

# Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

**Co-Chairpersons:**

Sultana Kamal,  
Lord Eric Avebury,  
Elsa Stamatopoulou

1 October 2011

## Press Release

**CHT Commission urges the Government of Bangladesh to conduct thorough and impartial investigations into allegations of human rights violations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, activate the work of the Land Commission and implement the 1997 CHT Accord.**

In the face of increasing allegations of human rights violations of indigenous people, the CHT Commission would like to remind the Awami League-led government that it is time for them to abide by their Election Manifesto of 2008 of the promise of full implementation of the 1997 CHT Accord.

The CHT Commission has received reports of alleged attempts of land grabbing of the Khyang community from the area of Gungru Mukh Para under Kuhlalong Mouza in Bandarban district. We have learnt that local Awami League leaders have threatened the local Khyang community with eviction from their land and have also threatened to attack them. According to the local Khyang people, they have been living in the area for more than a century. Although many Bangalis took leases of the land they never planted rubber trees according to the rules of the lease and as a result their leases were canceled after the signing of the 1997 CHT Accord.

We have received reports that on 18 September 2011 two Karbaris (local village leaders) from the Marma community of the Baro Modak area of Remacri union under Thanchi upazila in Bandarban hill district were allegedly tortured and three others allegedly harassed by Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) commanders under the 10 Battalion Boli Para BGB zone.

We have learned of an incident in Khagrachhari in which Bangali settlers allegedly have made several attempts to occupy lands belonging to the Marma community living in Pagla Para of Nabhanga mouza under Patachara union of Ramgarh upazila on 23 and 24 September 2011.

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We have also learned of a separate incident in Khagrachhari in which government security forces allegedly injured 22 Jumma students in an attack on a procession by about 900 students from Khagrachhari College who were demonstrating for constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh on 7 August 2011.

All these allegations indicate that the indigenous peoples of the CHT continue to suffer from marginalization and abuse by state (the border guards) and non-state (Bangali settlers) actors even 14 years after signing of the Accord. The government which vowed to protect the rights of the people and are signatory to various international treaties continues to ignore their obligations towards minority populations.

Although the progress has been disappointing, we hope that the Awami League-led government will honour its Election Manifesto of 2008 and implement the 1997 CHT Accord in full within its present elected term which is already at its halfway stage. In order to ensure that, the Government must end the culture of impunity that prevails in the CHT, where members of the security forces are regularly alleged to be involved in human rights violations of indigenous hill peoples, and these incidents are rarely investigated.

The CHT Commission believes that it is crucial for the Government to activate the Land Commission after amending the flaws in the present Land Dispute Settlement Commission Act of 2001 and to appoint a Chairperson of the Land Commission who has an understanding of the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the significance of community-owned land of indigenous people and believes in their rights to maintain their distinct social, economic or political systems. The members of the CHT Commission in their interactions with the present Chairperson of the Land Commission have found him to be biased towards the interest of Bangali settlers and unable to cooperate with the indigenous leaders or understand the special status of the CHT.

We noted that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her 'Peace Model' presented at the recent session of the United Nations General Assembly listed "inclusion of excluded people" as one of the six multipliers of her proposed model. She believed that peace prevailed when justice prevailed. She added that "...as member of the UN Human Rights Council and the ECOSOC, Bangladesh consciously promotes democracy, secularism, justice and rule of law; and equal rights of women, children, minorities and other vulnerable groups".

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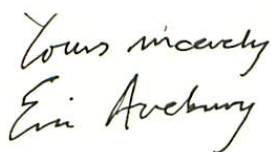
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These are indeed welcome aspirations, but the reality is different in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Indigenous people are being driven off their homes and lands by Bangali settlers; they are enduring constant harassment and persecution and human rights violations by the security forces and by the settlers, with the connivance of the security forces, and there is no authority to which they can appeal to get a hearing for their legitimate grievances.

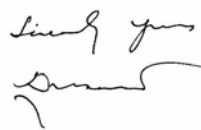
The CHT Commission urges the Government of Bangladesh to:

- Fully respect its international human rights obligations spelled out in the international human rights instruments.
- Investigate allegations of human rights violations in the above-mentioned and many other cases that remain pending for lack of investigation.
- Reactivate the Land Commission with a newly appointed Chairperson who fulfills the criteria of a fair and understanding retired judge and is acceptable to all local leaders in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- Declare a roadmap through which the 1997 CHT Accord can be implemented in full within the tenure of the present government as promised in the Election Manifesto.
- Direct the Ministry of CHT Affairs to withdraw the limitations placed on the CHT Commission's missions, which we believe to be a violation of the rights to freedom of movement and freedom of expression of the members of the CHT Commission, and enable us to continue our work in raising public awareness about the Accord.

On behalf of the CHT Commission



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CHT Commission



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