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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection of
Minorities

Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Geneva

29 July - 2 August 1985

Statement submitted by Ven. Aggavansa Mahathera on behalf of the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Madam Chairman,

I, Aggavansa Mahathera, a Chakma Buddhist monk from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, would like to draw the attention of the Members of the Working Group to the plight of the indigenous nationalities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

On 15 February 1972, the people of the CHT sent a delegation led by Mr. Manabendra Narayan Larma, to the Bangladesh leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, asking for regional autonomy and retention of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 to safeguard their political, economic and cultural rights. He rejected their demands and told them "Do away with your ethnic identity, go home and become Bengalis". This statement highlights the government's policy towards the indigenous people who are ethnically, religiously and culturally distinct from the Bengalis. All Bangladeshi rulers pursued this policy designed to Bengalise and to Islamise the CHT. The present regime of Gen. Hossain Mohammad Ershad denies even the existence of these indigenous nationalities. In a submission to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1983, the official Bangladesh delegate asserted that "the entire population of the territory which now comprises Bangladesh has always been and still is one people - the Bangladesh nation Bangladesh is a country with a homogenous population".

The government is depriving the tribal people of educational facilities in all fields. For example, Sweden has established a polytechnic at Kaptai to educate the local people in science and technology yet only 3 to 4 places out of 250 places are offered to the tribespeople every year. The para-medical training centre at Rangamati admits only a few tribal students. Sweden closed down the Forest Development Training Centre at Kaptai as the government refused to employ tribal people. Similarly the numbers of tribal students in medical, engineering and agricultural institutions are minuscule. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the tribal students to pursue their studies because they are often arrested, detained without charge or trial, tortured and even murdered. The tribal girl students are kidnapped, raped and made pregnant by the Bengali soldiers.

The Bangladeshi regime is persecuting the indigenous people for their religious beliefs. Numerous Buddhist temples have been looted, desecrated and destroyed. The monks are detained, tortured and murdered. For example,

1. A Bengali settler named Mohammad Ali built his house forcibly on the land of Mr. Dukhya Ram Chakma, 22, of Amtoli Adam in Merung Thana. On 31 December 1984, this Bengali set fire on his house and then complained to Lt. Hatem, a Bengali military officer of the Chongra Chari camp, that the local tribals burned his house. Lt. Hatem called the local tribal leader, Mr. Indrajoy Karbari, 58, and ordered him to pay Taka 10,000/- to the Bengali settler as compensation.

2. The Bengali settlers also forcibly occupied the land of Mr. Jugen Chakma, 44, of Chota Merung in Merung Thana. On 31 December 1984, the local tribal leaders - Mr. Guna Dhar Chakma, Mr. Hriday Ranjan Chakma, Mr. Surendra Chakma, Mr. Nihar Bindu Chakma and Mr. Bimal Kanti Chakma went to Merung police station to protest against the forcible occupation of tribal land. The Bengali Officer-in-Charge did not take any actions against the Bengalis. Instead he arrested these innocent tribal leaders on charges of arson and sent them to Khagrachari jail.

The root of the crisis in the CHT is that the government wants the land only for its co-religionists and not the people of the CHT because of their different race, religion and culture. The military regime is bent on solving the crisis simply by killing the indigenous people. Their survival is totally dependent on the help of the international community. I appeal fervently to you to take the following measures in order to protect the people of the CHT from the violent Bengali invasion.

1. Immediate release of all tribal people imprisoned in jails and detention centres in different parts of Bangladesh.
2. Immediate removal of all non-tribal settlers from the CHT.
3. Immediate withdrawal of all Bangladesh armed forces including the non-tribal police force from the CHT.
4. Retention of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 and constitutional provision restricting the amendment of the Regulation.
5. Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts with its own legislature and recognition of the Chittagong Hill Tracts People's right to self-determination.
6. Deployment of the United Nations peace keeping force in the CHT and supervision of the said operations under the auspices of the UNO.

Thank you for lending me your ears. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Anti-Slavery Society for helping me to participate in this conference.

'Sabbe Satta Sukhita Bhabantu'

'Let All Living Beings Be Happy'

Aggavansa Mahathera
(Chakma Rajguru)

on 22 February 1979, the Bangladesh army ransacked the Buddhist temple at Pujgang, 20 miles north of Khagrachari, shot at the holy image of the Buddha, broke its head with rifle butts, and then played football with the head. Rev. Aniruddha Bhikkhu and Rev. Rebata Bhikkhu were beaten severely with the result that the former had suffered a serious head injury and the latter had the right hand broken.

On 27 December 1979, Ven. Ajara Bhikkhu and Ven. Bannitananda Bhikkhu of the Buddhist temple at Thakujujama Kalak in the Kachalong valley were hacked to death by the Bengali soldiers.

