

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub- commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

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Intervention delivered by Loyal David Hauheng, President, Bawm Indigenous Peoples' Organization (BIPO), Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.

Agenda Item 5: General Statement

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Working Group, Government delegates, Indigenous brothers and sisters.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the UN Voluntary Fund for sponsoring me to attend this Working Group. This is a great privilege for me to deliver a speech on the situation of the Indigenous Jumma People of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. I am Loyal David Hauheng representing the Bawm Indigenous Peoples' Organization (BIPO), CHT.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) locating in the southeastern corner of Bangladesh is the ancestral homeland of 11 different Indigenous Peoples who are collectively known as Jumma People. The Indigenous Peoples have been living here since time immemorial with their own history, culture, traditions and customs, religion, language and identity.

Madam Chairperson,

You may be aware that on the 2nd December in 1997 an agreement was reached between our political party, the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and Government of Bangladesh. The agreement is generally known as the CHT Accord. However, almost five years after the signing of the accord, major provisions of the Accord remain unimplemented. These include: (i) hundreds of army and para-military camps remain stationed in the region; (ii) the government-sponsored non-indigenous Bengali settlers who have been receiving regular free rations and other benefits from the government since 1978, have not been withdrawn from the region; (iii) many of the Jumma refugees, all internally displaced Jumma people and PCJSS members are still without rehabilitation; (iv) the Land Commission, which was to start its work to resolve land disputes between Jummas and settlers, has not begun its work; and (v) Power relating to local government system including Law and order, Civil and Land Administration has not been transferred to the Hill District Councils and the CHT Regional Councils as per the Acts passed under the CHT Accord.

We are seriously concerned over the continued and fresh infiltration of Bengali families into the CHT region after the formation of new government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). A non-indigenous Bengali settler has been elected to the 8th Parliament from the CHT on the basis of a highly manipulated voter list where Bengali settlers were included as voters in violation of the CHT Accord. This Member of Parliament has also been appointed as Chairman

of the CHT Development Board, although the CHT Accord provides that this post would be reserved for an indigenous person.

The CHT Accord states,

"After the signing and execution of the Agreement between the Government and the Jana Samhati Samiti and immediately after return of the members of Jana Samhati Samiti to normal life, all the temporary camps of the army, the Ansars and the Village Defense Party (VDP), excepting the Border Security Force (BDR) and permanent army establishment (being those three at the three district headquarters and those at Alikadam, Ruma and Dighinala), shall be taken back by phases from Chittagong Hill Tracts."

Till date, almost 500 army camps remain in the area, making the CHT one of the most militarized areas in the world. Human rights violations by military and police personnel continue unabated with impunity. Recently, on 12 June 2002 one PCJSS member Mr. Charu Ranjan Chakma (45) was brutally tortured by a group of army led by Lieutenant Masud of Dighalchari army camp (43 East Bengal) under Kaptai Brigade of Rangamati Hill District and on 19 June 2002, two PCP (Hill Students Council) activists Mr. Pu Swe Thwai Marma and Mr. U Thwai Prue Marma were arrested by a group of army led by Captain Abedin of Bandarban Brigade and detained them in Bandarban District Jail.

Therefore, madam Chairperson, I urge you to address the following recommendations in your report for peace and development in the CHT:

1. Proper and immediate implantation of the CHT Accord;
2. Rehabilitation of the Bengali settlers outside the CHT with dignity.
3. Immediate steps to stop and prevent the new migration of Bengalis from plain lands to the CHT;
4. Formation of the local police force with the permanent residents in the CHT according to the CHT Accord;
5. Rehabilitation of PCJSS members, Jumma refugees and internally displaced Jummas;
6. Empowerment of the Hill District Councils as per the CHT Accord.
7. Establishment of CHT Regional Council with legislative prerogatives, authority over development matters and coordinating and supervisory authority over the CHT administration.
8. Recognition and protection of the land and resources rights of Jumma peoples by strengthening the power of the Hill District Councils and establishment of independent commission on Land.

Thank you madam Chairperson for your kind attention.