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Intervention by

Mangal Kumar Chakma, Information and Publicity Secretary, PCJSS

Agenda Item 7

Special Rapporteur's study on the status of implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts
Accord of 1997

Thank you, Madame Chair, distinguished Government delegates, honorable indigenous sisters and brothers,

I, on behalf of PCJSS, ~~signature~~ political party of indigenous Jumma peoples which signed Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord in 1997, would like to take this opportunity to thank Special Rapporteur on the Study on the status of implementation of the CHT Accord of 1997 Mr. Lars-Anders Baer for his excellent study report.

It is worth mentioning that CHT Accord was signed aimed at resolving the CHT problem through political and peaceful means. It paves the way for the peace, development and opportunities to meaningful engagement of indigenous peoples in the CHT.

Though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina bagged *UNESCO Houpet-Felix Boigny Peace Award* in 1999 for signing this Accord, but unfortunately, only a little of the Accord was implemented during her three year and eight months tenure (1996-2001). The main issues on which preservation of the status of tribal-inhabited region, functioning of special governance system in CHT involving CHT Regional Council and three Hill District Councils, resolution of land disputes, de-militarization of the region depend, are yet to be implemented.

Since assuming power by the present Grand Alliance Government of Bangladesh in January 2009, government has been reiterating its election commitment to fully implement the CHT Accord. In the meantime, government took few steps towards implementing the Accord, but these were basically reconstitution of some committees and appointment to some posts.

Almost two and half years have passed since the assumption of state power by the present government, but effective measures are yet to be taken for implementation of the main provisions of the Accord. A few examples are as follows-

Firstly, CHT Regional Council (CHTRC) Act and three Hill District Council (HDC) Acts were passed in 1998 as per CHT Accord, but these Acts are yet to be executed fully and

hence the CHTRC & HDCs introduced under the special governance system is yet to be institutionalized. No important administrative powers ensuring limited self-rule were transferred to HDCs.

Secondly, withdrawal of the temporary camps is yet to be carried out and the time-limit for this purpose is yet to be fixed. Rather, "Operation Uttoron" (operation upliftment) under the command and control of the army was imposed in 2001. Consequently, the military was vested with sweeping powers to control affairs in the CHT as in the pre-Accord period.

Thirdly, Land Commission was formed and its function for resolution of land disputes is yet to be started. CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act was passed in 2001, but it contained 23 issues contradictory to CHT Accord. These are yet to be amended. In addition, Chairman of Land Commission declared to conduct land survey violating CHT Accord.

Fourthly, Task Force was formed and tribal refugees were repatriated as per 20-point package facilities. But all lands of returnee refugees were not returned and internally displaced Jumma families remained to be rehabilitated. Rather, there was an attempt to include the Bengali settlers as IDPs violating the CHT Accord.

Lack of sincere political commitment to implement the CHT Accord on the part of the government in addition to continuing de facto military rule, and hostile bureaucracy both civil and military are the main elements hindering the implementation of CHT Accord. Until and unless withdrawal of all temporary camps and de facto military rule 'Operation Uttoron' from CHT region are made, restoration of peace and stability and implementation of CHT Accord will be difficult to achieve.

Finally I, on behalf of the PCJSS, endorse the recommendations of the study report made by Mr. Lars-Anders Baer. I also urge UNPFII to endorse these recommendations for the sake of effective implementation of CHT Accord.

It is unfortunate that the implementation of the Accord remained confined to rhetoric and commitment by the present government including honorable Prime Minister, but in practice there has been no real progress to implement the Accord. I urge government of Bangladesh to take effective initiatives for implementation of CHT Accord as per recommendations of Mr. Lars-Anders Baer by declaring a roadmap with a time-frame without any further delay.

Thanks you Madam Chair.