

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:

Sultana Kamal,
Lord Eric Avebury,
Elsa Stamatopoulou

2 February 2012

To
Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina
Honourable Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Prime Minister's Office
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Subject: Continued Intimidation and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Greetings from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission ('CHTC').

We welcome Your Excellency's comments at the meeting with Awami League leaders from Khagrachhari district on 19 January 2012 where you assured those present that the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace (CHT) Accord would be implemented in full.

However, we would like to point out that your reassurances are contradictory to the conduct of the civil and military administration in the CHT presently, and the situation has been getting considerably worse.

We have come to learn that a letter was circulated by the Rangamati Deputy Commissioner's office (reference number: 299.207.008.000.003.2011) to local non-government organizations (NGO) in November 2011 asking representatives of the NGOs to attend a meeting on 28 November, 2011 and to submit a report to the DC's office with specified information regarding their funding and beneficiaries for the financial year 2011-2012. This includes the following information: total beneficiaries, percentage of Bangali and Pahari beneficiaries, amount of foreign donation, number of projects, progress in project implementation, number of employees, percentage of Bangali and 'Upajati' employees.

In no other part of Bangladesh are the NGOs asked to give the ethnic make-up of its beneficiaries or employees in this manner to the district administration. We feel that this is a discriminatory act to intimidate and force the NGOs to employ more Bengali settlers and create more beneficiaries from amongst the Bengali settlers even in remote areas where there are very few Bengalis. We are not aware of any laws in the country which direct NGOs to maintain such ethnicity percentages and under which such a report could be deemed necessary.

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In contrast, the Constitution of Bangladesh stipulates special provisions for the advancement of 'backward section' of citizens and the protection of culture of the indigenous peoples (referred to as "tribes", etc.).

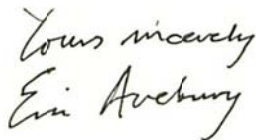
Also at this particular meeting convened by the DC's office, along with all government officials, the Brigade Commander of the district and the respective Zone Commanders were also asked to be present. This is a clear breach of the spirit of the 1997 CHT 'Peace' Accord where there are directives to demilitarize the area and transfer subjects, including the management of the work of the NGOs to the Hill District Councils.

We have also heard of reports of intimidation and harassment of Pahari leaders by the local administration. On 18 January, 2012 a notice was issued (reference number: 00.42.000.41.08.014.2011-18) from the Director of local government of the Chittagong division (referring to a letter from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative), which asked the chairman of Ruma upazila in Bandarban district Mr. Aung Thowai Ching Marma to be present before an Investigation Officer of the Chittagong division. The accusations brought against him were that he was instigating Paharis against Bengalis and protesting the expansion of the military garrison in Ruma.

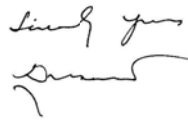
All these acts are contrary to the Government's pledge to implement the CHT Accord and bring peace to the CHT. We hope that Your Excellency will reverse this situation in the CHT against the indigenous peoples and the impunity for human rights violations enjoyed by the members of the security forces and look for ways to implement the 1997 CHT Accord promptly, fully and faithfully, and win the people's trust back in the Government.

On behalf of the CHT Commission

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CHT Commission



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