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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Bangladesh: Perpetuating Impunity and Exclusion of Indigenous Peoples

On 5th August 2024, the government of Bangladesh led by then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fell in the face of a massive anti-discrimination movement by the students. It was hailed as a revolution and an Interim Government headed by Dr Mohammed Yunus was sworn in. However, Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) region and elsewhere have been facing increased human rights violations mostly with impunity under Dr Yunus interim government.

The CHTs has been the only region predominantly inhabited by Indigenous Peoples. It witnessed armed conflicts over the demands of Indigenous Peoples for autonomy and land rights. The government of Bangladesh responded by implanting about 400,000 plainland Bengali settlers belonging to the Muslim majority from 1979 to 1983, with the sole aim to reduce Indigenous Peoples into a minority on their own land. Thousands of Indigenous Peoples were evicted from their homes; over 70,000 sought refuge in India and the Bangladesh army killed thousands more. In 1997, the insurgency ended following the signing of the CHTs Peace Accord between the Jana Samhati Samiti, representing Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Bangladesh. The Peace Accord largely remains unimplemented.

I. Increased Human Rights Violations Largely with Impunity under the Interim Government of Dr Yunus and Non-Implementation of the CHTs Accord

On 18 September 2024, the Indigenous hill tribe students under the banner of the “Sanghat O Boishamyo Birodhi Pahari Chhatra Andolan” (Anti Conflict & Discrimination Tribal Students Movement) organised “March For Identity” at Khagrachari demanding constitutional recognition of their identities, inquiry into corruption in the local councils created for the hill tribes, implementation of the 1997 CHTs Peace Accord, etc. About 40,000 Indigenous Peoples, unseen in the history of Indigenous Peoples in the region, participated in the protest.

This protest by Indigenous students rattled the Bangladesh Army who had been given a free hand to administer the CHTs since 1975. On 19-20 September 2024, the illegal Bengali settlers and Bangladesh Army launched an organised attacks 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 Bengali settlers specifically targeted shops and other business establishments of Indigenous Peoples and Buddhist temples. In these attacks, 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 properties including Buddhist temples were looted, destroyed or set ablaze. Allegedly, the police stood by and did not come to the aid of the Indigenous persons caught in the destruction and violence.

A number of international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, the Minority Rights Group International, International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs as well as the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights condemned these attacks on 19-20 September 2024 and demanded impartial inquiry.

On 21 September 2024, three advisors of the Interim Government visited the CHTs and formed a high-level committee to investigate the human rights violations that took place on 19-20 September 2024. On 26 September 2024, a seven-member inquiry committee headed by Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Mr Mohammad Nurullah Noori was formed and the committee was directed to submit the report within the next 14 working days.

On 30 September 2024, Mr Noori while visiting the affected areas at Rangamati told the journalists that he would submit the report to the interim government within 14 days after finding the root cause of the recent violent incidents, making a list of the victims and informing the interim government of their losses and making recommendations to prevent recurrence of such violent incidents. However, as on date, the Inquiry Commission report headed by Mr Noori has not been made public.

During the insurgency from 1975 to 1997, the Government of Bangladesh ordered only one inquiry i.e. one-man inquiry commission under retired Justice Sultan Hossain Khan in May 1992 to investigate the Logang massacre of 10 April 1990 in which 12 Indigenous individuals were killed, 13 injured, two disappeared while about 550 huts were burnt to ashes. The said inquiry commission report was never made public.

Dr Mohammed Yunus interim government failed to make the only inquiry commission it established since it came to power public.

More surprisingly, on 2 October 2024, in an interview to the Voice of America Dr Yunus stated that “elected governments later on will be able to take that (implementation of the CHTs Accord) on”. As it is a matter of urgency, we urge the interim to make a clear roadmap of implementation for the elected government to carry forward. The implementation of the CHT Accord is imperative to ensure peace for the Indigenous Peoples who have suffered for too long.

II. Exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from Reform and Other Processes

The Interim Government headed by Dr Yunus also excluded Indigenous Peoples and religious minorities from the constitutional reforms processes by failing to include a single member of Indigenous Peoples and religious minorities into the Constitutional Reforms Commission. On 30 October 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk 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”. However, the Interim Government did not pay any heed.

A recent incident further shows the urgency in recognizing Indigenous Peoples and ensuring the respect and implementation of their rights, incurred in January, 2025 when Indigenous Peoples were brutally attacked when staging a protest due to the fact, that the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh removed the artwork with the word "Adivasi" (Indigenous) from the back cover of the ninth and tenth-grade Bangla Grammar and Composition textbook on 12 January 2025 after facing protests from a group of Islamic students. When Indigenous students went to protest on 15 January 2024 in front of the NCTB office in Dhaka, they were attacked by the Islamic fundamentalists, and at least 20 Indigenous students were injured. The police remained mute witnesses.

The attacks on the Indigenous Peoples inside the CHTs region i.e. at Dighinala and Khagrachari on 19 September 2024 and at Rangamati on 20 February 2024 following the protest on 18 September 2024 and in front of the NCTB office in capital Dhaka on 15 January 2025 show that Indigenous Peoples cannot exercise their right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly in Bangladesh.

We urge the UN Human Rights Council to intervene with the Interim Government of Bangladesh headed by Dr Mohammed Yunus to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, and the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the constitutional reform processes.

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