

VOICES FOR PEACE

United Nations Human Rights Council

Forum on Minority Issues

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Agenda - ~~3~~ *3* ~~Protecting minority rights during humanitarian crises~~
Respecting, mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises

Statement by:

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Honourable Chairperson, distinguished delegates, indigenous and minority representatives,

The failure to fully implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord that was signed between the indigenous Jumma peoples and Government of Bangladesh in 1997 for resolving CHT crisis through political and peaceful means has led to continue sufferings of internally displaced families and India-returnee refugees of Jumma peoples in the CHT who were the innocent victims of government atrocities and humanitarian crises in 1980s and 90s.

It is to be mentioned that during the armed conflict between the then guerrillas of Jumma peoples and the government troops in 1980s-90s, at least twelve massacres upon the Jumma peoples were committed by Bangladesh military forces and Bengali Muslim settlers who were settled down in the land of the indigenous Jumma peoples of CHT in 1980s bringing them from plain lands by the government. As a result, around 100,000 families of indigenous Jumma peoples fled to the deep forest within the CHT who are regarded as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and around 15,000 families fled to the neighbouring Indian State of Tripura for shelter who are regarded as international refugee.

The CHT Accord stipulates to rehabilitate both IDPs and India-returnee refugees with returning their lands and homesteads back which were occupied by Bengali Muslim settlers with the assistance of government machineries. However, though 19 years have passed after signing of CHT Accord, no IDPs have been rehabilitated so far. At present, identification and rehabilitation process of IDPs remains in standstill situation, due to controversy government's initiative to rehabilitate Bengali settlers in CHT identifying them as IDPs which is contradictory to the provisions of the CHT Accord.

Since illegal settlement of the Bengali Muslim families in the land of the Jumma peoples in CHT in 1980s, they have been regularly receiving food grains as monthly rations. On the others, indigenous Jumma IDPs who were uprooted from their ancestral lands due to massive communal attacks by the settlers continue to be deprived of receiving any humanitarian assistance from government or any other national and international humanitarian actor. It can be described that the perpetrators continue to availing government benefit fully for almost three decades, while the

victims of eviction remain deprived of any humanitarian assistance for same period which could be cited as a crime against humanity.

In light of the above situation, I would like to appeal UN Forum on Minority Issues to pursue the Government of Bangladesh for urgent action on the followings for the sake of sustainable peace, security and development of CHT people-

- Rehabilitation of indigenous Jumma IDPs and Returnee Jumma Refugees with returning lands and homesteads back to them.
- Providing financial and food support to indigenous Jumma IDPs as a means of preventing or mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises.
- Rehabilitation of Bengali settlers outside CHT with dignity.
- Declaration of a timeframe road map for the speedy, proper and full implementation of the CHT Accord.

Thank you Honourable Chair.