



CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS COMMISSION

CHT Commission Condemns Death of Bawm Youth in Prison Custody and Calls for the End of Systematic Persecution of Bawm Community

19 May 2025

The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC) is extremely outraged and saddened to learn about the death of a 29 year old Bawm youth, Lal Tleng Kim Bawm in prison custody¹. Lal Tleng was arrested on 7 April 2024 from Bethel Para in Ruma, Bandarban, and was among 126 Bawm individuals, including 30 women and three children (as young as one and two years old)², who have been detained for over a year without due process based on unsubstantiated charges that lack transparency or legal justification.

For over two years now, the Bawm community, with a population just over 12,000 has been facing systematic human rights violations and risk of ethnic cleansing due to military crackdowns, attacks by pro-military armed groups, and mass arrests. This systematic persecution has displaced half of their population. 3500-4000 Bawm individuals, one-fourth of the entire community, have been forced to seek refuge in Mizoram State of India, and Chin State of Myanmar, where they are living in extremely precarious and inhumane conditions³. Meanwhile, those who remain face severe restrictions on movement, agricultural trade, and livelihood, which has pushed the entire community into a state of famine⁴. Since the emergence of KNF, reportedly under military patronage which has been published in details by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)⁵, over 26 Bawm individuals have been killed by security forces and affiliated pro-military groups, including reports of extrajudicial executions⁶, with victims as young as 13 years old.

Despite repeated appeals from national and international advocates, the crackdown continues, and the imprisoned Bawm individuals have not been released. A delegation of Indigenous leaders from across Bangladesh met with the Chief Adviser Dr. Md. Yunus and Law Adviser Dr. Asif Nazrul in September 2024, and urged the release of innocent Bawm women, children, and others who do not have affiliation with KNF⁷, but to no effect. It is extremely frustrating that the current interim government that stated its strong commitment to protecting minorities while taking charge, has failed to ensure protection of one of the smallest Indigenous groups of Bangladesh. While it has taken steps to hold security personnel accountable for human rights violations under the previous government in other parts of the country, no such action has been taken regarding CHT. No investigation has been initiated into the alleged involvement of security forces in creating and supporting KNF and other armed groups in CHT, nor into reported extrajudicial killings of Bawm

¹ <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/265151/justice-for-bawm-youths-custodial-death-demanded>

² CHT Commission's Secretariat has been keeping track of all the arrests and details with the support of Bawm civil society leaders

³ Based on information provided by CHT civil society and Bawm community leaders

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5554>

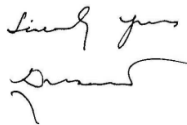
⁶ Please see CHTC's statements: <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5191>, <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5202>

⁷ Based on information obtained from Indigenous leaders of Bangladesh

civilians. It appears that the continued imprisonment of Bawm civilians and the broader persecution of the entire community is a reflection of the security forces' frustration over their failure to control KNF, an armed group that they allegedly created. If this ongoing systematic targeting of the Bawm community is not urgently addressed, the entire Bawm community will be forced to flee Bangladesh. The CHT Commission strongly urges the Interim Government:

1. To release all the innocent Bawm detainees immediately who are not affiliated with KNF, and withdraw all cases against them. Ensure proper medical care for sick Bawm individuals still in custody.
2. While taking lawful action against KNF, also hold accountable and bring into justice those who supported and sponsored the creation of KNF. Ensure security forces cease their support to all armed vigilante groups operating in the CHT.
3. Guarantee safe environments for the voluntary return of displaced Bawm individuals from India and Myanmar. Ensure their safety upon return, including freedom from arrest, and access to livelihood and basic services. Bring to justice the security personnel allegedly involved in the extrajudicial killings, as well as the pro-military armed groups responsible for executing Bawm civilians, to help restore the community's trust.
4. End de-facto military rule in the CHT by withdrawing the executive direction *Operation Uttoron*, and take immediate, concrete steps to implement the CHT Accord in full.

On behalf of the CHT Commission,



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