During the massacres in the Kalampati Union on 25 March 1980, the Bangladesh army and the Bengali settlers plundered and destroyed many Buddhist temples and murdered many monks. A parliamentary investigative team confirmed that the Buddhist temples at Betchari, Tonghapara, Chotadulu, Baradulu, and Tripuradighi were completely destroyed and that those at Headmanpara, Poapara, Rangeipara, Kashkhalimukh Para, Kachukhali, Chela Chara, Roazapara, Hatirpara etc. were heavily damaged. The Bengalis broke up the Buddha's statue at Poapara Buddhist temple and then played football with the broken pieces. A few monks survived and they were left for dead. Ven. Pannasara Bhikkhu and Ven. Wannasara Bhikkhu of Roazapara Temple had their hands broken. Ven. U Chandra Griya Bhikkhu, 60, of Chaityaraja Buddhist temple at Kashkhalimukh Para, had his head injured and both hands broken.

The Bengali soldiers stripped a Buddhist monk of the temple at Kattali, 70 miles north-east of Rangamati, slaughtered a cow on his saffron robes and sprinkled blood on the holy image of the Buddha.

On 11 August 1983, Ven. Bodhipal Bhikkhu of Banavihar temple at Jedamachyachara, near Panchari, was beaten mercilessly. He fled to Agartala in Tripura State of India as he could not bear military oppression anymore.

During the government-directed massacres in the Bhushanchara Union within Barkal Thana on 31 May 1984, Ven. Bodhi Ratna Bhikkhu, 78, of Janakalyan Bouddha Vihar at Bhushanchara, Ven. Jyotipal Sramana, 58, of Gorasthan Samaj Bouddha Vihar at Gorasthan, and Ven. Jyotipal Bhikkhu, 73, of Banarupa Bouddha Vihar at Chotaharina, were beaten severely. The temples were looted and the holy images of the Buddha were broken into pieces. The monks sought refuge in Mizoram State of India.

International Fellowship Of Reconciliation (IFOR) has disclosed that the Bangladesh armed forces occupy the Buddhist places of worship forcibly. The Buddhist temple at Maischari, 40 miles north of Rangamati, for instance, was occupied forcibly by the Bangladesh armed police for eight months. The intruders reviled the monks, slaughtered a cow on their saffron robes and smeared the image of the Buddha with blood.

IFOR has also revealed that the Bangladesh army prevents the people from practising their own religion. The Buddhist shrine at Chitmanara, 20

about 10,000 fled into the surrounding forests.

On 30 June 1984, the Bengali settlers were prompted by the Bangladesh army to forcibly reap the Chakmas' rice crops. When the tribals resisted, the Bengali soldiers emerged from concealment and launched attacks on several tribal villages named as Chota Harina, Bara Harina, Chedoa, Garjan Tali, Suguri Para and Maudong. More than 300 Chakmas were murdered. The captured tribals were divided into three groups - old and young men, elderly women, and young women. Men and old women were shot dead. The young women were raped freely, some of them were killed and some were converted to Islam. About 13,000 tribal refugees crossed into Mizoram State and many thousands of others took refuge in the adjacent forests.

About 4100 tribal refugees have been settled in two camps at Tibira Ghat and Tagalak Bak in Mizoram. The other refugees were pushed back to the CHT by the Mizoram Administration. They could not return to their villages because the Bengali settlers have already occupied them. Now these uprooted tribal people have taken refuge in the upland forests in the CHT. Their fate is not known. Survival International has reported that "the situation of the refugees currently resident in Mizoram State, India, is far from satisfactory". Many young and aged members of the group died due to meagre diet and scarcity of medicines.

Survival International has revealed that the Bangladesh army pursued a scorched earth policy in the Gaba Chari region in the Subalong valley mostly inhabited by the tribal slash-and-burn (Jhum) cultivators. During a month-long operation, between 20 September and 19 October 1984, the Bengali soldiers destroyed six villages, namely, Bar Kalak, Othyal Chara, Harin Hat Para, Mong Chari, Shivram Para and Bamer Subalong. Houses were burnt, crops were destroyed, harvests were taken, and villagers were evicted from their ancestral homes. It is, perhaps, noteworthy that the scorched earth policy has characterised the government's activities in the tribal homeland for many years.

On the orders of the highest authorities of Bangladesh, the Bengali soldiers and the Bengali settlers rape hundreds of tribal women everyday. For instance,

1. On 31 October 1984, Miss Chikonbi Chakma, 16, daughter of Mr. Padma Kumar Chakma of Kalabanya in Mahal Chari Thana, was raped by 4 Bengali soldiers in front of her father. Then she was taken to the local military camp. She was not released despite her parents' request to the camp commander.
2. On 14 January 1985, the members of the Bangladesh Rifles of Dewan Para BDR camp surrounded the house of Mr. Shombu Nath Chakma of Dewan Para in Matiranga Thana and raped his daughter, Miss Jhurongini Chakma, 17.

