cht-villages-never-heard-online-classes-1921381>