

2 May 2011

Press Release

The CHT Commission protests attempted intimidation of media workshop by intelligence agencies

The CHT Commission, with logistic support from the Association from Land Reform and Development (ALRD) has just concluded conducting a journalists' workshop titled "Reporting on CHT and Indigenous Peoples" from 27-29 April, 2011. Journalists from both Dhaka and the three Chittagong Hill Districts participated in this workshop, the objectives of which were the following:

- To increase awareness of the importance of implementation of the CHT Accord.
- To increase awareness of the importance of recognizing indigenous people in the constitution.
- To increase awareness of the rights of indigenous people in the CHT.
- To increase awareness about international conventions and standards on indigenous peoples signed by the Government of Bangladesh.

However from 28 April National Security Intelligence (NSI) officials attempted to intimidate the Secretariat of the CHT Commission first by asking to send an official to be present throughout at the workshop, then by stationing an official outside the workshop venue for its duration. The NSI official who was stationed outside the workshop questioned several staff at the venue about the nature of the workshop and the participants, and claimed that there was 'a matter of national security' involved given the presence of participants from the Chittagong Hill Tracts at the workshop.

One of the lecturers, journalist Saleem Samad, was also questioned on the phone several times by members of the NSI about the nature of the workshop.

The CHT Commission considers these acts as attempts at intimidation and harassment by intelligence officials. The CHT Commission calls on the Bangladesh government to:

- Protect the CHT Commission secretariat from harassment by intelligence officials;
- Protect all journalists from harassment and intimidation;
- More generally, guarantee the right to freedom of expression of journalists and individuals in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a party; and
- Urgently implement the CHT Accord so that the situation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is normalized, and the intelligence services stop considering the expression of legitimate concern with the situation in the CHT a threat to national security.

On behalf of the CHT Commission

Yours sincerely
Eric Avebury

Eric Avebury
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Sincerely yours
Sultana Kamal

Sultana Kamal
Co-chair of the
CHT Commission

Yours Sincerely
Ida Nicolaisen

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Co-chair of the
CHT Commission