



An NGO supporting socio-economic self-reliance of hill people in Bangladesh
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July 30, 2012

Honorable Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka

Subject: Request for Explanation regarding Denial of Entry into Bangladesh and for Withdrawal of Restrictions on Future Entry

Your Excellency,

At first I wish to convey my deepest condolences and heart-felt respect to your Excellency and to the people of Bangladesh in advance of the Day of Mourning, August 15th. The people of the world have not forgotten the great sacrifices made for the independence of Bangladesh. Your country's advances toward sustainable development and its contributions to global peace are admired around the world. The dynamism, vibrant and diverse culture, warm hospitability and scenic beauty of Bangladesh continue to fascinate visitors. That is why I have travelled to Bangladesh nearly twenty times in the last twenty-five years, and have studied the Bangla language with a desire to learn from its profound literature.

It was thus a great shock to be denied entry at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on July 23, 2012. As I had been granted a one-year, multiple-entry visa valid until September 1, 2012, I was aware of no procedural irregularities that would have been grounds for denial of entry. I did not receive a full explanation of the reason for my detention by the airport police and deportation to Bangkok on July 24, except that there were allegations of "controversial activities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts."

I was also unjustly ordered to leave from Bandarban Hill District on January 3, 2012, after detention and interrogation by intelligence authorities, even though I had obtained an entry permit from the district administration and had been duly screened at the check post. I had not travelled to any destinations other than in my permitted itinerary nor engaged in any activities prohibited under the

permit. Nonetheless, my local host was blamed for not having informed all military and intelligence authorities of my entry in advance, and my conversation with some acquaintances at a tea stall in the market was branded as a “secret political meeting.” The media published fabricated stories alleging that I had entered the district without permission, held secret meetings, or traveled outside the authorized area.

As a member of a Japanese non-governmental organization doing advocacy work for full implementation of the CHT accord and protection of human rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I have visited the region on many occasions to speak to all stakeholders and to understand the real situation. Such fact finding and access to affected people is crucial for our work in support of the government’s efforts to implement the CHT accord.

It is difficult to understand why a democratic state that is signatory to major international instruments on human rights has recently tightened restrictions on travel of foreign nationals to the Chittagong Hill Tract, where the law and order situation is relatively stable and foreigners have been working without major incidents for years. It seems quite contrary to your government’s commitment to fully implement the CHT Accord and to promote peace and development in the region.

I ask that I be given a full explanation of the reasons for denial of my entry to Bangladesh, and that any restrictions on my future travel to Bangladesh including the Chittagong Hill Tracts be withdrawn. I also call upon your government to grant foreign visitors, journalists, NGO workers, human rights activists, etc., free access to all parts of your country, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, so that they may hear the voice of the people, understand the ground reality, and make positive contributions in their respective fields.

With deepest respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas Christian Eskildsen". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Thomas Christian Eskildsen
Co-President
Jumma-Net