

Global Association for Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

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23 November 2024

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Subject: Submission to the CPG on Bangladesh for its meeting on 27 November 2024

Dear Sirs/Madams,

We, the representatives of the Global Association for Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (GAIPCHT), are writing to make this submission to Your Esteemed Committee which is scheduled to meet on 27 November 2024.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) is the only region in Bangladesh inhabited by indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples were reduced to minority on their own lands because of the population transfer and implantation of the majority Muslim

populations from 1979 onwards as part of the government policy on the region. Over two decades of insurgency ended after the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord on 2 December 1997.

We are making this submission primarily on three critical issues i.e. (1) refusal of the Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh to implement the CHTs Accord; (2) Refusal of the Interim Government to make its inquiry commission report on attacks on indigenous peoples in the CHTs on 19-20 September public; and (3) Exclusion of indigenous peoples and religious minorities from the constitutional reform process.

The details are provided below:

1. Refusal of the Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh to implement the CHTs Accord

Dr Mohammed Yunus on the CHTs Peace Accord had told the *Voice of America* on 2 October 2024 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly:

"We just got here. It's not right to hope that a problem that has been there for so long can be solved in a couple of days. There was a peace accord; it happened after trying for many years. That accord is not being implemented; whether or not a new peace accord must be made, our government won't be able to accomplish that. Elected governments later on will be able to take that on".¹

The Interim Government headed by Dr Yunus has constituted 10 reform commissions respectively on electoral system reform; police administration reform; judicial reform; anti-corruption reform; public administration reform; constitutional reform,² mass media, health, labour rights and women affairs.³ However, the same Dr Yunus refuses to do anything on the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord⁴ which was codified under the CHTs Regional Council Act and the Hill District Councils Act.

¹. 'Interim govt to decide its term, The Daily Star, 2 October 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/interim-govt-decide-its-term-3717261>

². 9-member constitutional reform commission formed with student representative Mahfuz Alam, BDnews24.com, 8 October 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/bebd71dc4eea>

³. Govt forms 4 more commissions, The Daily Star, 18 October 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/govt-forms-4-more-commissions-3730196>

⁴. "Life is not Ours", P. 52, The Report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, May 1991, http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_publications_files/0129_Life_is_not_ours_1-108.pdf

The key provisions of the CHTs Accord were not implemented. For example, there are around 400 army, paramilitary and police camps in the CHTs.⁵ Sub-section 17 of Section D relating to *rehabilitation, general amnesty and other matters* of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord signed on 2 December 1997 provided that “*after signing the agreement between the government and the Jana Samhati Samiti and immediately after the return of the JSS members to normal life all the temporary camps of military, Ansar and Village Defence Party shall be taken back to permanent installations except the Border Security Force (BDR) and permanent cantonments (3 at the 3 District Hqs. and Alikadam, Ruma and Dighinala) by phases and with this in view, time limit shall be determined.*”⁶ However, this provision of the CHTs Accord remained unimplemented and the military continues to rule the CHTs.

2. Refusal of the Interim Government to make its inquiry commission report on attacks on indigenous peoples in the CHTs on 19-20 September public

The illegal plain settlers and Bangladesh Army led organized assaults on indigenous peoples in Dighinala and Khagrachari Sadar under Khagrachari district on 19 September, followed by further attacks on Rangamati Sadar on 20 September. The Bangladesh Army and the illegal settlers specifically targeted shops and other business establishments of indigenous peoples and Buddhist temples. In these attacks by the illegal plain settlers and Bangladesh Army, at least four indigenous persons i.e. Mr Dhana Ranjan Chakma, Mr Junan Chakma, Mr Rubel Tripura, and Mr Anik Chakma were killed, at least 75 indigenous Jumma people were seriously injured while at least 142 houses, shops and other business establishments, properties, Buddhist temples that were looted, destroyed or set ablaze.⁷

A number of international organizations such as Amnesty International on 20 September 2024,⁸ the Minority Rights Group International on 24 September 2024,⁹

⁵. Bangladesh: Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, The Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples. IWGIA Report 14, 2012, <https://www.iwgia.org/en/resources/publications/308-human-rights-reports/3076-bangladesh-militarization-in-the-chittagong-hill-tracts-the-slow-demise-of-the-regions-indigenous-peoples-iwgia-report-14.html>

