

Press Statement

The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission condemns the attack on the homes of indigenous peoples in Matiranga and calls upon the Government to take prompt action

Dhaka, 5 August 2013. The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) condemns the attack on the homes of indigenous peoples in Matiranga and the continual failure of the Government of Bangladesh in protecting the lives and livelihoods of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The CHTC asks for prompt action by Government, in accordance with its national and international human rights responsibilities.

The CHTC has received alarming reports that many homes of indigenous peoples in villages of Taindong, Bandor Sing Para, Boga Para, Monu Das Para and Laku Headman Para in Matiranga upazila of Khagrachari district of the CHT of Bangladesh have been burnt down in a communal attack by settlers of that area on 3 August 2013, Saturday. Newspaper reports place the number of homes burnt between 30 and 100. There are also allegations that settlers have looted the homes of the indigenous peoples in these areas. There are also further allegations that about 14/15 indigenous peoples have been taken away by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) officials and tortured. This has forced more than a thousand indigenous villagers to take refuge in neighboring Indian state of Tripura.

In August last year hundreds of indigenous peoples from this area fled and took shelter in the Tripura state of India fearing communal attacks by Bengali settlers.

CHTC has been particularly alarmed by the recurring cases of arson attacks in several areas in the CHT for which no investigation or accountability have been pursued by Government.

The CHTC has repeatedly publicly condemned these attacks on the indigenous peoples and called on the Government and relevant authorities to take action against those who are responsible for these attacks and called on more accountability on the part of the security forces including the military, police and border guards.

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:
Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Awebury, Elsa Stamatopoulou

Members:
Shapan Adnan, Sara Hossain, Iftakharuzzaman
Khushi Kabir, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Tone Bleie
Lars-Anders Baer, Michael C. van Walt van Praag
Hurst Hannum, Yasmeen Haque

The CHTC has noted some common characteristics in all of these arson attacks. The attacks are usually initiated with a rumor about an attack on a Bengali individual. Within hours settler groups mobilize themselves and attack neighboring indigenous peoples' villages. During these attacks the security forces tacitly support the settlers by not taking any action to protect the people. The latest attack also comes under similar circumstances. The attack was instigated after a rumor that a Bengali settler motorcyclist was kidnapped by indigenous villagers. Many indigenous villagers were out in the field doing shifting cultivation and they were unable to save their property. There are also allegations that although the paramilitary forces' BGB camp was nearby, they did nothing to stop the arson attacks.

The CHTC condemns the series of arson attacks that are being carried out by Bengali settlers in the CHT and the failure of the authorities to make any meaningful efforts to hold members of the security forces accountable for their role in allowing these attacks to take place. These incidents raise grave concerns about violation of international human rights norms and the international responsibility of the Government as well as about the quality of governance in the CHT, continued military control of the area, and resultant constraints on democratization in the CHT. Unless the Government of Bangladesh takes firm action against the attackers and the security forces as well as concrete measures for the protection of the lives and livelihoods of the indigenous peoples of CHT, the Government of Bangladesh will receive further flak for breach of its national and international obligations.

The CHTC reiterates the following recommendations, made earlier on various serious incidents such as this. The Government must:

- Ensure safety and security of all indigenous people living in the Matiranga area and all other areas in the CHT and prevent attacks on them by settlers. Those who have taken refuge in Tripura must be brought back and their security and safety guaranteed.
- Rehabilitate all the people who have lost their homes and property in this and other arson attacks.
- Undertake an urgent, independent, and high level investigation into the arson attack.
- Prosecute through fair, prompt and independent processes those who are responsible for such violence.

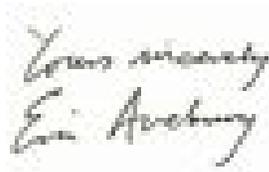
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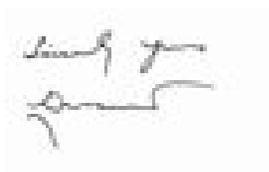
Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

- Take immediate steps to activate the Land Commission and amend the CHT Land Dispute Settlement Commission Act 2001, so that all outstanding land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts can be readily and fairly settled, as per provisions of the CHT Accord, thereby helping to prevent the outbreak of further violence.
- Withdraw army camps from the three hill districts in accordance with the CHT Accord, as well as terminate Operation Uttaran.
- Immediately declare a roadmap for full and comprehensive implementation of the 1997 CHT Accord, in line with the Government's election pledge.

On behalf of the CHT Commission



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