



**Joint Statement: Call for Urgent Action on Repeated Violence in CHT**

*Issued by AIPP, CHT Commission, and IWGIA*

We are deeply concerned about the ongoing violence and attacks on the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Recent deadly attacks by Bengali settlers in the presence of state forces, in Khagrachari and Dighinala on 19 September, and in Rangamati on 20 September<sup>1</sup>, have resulted in the deaths of four indigenous persons (one in Rangamati and three in Khagrachari) and widespread arson attacks on indigenous houses, businesses, and Buddhist places of worship. These events were ostensibly sparked by the alleged mob killing of a settler who was attempting to steal a motorbike.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 October, further violence erupted in Khagrachari after the alleged mob killing of Sohel Rana, an instructor at the Khagrachari Government Technical School and College, following allegations that he raped a 7th-grade indigenous girl from the school. Once again, settlers instigated a reign of terror against indigenous communities and their businesses, allegedly in response to the death of Sohel Rana. Witnesses testimony and live-streamed videos on social media show that, despite the local administration imposing restrictions on unlawful assemblies of four or more persons (Section 144, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898) at 3 PM, settlers continued their rampage of destruction until around 7:30 PM, in the presence of security forces. The role of the security forces is highly questionable, as they allowed these crimes to continue for several hours. Pankhayapara, the area that suffered the worst atrocities, is located less than half a kilometer from the Khagrachari Cantonment (Garrison), yet no intervention occurred until later in the evening.

1 October, 2024 reports from the ground indicate that in the morning, the accused teacher, Sohel Rana, lured one of his teenage indigenous female students to the teacher's quarters, where he allegedly raped her. The girl's friends witnessed Rana leading her to his residence and quickly raised the alarm. The Officer-in-Charge of Khagrachari Police Station and five students rescued her, and she later testified to being raped by Rana<sup>3</sup>, and a recent medical test found evidence of rape<sup>4</sup>. Protests erupted, and while Rana was confined to the principal's office, a mob broke in and assaulted him. Rana fled but was injured in a vehicle collision and died at the hospital<sup>5</sup>. The police and civil administration officials present failed to protect him from the mob.

Media reports indicate that the mob's anger toward Sohel Rana stemmed from his long history of sexual misconduct allegations at various institutions, including an attempted rape charge involving another indigenous girl student at the same school in Khagrachari<sup>6</sup>. While mob violence is unjustifiable, this incident underscores the impunity surrounding violence against indigenous women and girls in the CHT, fueling public outrage. In September 2024, the CHTC Secretariat

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5561> and <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5562>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/khagrachhari-tension-runs-high-after-mob-kills-teacher-3717121>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/khagrachhari-girl-medical-test-finds-evidence-rape-3719071>

<sup>5</sup> Information obtained from on-the-ground interviews

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/khagrachhari-tension-runs-high-after-mob-kills-teacher-3717121>



documented a gang rape and two attempted rapes of indigenous women and girls by settlers, including an 8-year-old victim, reflecting a troubling trend of violence in the region.

Mob violence is not confined to the CHT. Throughout Bangladesh, mob violence is alarmingly frequent. According to a recent report by the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), 28 people were killed in mob lynchings in September 2024 alone<sup>7</sup>. However, in no other part of the country has such violence led to one community attacking another, as seen in the CHT. On the same day, 18 September, when a Bengali settler was allegedly killed by a mob in Khagrachari, sparking settlers' deadly attacks on Indigenous Peoples, two other individuals were also killed in mob violence at Dhaka University<sup>8</sup> and Jahangirnagar University<sup>9</sup>, two of the country's most respected institutions. Yet, no retaliatory attacks followed at those locations. In the CHT, settlers repeatedly use such incidents as a pretext to unleash violence against the indigenous population and to create unrest, often, it is widely believed, with the express or tacit support of the nearly 100% Bengali security personnel.

As noted in a recent joint statement by IWGIA and CHTC<sup>10</sup>, settlers have been attempting to incite unrest in the CHT ever since the Chief Adviser of the Interim Government referred to the Indigenous Peoples of the region as "Indigenous," a term the settlers strongly opposed. During a mass gathering on August 31 in Bandarban, Kazi Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Parbattya Chattagram Nagarik Parishad (PCNP), demanded that Dr. Yunus retract his statement, claiming that Bengalis are the only Indigenous Peoples of the CHT and that the Indigenous Jummo are outsiders. He further declared that the CHT would become the land of "Allahu Akbar" and "Nara-e-takbeer" and issued threats against the Jummo Indigenous Peoples if they attempted to establish their rights in the region.<sup>11</sup> We believe the ongoing violence and attacks on the Jummo by settlers are linked to this.

Although the government has formed a seven-member investigation committee to examine the causes of the violence in Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Dighinala, we have little confidence that this committee will bring justice. Similar committees have been formed after every major attack on indigenous communities in the CHT, and none have provided justice or made their findings public.<sup>12</sup> In most cases, these committees' mandates were inadequate, and the committees were not independent or neutral, as is also the case with the present one.

