

**24 Session United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations  
Geneva, Switzerland 31  
July - 4 August 2006**

**Agenda Item; 4(a) General Debate  
(Land and Settlers)**

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Mr. Chairperson, distinguished government delegates, honorable indigenous sisters and brothers.

Land is the main problem of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The Government often ignores their land rights. Where land is 'vested' in the community, the Government has occupied that land in the name of 'development' or as so-called 'Eco-Park', 'reserved forest area' etc. The Government has taken many lands from CHT, Modhupur forest, Garo Hills, Pan Punji and still many lands and forest areas of indigenous peoples have been identified to be taken by the Government. Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are the victims of human rights violations and all kinds of discrimination as 'indigenous'. They do not get justice from police, court and other governmental or non-governmental legal institutions.

Lands of the different peoples, including the Rakhaing, Garo, Santal, Tanchangya, Oraon, Rajbangshi, and Khasi continue to be taken over by non-indigenous people. Such land alienation is forbidden by the East Bengal State *Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950*, and the *ILO Convention No. 107* (ratified by Bangladesh), but it nevertheless continues. The lands of Garo and Khasis have been arbitrarily included within so-called "Eco-Parks" and "National Parks" for the benefit of city-dwellers and foreign tourists. Few year back, while peacefully leading a demonstration against the construction of a wall in Madhupur forest, indigenous activist Piren Snal was shot and killed by armed Forest guards.

One of the worst developments in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was the population transfer programme of 1979-1985 whereby the Government of Bangladesh brought in four hundred and fifty thousand Bengali Muslim people and re-settled them, with the help of the military, on lands owned or traditionally used and occupied by indigenous people. We have demanded that the Bengali Muslim settlers should be rehabilitated properly but not on our lands. The European Parliament even adopted a budget line to help the repatriation of these settlers outside the CHT, but the Government of Bangladesh did not accept the proposal.

Thus the Government of Bangladesh continues to artificially alter the demographic map of the CHT - like "ethnic cleansing" - by helping the settlers through land grants, credit and even food grain support. Recently Government of Bangladesh is considering to allocate free ration to a fresh number of 28,000 (twenty eight thousands) Bengali Muslim settler families. In addition, a proposal is under process to settle about 10,000 (ten thousands) Bengali Muslim settler families in Kassalong Reserved Forest and on the roadsides of the newly built Baghaihat-Sajek road.

Until today, those indigenous people who were forcefully pushed out of their lands by the settlers have not been able to return to their own homes and lands. The government has formed a Task Force rehabilitate the displaced people, but the Task Force has not been able to do its work yet. According to the CHT Accord, a Land Commission was formed to resolve land disputes. However, the law that was passed in 2001 gives too much power to the chairperson of the commission and otherwise provides the Commission with fewer jurisdictions than was agreed in the Accord. This also demonstrates that the government is not interested in resolving the land disputes in accordance with the 1997 Accord. It is determined to continue to alter the demographic character of the CHT and make it a Bengali Muslim-majority area, where we will not be able to live with dignity as distinct peoples with our own languages, religions and cultures.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.