⁶. The CHTs Peace Accord can be accessed at https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/accords/Chittagong_Hill_Tracts_Peace_Accord.pdf

⁷. “Conflicts In Bangladesh and Myanmar: The Threat To Regional Peace And Security”, Rights and Risks Analysis Group, 10 October 2024, <http://www.rightsrisks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ConflictsinMyanmarBangladesh.pdf>

⁸. Amnesty International, 20 September 2024, See <https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1837114994753687692>

⁹. Bangladesh: MRG condemns renewed violence and hate speech against indigenous peoples, Minority Group International, 24 September 2024,

International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs on 8th October 2024¹⁰ and the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights on 14 October 2024¹¹ condemned the attacks and demanded impartial inquiry.

Given the gravity of the attacks, on 21 September 2024, a high-level government delegation consisting of Home Affairs Adviser Lieutenant General (Retired) Jahangir Alam Chowdhur, CHT Affairs Adviser Supradip Chakma and Land and Local Government Minister AF Hasan Arif visited Rangamati and Khagrachari to assess the situation and ordered "*a fair investigation of all incidents related to violence and prosecution of those responsible*".¹²

On 26 September 2024, the Chittagong Divisional Commissioner formed a seven-member inquiry committee headed by Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Mr Mohammad Nurullah Noori to submit the report within the next 14 working days. On 30 September 2024, Mr Noori while visiting the affected areas at Rangamati reiterated before the journalists that he would submit the report to the government within 14 days after finding the root causes of the violent incidents, making a list of the victims and informing the government of their losses and making recommendations to prevent recurrence of such violent incidents.¹³ On 2 October 2024, the Committee visited Larma Square Bazar, Dighinala which was set on fire on 19 September 2024.¹⁴

The report of the Inquiry Commission was to have been submitted latest by 10 October 2024. However, as on date, no public statement has been made regarding the status of the Inquiry Commission report. This does not bode well for transparency, accountability and rehabilitation of the affected persons in these organised attacks.

<https://minorityrights.org/bangladesh-mrg-condemns-renewed-violence-and-hate-speech-against-indigenous-peoples/>

¹⁰. Joint Statement: Call for Urgent Action on Repeated Violence in CHT, IWGIA, AIPP & CHTs Commission , 8 October 2024, <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5566-joint-statement-urgent-action-repeated-violence-cht.html>

¹¹. UN bodies urge govt to invite UN to investigate rights violations in CHT, The Daily Star, 15 October 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/un-bodies-urge-govt-invite-un-investigate-rights-violations-cht-3728076>

¹². 3 advisers in two hill districts to monitor emerging situation, The Daily Bangladesh, 21 September 2024, <https://www.daily-bangladesh.com/english/national/98200>

¹³. Khagrachari-Rangamati violence inquiry committee visited Rangamati, The Daily Country Today, 30 September 2023, <https://dailycountrytodaybd.com/story/khagrachari-rangamati-violence-inquiry-committee-visited-rangamati>,

¹⁴. Probe body begins inquiry into recent CHT violence, The New Age, 20 September 2023, <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/246496/probe-body-begins-inquiry-into-recent-cht-violence>

3. Exclusion of indigenous peoples and religious minorities from the constitutional reform process

Indigenous peoples and religious minorities have been fully excluded from the reform process. The Constitutional reform commission headed by Professor Ali Riaz include Professor Sumaiya Khair at Dhaka University, Barrister Imran Siddiqui, Professor Muhammad Ikramul Haq at Dhaka University, Supreme Court lawyer Dr Sharif Bhuiyan, Barrister Moin Alam Firozi, writer Firoz Ahmed, writer and human rights activist Mo Mustain Billah, and student representative Mo Mahfuz Alam.¹⁵ There is not a single representative of indigenous peoples or religious minorities was included in this Constitution Reform Commission.

