

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:

Sultana Kamal, Elsa Stamatopoulou
Myrna Cunningham Kain

Members:

Shapan Adnan, Lars-Anders Baer, Tone Bleie
Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Bina D'Costa, Hurst Hannum
Yasmeen Haque, Sara Hossain,
Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Khushi Kabir
Michael C. van Walt van Praag, Iftekharuzzaman

Sheikh Hasina
Honorable Prime Minister
Government of Bangladesh
Bangladesh

Date: April 12, 2020

Subject: About providing urgent medical care and financial help to children and their families affected by the measles outbreak in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Greetings from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission!

Honorable Prime Minister, while the world is struggling to deal with the global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, we would like to bring your attention to the recent outbreak of measles in various places in the Chittagong Hill Tracts including Sajek union of Baghaichari upazila of Rangamati district and Lama upazila of Bandarban district.

Since March 2020 this local epidemic has affected more than 300 pahari children and at least 10 of them have died. Measles is a preventable disease for which vaccine is provided to children universally and all over Bangladesh for free. The fact that more than 300 children have not received this vaccine shockingly indicates that the state's health care facilities are not reaching the most vulnerable people, the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This outbreak could have been prevented if the relevant authorities had maintained strict monitoring of the public immunization programs and healthcare services. While Bangladesh has made commendable progress in terms of many socio-economic indicators including primary health, this example of neglect of its most vulnerable citizens shows that there is a serious lack of monitoring of the implementation of vaccine-preventable disease control activities. The right to vaccination is a universal right of every child and it is of utmost importance that the government find the loopholes whereby these children have been left out of this system.

International Secretariat:

C/O IWGIA, Classensgade 11E, 2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Phone: +45 35 27 05 00, Fax: +45 35 27 05 06

E-mail: cn@iwgia.org

Phone: +88 02 91 46 048, E-mail: chtcomm@gmail.com

www.chtcommission.org

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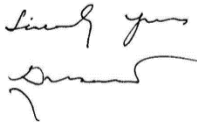
Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

While the measles outbreak, in the backdrop of the global pandemic, is a cause for national concern for these most vulnerable populations, we also condemn the comments made by the Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner DC Pratap Chandra Biswas and Civil Surgeon Dr Nupur Kanti Das that the superstitious beliefs of the local communities is the cause for the spread of measles in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This is a reprehensible comment by responsible officials that comes not only as prejudiced against the local people but also as an attempt to shirk their own responsibility to carry out proper monitoring of their health programs.

Prime Minister, under these circumstances we have the following recommendations:

- To provide urgent and free medical care to all the children afflicted with measles and emergency humanitarian assistance to the families of the children, including due compensation to the families who have lost their children; and
- To establish an effective mechanism to ensure continuous, uninterrupted and adequate medical care in the affected areas to deal with the current crisis and to ensure proper and regular monitoring of vaccination of all children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

On behalf of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission,



Sultana Kamal
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Elsa Stamatopoulou
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission



Myrna Cunningham Kain
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Members: Shapan Adnan, Lars Anders Baer, Tone Bleie, Bina D'Costa, Hurst Hannum, Yasmeen Haque, Sara Hossain, Zafar Iqbal, Khushi Kabir, Michael van Walt van Praag, Iftekharuzzaman.

Advisers: Jenneke Arens, Tom Eskildsen, Meghna Guhathakurta.

CC:

1. Mr. Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs.
2. Mr. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, Honorable Chairman, Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, Rangamati Hill District.
3. Office Copy.

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C/O IWGIA, Classensgade 11E, 2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Phone: +45 35 27 05 00, Fax: +45 35 27 05 06

E-mail: cn@iwgia.orgPhone: +88 02 91 46 048, E-mail: chtcomm@gmail.com**www.chtcommission.org**