

Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

Co-Chairpersons:
Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Awebury, Ida Nicolaisen
Members:
Shapan Adnan, Lars-Anders Baer
Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Sara Hossain
Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Lee Swepston
Robert Evans, Hideaki Uemura

5 June 2011

Press Statement

CHTC welcomes UNPFII recommendations on “1997 Accord” and “UN Peacekeeping” related to the Chittagong Hill Tracts region in Bangladesh

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) congratulates former member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and UN Special Rapporteur Lars-Anders Baer for presenting the Study on the status of implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997 at the tenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York.

The CHTC is pleased with the excellent recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur to the Government of Bangladesh and to the United Nations system to hasten the implementation process of the 1997 CHT Accord that was signed at the initiation of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The UN Permanent Forum, at its closing meeting on 27 May, accepted several of Mr. Baer’s suggestions and adopted some of the most crucial ones as its own recommendations, including (i) on the full implementation of the Accord with specific timeline and modalities, (ii) on the prevention of Bangladesh military personnel and units involved in human rights violations of indigenous peoples from participating in UN peacekeeping duties abroad and (iii) and on the establishment of independent and impartial commissions of enquiry to address human rights violations against indigenous peoples in the CHT.

The CHTC believes that these recommendations, when implemented, can help consolidate a just peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and help build trust between the indigenous peoples and the Government of Bangladesh, as referred to in the Forum’s recommendations. The CHTC is also pleased that the Forum has linked the implementation of the Accord with the ongoing constitutional reform in Bangladesh and the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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However, the CHTC is disappointed with the statement submitted to the Permanent Forum by Mr Iqbal Ahmed, the First Secretary of the Bangladesh mission to the UN, on behalf of the Bangladesh Government. In his statement, Mr. Ahmed claimed that there were no Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh and then proceeded to say, “The accord has nothing to do with ‘indigenous issues’, and therefore the Government of Bangladesh reiterates its position that the Forum, which is mandated to deal with ‘indigenous issues’, does not have any *locus standi* in discussing the issues related to CHT Peace Accord.”

It is very unfortunate that the Bangladesh mission stated that the report by the Special Rapporteur was “a ‘lopsided’ opinion on a ‘non-indigenous’ issue” and objected to para 56 and 58A saying that it was “completely out of context.”

The two above-mentioned paragraphs deal with the issue of the UN Peacekeeping forces from Bangladesh. The CHTC lauds the excellent work done by the UN Peacekeeping forces to bring peace in conflict zones all over the world. At the same time, CHTC agrees with the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur to the UN’s Department of Peace Keeping Operations that it should develop a mechanism to screen human rights violations committed by military personnel and that it should prevent “human rights violators and alleged human rights violators within the security forces of Bangladesh from participating in international peacekeeping activities under the auspices of the United Nations” according to the Permanent Forum’s recommendation to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at its fifth session.

The CHTC is concerned that the Government of Bangladesh’s non-recognition of the existence of Indigenous Peoples in the country and the stance at the Permanent Forum shows a lack of political will to implement an Accord that the government signed 14 years ago. It may be noted that several Bangladeshi laws already recognize the CHT indigenous peoples as ‘indigenous’ or ‘adibashi’, although this is not directly acknowledged in the constitution.

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The CHTC hopes that the government will live up to the promise it made 14 years ago– a responsibility that its major component, the Bangladesh Awami League reiterated in its 2008 Election Manifesto. This should be done by declaring a timeline and modalities for full implementation of the 1997 Accord, and cooperating with the United Nations to maintain the integrity of Bangladesh’s contribution to UN Peacekeeping forces.

On behalf of the CHT Commission

Yours sincerely
Eric Avebury

Eric Avebury
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Sincerely yours
Sultana Kamal

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Co-chair of the
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Yours Sincerely
Ida Nicolaisen

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