

UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)
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Joint Statement by: Kapaeeng Foundation (KF), Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network
(BIWN) and Jatiya Adivashi parishad (JAP)

Honorable Chairperson,

I am Manjuni Chakma, representing indigenous peoples of Bangladesh.

Like across the globe, indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, continue to be dispossessed of their lands by state and non-state actors. Many indigenous families have been and are being displaced from their traditional lands following large-scale development projects such as establishment of military installation, reserve forest, tourism complexes, national/eco parks, tea garden, special economic zone and so on. For instance, Govt. forcefully grabbed the land of indigenous peoples by declaring 9145 acres of lands as reserve forest in Tangail and issued a notice directing the Khasi people to leave Nahar Aslom and Nahar Kailin Punjis in Mulvibazar district, Shylet.¹ Moreover, such land snatching practices end up in gross human rights violations of indigenous peoples which get manifested in the form of intimidation, torture, physical assault, forced eviction, killing, rape etc.

For example, according to Kapaeeng Foundation report, in 2018, the livelihood of at least 2,768 indigenous families were reported to be under threat as they faced eviction from their ancestral lands. Although numerous international human rights instruments, national laws and policies recognize the rights to land and natural resources of indigenous peoples, Bangladesh government, in most cases, appears to be falling short of respecting, protecting and fulfilling such rights.

In order to resolve CHT land problem which is one of the main issues of CHT crisis, the CHT Accord signed between the Government of Bangladesh and PCJSS² in 1997 stipulated to form a Land Commission. The work of the Land Commission is still seriously impeded by its lack of fund, manpower and the absence of Rules to supplement the provisions of the Land Commission Act. Due to non-resolution of land disputes, land grabbing, eviction and ethnic conflicts are frequently taking place in CHT, which leads to a great trouble of lives and livelihood of indigenous communities.

On the other, the government of Bangladesh did not take any initiative to form a separate land commission for indigenous peoples in the plains though the government pledged to do so in their election manifesto.

Finally, I would like to recommend to EMRIP to encourage Government of Bangladesh for-

1. Proper and speedy resolution of land disputes in accordance amended CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act 2001 for the sake of preservation and protection of indigenous peoples' traditional lands, giving priority to immediate adoption of Rules of the Commission; to allocate adequate fund for the Commission; and to appoint adequate manpower of the Commission.
2. Immediate formation of a separate Land Commission for restitution of dispossessed lands of indigenous peoples in plain land.

Thank you, Honorable Chair.

¹ KF Human Rights Report-2018

² Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) is the political party of indigenous peoples in CHT.