

WGIP 87/SAS. BGD/1

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection of
Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Geneva, Switzerland
3 - 7 August 1987

A submission made by Venerable Bimal Tishya Bhikkhu on behalf
of the people the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Madam Chair,

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak before your distinguished working Group. I wish to speak to agenda item 2, concerning the review of developments.

I am a Buddhist monk from the hills in the South East of Bangladesh-the Chittagong Hill Tracts-where more than half a million tribal people live . Unlike the rest of Bangladesh the vast majority of these people are not muslim and differ linguistically, ethnically and culturally from the Bengali majority.

I belong to the Chakma tribe. In 1984 became the Chairman of 'Parbatya bouddha Sangha' a socio-religious non-government Organisation working for the tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

I came here because I feel that I have a responsibility as a man , and may be more as a Buddhist monk, to try to stop the human rights abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have witnessed many years of horrible atrocities and my people asked me to speak and express their experiences, sufferings and hopes. Your Committee may brings a ray of hope to all indigenous people throughout the world who face the threat of extinction.

I do not want to repeat what has already been published by different NGOs or has brought before your subcommission since 1982 regarding the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Nobody who lives in the Hill Tracts will deny these reports.

Since the Conference of Working Group in 1985 the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has deteriorated alarmingly. I would like to discuss the prevailing situation in the area so that the Working Group can respond to the needs of our people. I hope that the evidence I shall give will enable the working Group to persuade the Commission on Human Rights to send a repporteur to Bangladesh as soon as possible to see the situation at first hand, and to intercede with the Bangladesh Government to stop human rights Violations.

The Bangladesh regime has deprived the tribal people of the high degree of autonomy which they enjoyed under the British, when the Chittagong Hill Tracts was an excluded area and the rights of the tribal people were protected by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900.

According to the International Working Group on Indigenous affairs, perhaps 200.000 tribal people -a third of the Indigenous people of the Hill Tracts- have been killed by the military of Bangladesh or by settlers. 250,00 settlers- landless Bengalis from the plains- have taken over much of the agricultural land in the Hill Tracts, particularly in the nort. Thousands of our people have been driven from their housed and lands, the solution to the problem of the Bengali landless is not to take the land of tribal people by force and to kill us.

Already 50,000 are refugees in India. I have visited the refugee camps in India where conditions are appalling. Even now another 15-20,000 refugees are prevented by the Bangladesh army.

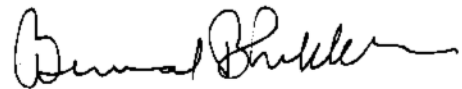
I have submitted to the Working Group a longer statement but would like to tell of one sad and disturbing case to show that our human rights continue to be ignored since your Working Group last met.

I speak now from my personal experience. The Bangladesh security forces and Bengali settlers attacked 35 villages in Dighinala Upazilla from 13 to 15 June 1986. About 250 Tribal People, motly children, women and old people died during this attack. On 13 June 1986 Bengali settlers, with the support of the Bangladesh armed forces, raid my orphanage at Boalkhali in Dighinala Upazilla. My orphanage housed some 300 orphans of 5 to 12 years old. More than 100 of them are missing since the raid. 154 orphans manage to escape to the Indian state of Tripura, where they have been given shelter in the refugee camps. Madame Danielle Mitterrand the wife of the France President, and the Director of Partage Avec Les Enfnts Du Tiers Monde, Mr. Pierre Marchand, have kindly found foster homes in France for 72 of our orphans. But the Government of Bangladesh did not want to allow them to go to France because it feared that they would expose its genocidal activites in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the civilised world . Finally, after a year tactics, international opinion has forced the Government to give permission for these orphans to go to France.

Madam Chairmn, I do not want to take up the time of this Working Group with more such incidences. I want you to know that the pattern of murder, rape and land seizure continues relentlessly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The whole area is under military occupation and there is an army camp in nearly every village.

May I repeat that I believe that the UN Commission on Human Rights should intervene in this terrible situation as a matter of urgency. The Commission should send a rapporteur to witness the genocide of the tribal peoples that is taking place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to persuade the Bangladesh Government to stop these atrocities. I would ask you to include in this year's Working Group report a specific request to the sub-commission to send a rapporteur as soon as possible. I know that all the Indigenous peoples and NGOs present will support me in this heartfelt request.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for giving me the floor and for your patience. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for your compassion and help.



(Bimal Tishya Bhikkhu)