We have also received testimonies that Army personnel in Rangamati have been checking the cell phones of Indigenous Peoples and deleting footage of the settlers' attacks. If they find any such footage, they beat the Jummo individuals. Additionally, it is deeply concerning that many

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/mob-attacks-least-28-beaten-death-sept-3719031>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/savagery-du-they-beat-him-fed-him-then-killed-him-3707351>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/358936>

<sup>10</sup> <https://iwgia.org/en/news/5562>

<sup>11</sup> We have acquired a video of his speech.

<sup>12</sup>For instance, just to name a few deadly attacks for which the Jummo have never received justice from these investigative committees: (the Langadu attack: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/arsen-attack-jumma-villages-bengali-settlers-longadu-300-houses-torched> ), (the Matiranga-Taindong attack: <https://www.kapaeeng.org/inquiry-report-of-citizens-committee-on-matiranga-taindong-communal-attack-upon-jumma-villages-by-bengali-settlers/> ), and (the Baghaihat attack: <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/cht-commission-submits-probe-report> )



mainstream Bengalis are siding with the settlers, labeling the Jummo as secessionists and spreading false propaganda on mainstream and social media. Posts and videos filled with lies are being shared widely on social media, inciting nationwide hatred toward the Jummo, which is very alarming. The live videos posted by Jummo during the settlers' attacks have been reported and removed from Facebook. Several Jummo bloggers and pages that shared videos of the attacks have also been targeted by cyber-attackers and had their accounts hacked. These developments are deeply troubling.

We urgently call upon Dr. Mohammad Yunus, the Honourable Chief Adviser of the Interim Government of Bangladesh, as a Nobel Peace Laureate, to take the following measures to ensure long-term peace in the CHT:

1. The government should immediately invite the United Nations and mandate holders to conduct an independent investigation into the reasons behind the continued violence against Indigenous Peoples in the CHT, as it did when inviting a UN team to probe the human rights violations that took place between July 1 and August 15, 2024.
2. Pending such investigations by the UN, the government should establish an independent, impartial, and adequately mandated Commission of Inquiry in accordance with the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1956. Such a commission would have all the powers of a civil court, including the authority to summon all concerned officials, enter all concerned premises, and peruse necessary documents, and facilitate criminal proceedings by Courts of Judicial Magistrates. The 7-member committee that the government has formed, headed by an Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong, and including six other low-level civil administration and police officers has none of the powers mentioned above. Moreover, it is of too low a level to be regarded as independent, or neutral or adequately mandated. These committee members' rank and status are far below that of the senior-most military officials posted in the hill region at region/brigade level, and therefore the committee is almost certain to be unable to summon the concerned officials and look into their conduct.
3. Swift and transparent legal action must be taken against those responsible for the attacks. The government must take decisive steps to end the culture of impunity surrounding violence against Indigenous Peoples in the CHT. We also call for proper justice regarding the alleged mob killings.
4. Ensure the safety of indigenous women and girls by implementing stronger legal protections and holding perpetrators of gender-based violence accountable.
5. Investigate the role of security forces in allowing violence to continue under Section 144 and hold those responsible accountable for failing to protect the lives and properties of the Jummo.



6. The government should immediately revoke the executive order 'Operation Uttoron,' restoring civilian administration and a democratic environment in the CHT. All temporary military and security camps should be dismantled, with the exception of the six permanent military bases designated in the 1997 CHT Accord.
7. In the CHT, the security forces are composed entirely of personnel from the Bengali community, which often makes it difficult to maintain neutrality during communal clashes. To build trust and restore confidence among indigenous communities, the government should establish an ethnically diverse police force in the region, incorporating both Indigenous Peoples and ethnic Bengalis, as expressly provided for in the Hill District Councils Acts of 1989 (Acts 19, 20 and 21 of 1989). Implementing this diverse police composition will help prevent discriminatory practices and reduce the risk of perceived or actual bias during conflicts between Indigenous and Bengali groups.
8. We also ask the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Adviser Nahid Islam to ensure that media and social media platforms are not used to spread misinformation and hate speech that incites violence against Indigenous Peoples.
9. Finally, it is clear that settlers continue to pose a significant obstacle to the full implementation of the CHT Accord, the resolution of land disputes, and the achievement of lasting peace in the region. The only viable solution is the dignified relocation of settlers outside the CHT. The government can relocate them outside the CHT while continuing to provide rations, food grains, and other support, as it has done since their relocation to the region.

We firmly believe that lasting peace and justice in the Chittagong Hill Tracts can only be attained through meaningful action, accountability, and democratic dialogue. A militarized approach is not the solution; instead, we must foster an environment that encourages open communication and collaboration among all stakeholders. Prioritizing inclusive dialogue and addressing the root causes of the conflict can be the only solution to bring lasting peace to the CHT.