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UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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United Nations Headquarters, New York

Agenda Item: 4 (d) - Human Rights

Statement by: Rev. Prajnalankar Bhikkhu

Thank you, Mr. Chair

Distinguished delegates, good afternoon.

States identify indigenous political activists struggling for self-determination and justice as "terrorists", "militants" "insurgents" etc. and thereby justify human rights violations against the indigenous peoples. Obviously indigenous peoples are the worst victims of human rights abuses in today's world. It is terrible!

In the **Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)**, the human rights of the Jumma indigenous people continued to be violated by the security forces of Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh is bound by an obligation under the **CHT Accord** of 1997 to withdraw all the "temporary military and paramilitary" camps except that of the Bangladesh Rifle (BDR=Bangladesh Border Security Force) and "six permanent military establishments" from the CHT. It is, however, very disappointing that the government of Bangladesh continues to non-comply with the obligation till today. It is seriously undermining the peace-building efforts in the region.

The security forces of Bangladesh had perpetrated massive human rights violations including 13 major genocides against the indigenous people during the conflict-period (late 1970s - early 90s). It resulted in killing of nearly 15,000 Jummas and displacing hundreds of thousands of Jumma people of whom, over 120,000 were forced to become refugees in neighboring India in the 1980s and 90s. But no perpetrator has been brought to justice!

According to the **Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)**, the political organization representing the Jumma indigenous people, there are more than 500 military camps in the CHT till today. All these camps were set up during the conflict-period to suppress the movement of the indigenous people. Even after six years of the signing of the CHT Accord the government of Bangladesh failed to remove the camps and lift the military rule, "**Operation Dabanal**" [Operation Wild-fire renamed as "**Operation Uttoran**" (Operation Upliftment) after the agreement] imposed in the CHT in 1982. Its reason is to provide security to huge Bengali Muslim settler population systematically moved from plain districts into the CHT under a state-sponsored population transfer program designed to destroy the ethnic identity of the Jumma indigenous people.

It is, indeed, a matter of grave concern that the security forces continue to practice pervasive human rights abuses against the indigenous people with complete impunity in the post-conflict CHT as well. These human rights abuses include massacre, killing, torture, attack with arson, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape, sexual assault, political harassment, religious intolerance, looting, extortion, land-grabbing etc. In its April 2004 report, "**PERSISTENT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES WITH COMPLETE**

IMPUNITY: A Report On The Human Rights Abuses Committed By Bangladesh Security Forces Against The Jumma Indigenous People In The Post-Conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts (2 December 1997 - 31 March 2004), **Peace Campaign Group**, our organization, has documented 144 cases of such human rights abuses including four massacres – **Babuchara Massacre** on 16 October 1999, **Dighinala Massacre** on 22 May 2001, **Ramgarh Massacre** on 23 June 2001 and **Mahalchari Massacre** on 26 August 2003 – in the post-conflict CHT. Thousands of Jumma indigenous people were subjected to these human rights abuses. Such human rights abuses are crimes against humanity and contravene

- **Article 1, Article 3, Article 5, Article 8 and Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;**
- **Article 2 (1) and (2), Article 4, Article 10 (1), Article 14 (1) and Article 16 (1) of the Convention against Torture, and Article 2 and Article 3 of the General Assembly Resolution 3452 (XXX) of 9 December 1975;**
- **Article IV of the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Convention War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity;**
- **Article 5 (b) of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;**
- **Article 7 and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;**
- **Article 1, Article 2 and Article 4 (1) of the General Assembly Resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992; and**
- **Article 6 (a), (e) and (f) of the General Assembly Resolution 35/55 of 25 November 1981.**

In a joint army-police drive codenamed “**Operation Clean Heart**” launched on 17 October 2002 nearly 40,000 army personnel were deployed across the country to crackdown “crimes”. The operation was used as a political tool to crackdown indigenous political activists and their supporters pressing the government for implementation of the **CHT Accord**. In fact, Bangladesh has been committing a systematic “state-sponsored violence” against the indigenous people resulting in the undermining of the **CHT Accord**. In addition, the security forces continue to freely interfere with the civil administration and democratic institutions in the CHT. The military also practice wide irregularities during elections for their favorable candidates. Ironically, it is the same security forces that earn money and recognition for working as part of international peacekeeping operations in various countries ravaged with war and violence under the aegis of the **United Nations**! International community cannot allow the government of Bangladesh to use its security forces as warmongers and human rights violators against the country's minority indigenous people struggling for survival of their identity. In fact, the security forces of Bangladesh have become the main source of insecurity, fear and tension, lawlessness and disorder in the CHT! This paradox must be protested and stopped for promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and peace in the CHT.

Therefore, Mr. Char, **Peace Campaign Group** urges you to recommend in your report the followings:

1. Giving the **UN Special Rapportuer on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples** free access to indigenous territories, such as the CHT, for comprehensive study on human rights of indigenous peoples; and
2. Immediate withdrawal of the security forces from the CHT as agreed upon in the **CHT Accord** and free and fair trial of the members of the security forces involved in human rights violations in the **International Criminal Court** or in a competent tribunal in Bangladesh.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for bearing with me!