In complicity with the Bangladesh security forces, the Bengali settlers occupy tribal lands forcibly. The tribal farmers are punished if they complain to the authorities against the Bengali settlers.

miles south of Rangamati, is the holiest of all places in the CHT and the Buddhists from every corner of the district have gone there for pilgrimage. The Bangladesh army has set up a checkpoint on the way to the shrine. People going there are asked for identity cards (special cards are required only of the tribal people) and thoroughly searched. Women are raped. Harassment has increased to such an extent that very few people dare visit the shrine.

The military junta has made a secret plan to force the tribal people to become Muslims. With the financial help of Saudi Arabia, it has built an Islamic Preaching Centre and an Islamic Cultural Centre at Rangamati for this purpose. The government is also building hundreds of Mosques throughout the CHT while it is destroying hundreds of Buddhist temples with equal measures of zealotry. The Bangladesh security forces harass the tribal people and then offer them financial inducement and also freedom from oppression if they embrace Islam. Mr. Probodh Chandra Chakma, 52, of Mara Chengi within Naniachar Thana, for example, was harassed on 1 October 1984 and then enticed to become a Muslim with offer of money and freedom from oppression. Now he lives in serious mental agonies.

The government has secretly circulated a letter to all military officers now stationed in the CHT encouraging them to marry tribal girls with a view to assimilating the indigenous people. As a consequence, the Bangladesh armed forces kidnapped thousands of tribal women and forced them to become Muslims and to marry Bengalis. For instance, Miss Sukrabala Chakma, 18, daughter of Mr. Lochonya Chakma, of Prodeep Para, Jurmarong within Khagrachari Thana, was taken away from her home at gun point by the Bangladesh Reserve Police of Bhaibonchara police camp on 7 August 1984. She was forced to become a Muslim and to marry a Bengali policeman from Comilla against her will.

On 25 October 1984, the Bengali soldiers of Thalchara camp attacked the house of Mr. Gulchoga Chakma, 33, of Jadugachara within Naniachar Thana and told him that Bengali sperms must be infused into the wombs of tribal women so that they give birth to children of Bengali origin. Then they raped his wife until she became unconscious.

I earnestly appeal to you to protect the political, economic and cultural rights of the indigenous population of the CHT. Thank you for giving me a patient hearing.

'Sabbe Satta Sukhita Bhabantu' 'Let All Living Beings Be Happy'

Aggavansa Mahathera
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Madam Chairman,

I, Aggavansa Mahathera, a Chakma Buddhist monk from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, would like to draw the attention of the Members of the Working Group to the precarious situation of the indigenous people of the CHT.

All successive rulers of Bangladesh have unleashed a reign of terror in the CHT, the traditional homeland of 13 mongoloid tribes who profess Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, and cultivate Tibeto-Burman culture. However, conditions for the indigenous people have worsened since Gen. Hossain Mohammad Ershad has seized power by overthrowing the elected government of President Abdus Sattar. The present military regime is persecuting the tribal people more ruthlessly than its predecessors. It has sealed off the area and deployed over 125,000 military and para-military personnel, one unit of the Bangladesh navy and the entire Bangladesh air force to exterminate the local people systematically on the one hand and to settle over half a million outsider Bengalis in their place on the other. As a result of the government-directed violence, about 185,000 tribal men, women and children died and the pogrom is continuing unabated.

On 31 May 1984, the members of the Bangladesh army and the Bengali settlers mounted a series of attacks on the tribal villages - Ludibash Chara, Ujyang Chari, Suguri Para, Het Bharia, Gorasthan, Bhushan Chara, Garjan Tali and Dhanu Bak - within Barkal Thana, resulting in 69 deaths. Most of the victims were women and children and they were murdered most brutally. For example,

1. Mrs. Sneha Bala Chakma, 35, wife of Mr. Mohan Chakma of Suguri Para, was raped by many attackers. She was bleeding profusely. Then she and her 1 year old son, Nanda Kumar Chakma, were killed with bayonet charges.
2. Mrs. Nila Mukhi Chakma, 33, wife of Mr. Boli Mohan Chakma of Suguri Para, was raped by many invaders. She was bleeding profusely. Then the soldiers charged her with bayonets through the bleeding private parts of her body and shot her in the breasts.
3. Miss Chaya Rani Chakma, 14, daughter of Mr. Dalam Chakma of Suguri Para, was raped by many soldiers. She was bleeding profusely. Then she and her mother were thrown into the fire.

The Buddhist temples were looted and the monks were beaten severely. Some 5,000 tribal people sought refuge in the Indian State of Mizoram and