On 8 October 2024, the Denmark-based International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and New Delhi-based Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) urged Dr Yunus to reconstitute the commission and include representatives of indigenous peoples and minorities. Religious minorities make up 16 million while there are about 1.6 million members from ethnic communities. The representative of the Vatican to Bangladesh had intervened at the request of the IWGIA and RRAG.¹⁶

On 30 October 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the conclusion of his visit to Bangladesh had stated, "*The participation of ethnic and religious minorities in the reform structures, as well as of Indigenous Peoples, is also crucial*".¹⁷

However, no measure has been taken by the Interim Government of Bangladesh which had excluded indigenous peoples and religious minorities from the Constitutional Reforms process.

4. Request for interventions with the Government of Bangladesh

In the light of the above facts, we shall highly appreciate if the Scottish Parliament could kindly intervene with the Government of Bangladesh for implementation of the CHTs Accord; make its inquiry commission report on attacks on indigenous peoples in the CHTs on 19-20 September public; and include indigenous peoples and religious minorities from the constitutional reform process.

¹⁵. 9-member constitution reform commission announced, Dhaka Tribune, 7 October 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/361122/9-member-constitution-reform-commission-announced>

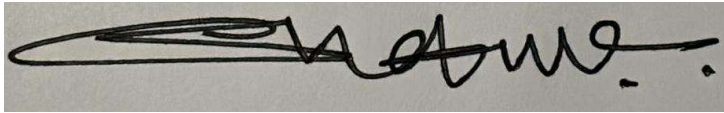
¹⁶. Calls to make Bangladesh constitution reform body inclusive, UCAN News, 28 October 2024, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/calls-to-make-bangladesh-constitution-reform-body-inclusive/106839>

¹⁷. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk concludes official visit to Bangladesh, OHCHR, 30 October 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/10/un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-concludes-official>

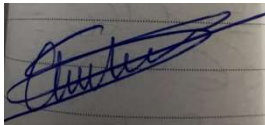
Looking forward to Your Excellencies interventions.

With kind regards,

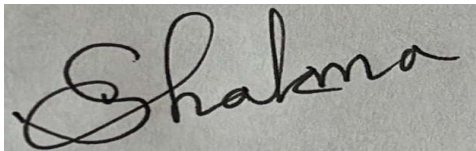
Yours sincerely



1. Arun Chakma (Mr), Co-Convenor, USA



2. Samapti Chakma Borgne (Ms), Member, France



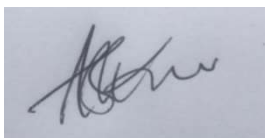
3. Shiuly Chanpa Chakma (Ms), Member Canada

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4. Dr Bhagadutta Chakma, Member, Australia

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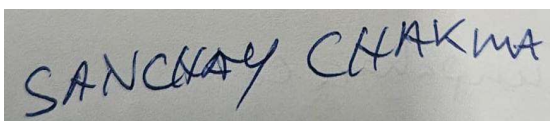
5. Pavel Chakma (Mr), Member, Australia



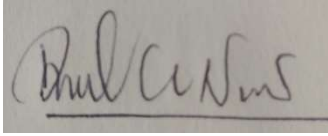
6. Ashu Chakma (Mr), Member, UK



7. Rémi Pflieger-Chakma (Mr), Member, France



8. Sanchay Chakma (Mr), Member, Switzerland



9. Ronel Chakma (Mr), Member, South Korea

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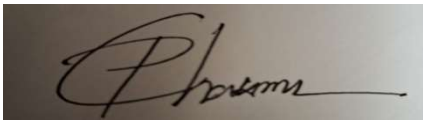
10. Dipti Sankar Chakma (Mr), Member, Japan

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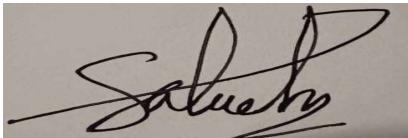
11. Devashish Chakma (Mr), Member, USA



12. Sushil Chakma (Mr), Member, USA



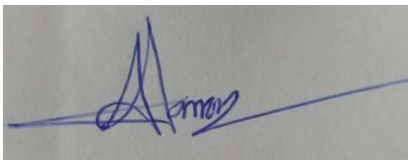
13. Parish Chakma (Mr), Member, USA



14. Satu Chakma (Mr), Member, China



15. Pragna Tapas Chakma (Mr), Member, Canada



16. Rev Atma Dip Bhikkhu, France