

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:
Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Avebury, 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-Corpuz

Press Release

International CHT Commission expresses deep concern over re-imposition of discriminatory and unconstitutional restrictions on indigenous communities of the CHT

24 May 2015, Dhaka: The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) has expressed deep concern over re-imposition of discriminatory and unconstitutional restrictions on the indigenous communities of CHT through a circular issued by the Home Ministry on 23 April, 2015. It requires inter alia that any national or foreign individual or organization willing to visit CHT for research or to hold any meeting in the region must obtain prior government approval providing detailed agenda of discussion, date, time, venue, list of possible participants, justification, etc.

Such restrictions, involving security and intelligence agencies, are not only contradictory to the CHT Peace Accord but also constitute gross violation of fundamental rights of the indigenous people, particularly free movement, freedom of speech and freedom of association. The CHTC calls upon the government to immediately withdraw the restrictions; refrain from any such measures in the future and instead take concrete steps to implement the Peace Accord.

It may be recalled that on February 15, the CHTC issued another statement expressing similar concern about an earlier Home Ministry circular which was widely considered by stakeholders including civil society and the media to be racist, discriminatory, unconstitutional and tantamount to stripping fundamental freedoms of the indigenous people. In response to widespread protests, on March 23 it was reported in the media that the Home Ministry had decided to withdraw the said circular.¹

Regrettably, however, the new memo no: 44.00.0000.079.14.001.2014, dated 23 April which considered minutes of a meeting of March 22, 2015 in reality reaffirms the same restrictions with only minor amendments.

The CHTC is disappointed that instead of making any real efforts to bring back faith of the indigenous people by implementing the 1997 CHT Accord, ending the repression on the indigenous people in the CHT and the rest of the country, settling land disputes and removing temporary military camps from the CHT the government is treating a section of its own citizens differently from the rest of the population which is contrary to their fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights among other international human rights laws which Bangladesh is committed to uphold.

By treating meetings between indigenous people of CHT with non-CHT Bangladeshi and foreign individuals or organizations with suspicion and imposing arbitrary restrictions whereas no such restrictions are in place anywhere else, the Government is clearly discriminating a section of the citizens of the country based on their ethnicity.

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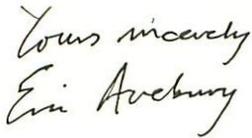
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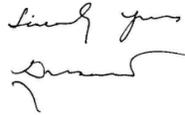
We therefore reiterate the recommendations made in our previous statement:

- The racist, unconstitutional and discriminatory directives must be immediately retracted.
- The Government must declare a time-bound plan of action to fully implement the 1997 CHT Accord which must be developed and enforced in a participatory process involving all stakeholders, especially representatives of the indigenous communities.

On behalf of the CHT Commission,



Eric Avebury
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Sultana Kamal
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Elsa Stamatopoulou
Co-chair of the
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ⁱ 'Govt to lift restriction on foreigners' entry to CHT,' The Daily Star, 23 March 2015.

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