**IWGIA statement** at the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), discussion on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in post-conflict situations, and peace negotiations, agreements, and accords on Monday July 8th (12-16).

418 words (3 mins.)

IWGIA’s main recommendations to EMRIP is centered around the protection of the legal status of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Regulation of 1900, which safeguards the identity, rights, and welfare of the region’s Indigenous Peoples. IWGIA notes that the 1900 Regulation is currently under review at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. This process jeopardizes even the limited protection provided by the 1900 Regulation, potentially leading to further human rights violations of Indigenous Peoples in the CHT, who already face pervasive abuses including rape, torture, displacement and persistent land grabbing.

For example, in May 2024, Amnesty International reported over 100 Indigenous Bawm villagers being arbitrarily arrested and labelled terrorists, resulting in the displacement of over 2,000 Bawm people. The community faces severe restrictions on movement, including access to hospitals and markets, and engaging in agriculture, exacerbating widespread hunger and food insecurity. While schools, cultural events, and religious activities have come to a halt, worsening social disruption.[[1]](#endnote-1) [[2]](#endnote-2)

At the same time land grabbing in the CHT is ubiquitous, with settlers, companies, retired and serving civil and military officials, and military institutions like the Engineering Corps and the Army Welfare Trust all involved. In a 2023 incident, Lama Rubber Industries forcibly evicted Indigenous Mro and Tripura villagers from three villages, employing 150 agitators who violently attacked, burned, and plundered homes. Since 2022, there have been 11 further forcible eviction attempts, involving violent assaults, attempts on local leaders' lives, arson, demolition, and poisoning of water sources. The ongoing 1036-kilometer border road construction led by the Army Corps of Engineers is another example of land grabbing without consultation with or compensation for Indigenous Peoples and causes severe environmental and biodiversity damage in the region.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Furthermore, successive governments' 25-year failure to apply the major provisions of the 1997 CHT Accord, which includes implementation of the 1900 Regulation, has exacerbated militarization of the CHT, instead of fostering peace and development.[[4]](#endnote-4) It also threatens Bangladesh's multicultural foundation as outlined in the Constitution.[[5]](#endnote-5)

IWGIA therefore calls for full legal protection of the 1900 Regulation, and proper implementation of the 1997 CHT Accord. Together these recognise customary land usage and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and would allow the establishment of a monitoring and investigative mechanism for human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples and activists in the CHT.

IWGIA recommends EMRIP to:

1. Enter into a dialogue with the Government of Bangladesh on the issues mentioned in the statement, and
2. That EMRIP does further studies on the impacts of militarization and non-implementation of peace accords going forward
1. https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-over-100-indigenous-people-arbitrarily-arrested-bangladesh-48-24/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://hillvoice.net/en/bawm-peoples-demonstration-human-chain-to-stop-disturbance-of-knf-in-rowangchari/#:~:text=The%20common%20Bawm%20people%20in,a%20living%20by%20growing%20fruits [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.iwgia.org/en/bangladesh/5363-iw-2024-bangladesh.html#\_edn17 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/the-twisted-facts-cht-accord-implementation-3596581 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.newagebd.net/post/politics/238199/conspiracy-on-to-abolish-cht-regulation-santu-larma [↑](#endnote-ref-5)