

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:
Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Awebury, Elsa Stamatopoulou
Members:
Shapan Adnan, Sara Hossain, Iftekharuzzaman
Khushi Kabir, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Tone Bleie
Lars-Anders Baer, Michael C. van Walt van Praag
Hurst Hannum, Yasmeen Haque
Myrna Cunningham Kain, Victoria Tauli-Corpus

Press Statement

CHTC concerned over the failure to fully implement the 1997 CHT Accord. Calls for roadmap with clear milestones on full implementation.

Dhaka: December 2, 2014. The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) has expressed concern over the Government's lack of political will leading to the failure of full implementation of the CHT Accord 17 years after its signing. The CHTC has called upon the Government to urgently adopt and enforce a roadmap with clear milestones for implementation of the Accord ensuring full participation of all stakeholders.

The Awami League signed the Accord together with PCJSS on December 2, 1997 and the present Awami League government has repeatedly pledged to implement the Accord, both nationally through each of its election manifestos to date and internationally during the Universal Periodic Reviews in 2009 and 2013. Yet the state of peace and stability in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has continued to deteriorate throughout the two terms the government has held office and there have been no efforts to strengthen local institutions and ensure end to land conflict which has led to the deterioration of the human rights situation in the area.

Amendment of the HDC Acts and failure to hold elections

On November 23, 2014 parliament passed the three Hill District Councils amendment acts despite strong opposition from the indigenous community. The Ministry of CHT Affairs tabled the Rangamati Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014, the Khagrachari Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014 and the Bandarban Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014 on July 1. As a result of passing of these bills the number of interim members of the hill district councils will be increased to 11 from the existing five including three non-indigenous members. By increasing the number of members without an election, the Government has violated the Accord which stipulates the preparation of a voter list comprising only the permanent residents of the three hill districts.

The Government should immediately start the work of resolving land disputes in order to authenticate the permanent residents of the CHT and draw up a voter list and hold elections at the Hill District Councils.

Failure to amend the Land Commission Act

The success of the drawing up of the voter list is directly related to the settlement of the land disputes in the CHT. In the nineteenth session of the 9th National Parliament in October 2013 the Government came close to but failed to pass the Bill on the amendment of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act 2001. The thirteen points proposed by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC) and the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) which were approved by the CHT Accord Implementation Committee and adopted by the inter-ministerial committee were approved by the Cabinet on June 3, 2013 and placed in the House on June 16, 2013. This once again proved the lack of political will of the Awami League Government to fulfill a pledge made to the people during the 2008 election to implement the 1997 CHT Accord. Since

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resuming office in 2014 the Awami League Government has had absolute majority in Parliament. There seems to be no effective opposition preventing the Government from implementing the Accord in full, it is thus disconcerting that no attempts have yet been made to table the Land Commission Amendment Bill in the Parliament sessions.

Failure to end militarism

The Government has failed to dismantle all temporary camps as stipulated in the 1997 CHT Accord and the presence of security forces appears to be increasing. In recent years the securitization has also proliferated through other security forces like the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). There have been allegations of land-grabbing and human rights violations by the BGB in Khagrachari and in Bandarban Sadar.

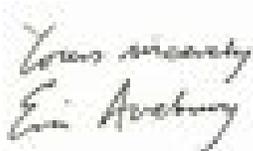
Not only did the Government fail to conduct independent and impartial investigations into these cases, but civil society groups who went to carry out investigations into the allegations were harassed and threatened by Bengali settler groups with clear impunity.

Threats and attacks on the CHT Commission

The CHT Commission members were attacked and persons in their entourage injured by Bengali settler groups in July 2014 where police failed to apprehend the identified suspects. It appears that there is no freedom to conduct inquiry and express opinion in a democratic manner regarding the complaints of people in the CHT. The Government has also put restrictions on the work of the CHT Commission and protests about such undemocratic restrictions have not been heeded by the Government.

On the 17th anniversary of the signing of the CHT Accord the CHT Commission urges the Government to publicly commit to a roadmap with clear milestones on full implementation of the Accord.

On behalf of the CHT Commission



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Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Sultana Kamal
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Elsa Stamatopoulou
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission