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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
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Agenda item 3

**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL,  
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING  
THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Written statement\* submitted by Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network  
(AITPN), 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.

[20 February 2008]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Bangladesh: The Army attacks Buddhism to facilitate illegal settlement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

The army, which is the de facto ruler of Bangladesh, have been increasingly targeting Buddhism to facilitate illegal settlement of the plain settlers into the lands of the indigenous Jumma peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs). The government's action is part of the ongoing and long established State policy to establish a homogenous Bengali Muslim society; a policy that implies the destruction of the identity of the indigenous Jumma peoples through a process of illegal and often violent implantation of the Bengali Muslim settlers.

### **i. Arrest of Buddhist monk, Reverend Arya Jyoti Bhikkhu**

On 14 January 2008, the Bangladesh Police arrested Reverend Arya Jyoti Bhikkhu, Head Priest of Sarnath Arannyo Kuthir, a Buddhist temple at Karallyachari in Khagrachari Hill district of the CHTs, after a settler, Abdul Majid, son of late Akad Zaman from Karallyachari cluster village, filed a First Information Report (No. 1 of dated 11/1/2008) under sections 143, 447, 379, 427, 506 and 109 of the Bangladesh Penal Code. The complainant accused about 500 indigenous peoples including Rev Aryo Joti Bhikkhu and Late Tumbo Chakma of committing offences of unlawful assembly, theft and destruction to private properties. In reality, it appears that these indigenous Jummas were making temporary houses to accommodate the Buddhist monks and the devotees within the temple premise. Reverend Arya Jyoti Bhikkhu was later released on bail.

The district authorities also initially banned the religious gathering of the indigenous Buddhists at at Sarnath Arannyo Kuthir on 25 January 2008. On 21 January 2008, the Additional District Magistrate of Khagrachari Mr Manindra Kishor Majumder in a communication (je.pra.kha/je.em/tin-75/2008-63) ordered the Officer-in-Charge of Mahalachari Police Station area to issue show cause on the headmen and Karbaris (traditional village chiefs) of Karallyachari area as to why they had failed to notify the administration about the religious programme. However, the religious programme was allowed to take place following a meeting with the indigenous leaders.

### **ii. Series of attacks at Buddhist temples and Buddhist monks**

Recently, the army personnel and the civil administration have targeted various Buddhist temples across the CHTs. In August 2007, illegal settlers and the Bangladesh army personnel tried to take over the lands of the Sadhana Tila Buddhist temple of Babuchara area under Dighinala upazila in Khagrachari district.

On 12 September 2007, Khagrachari district authorities banned the "*construction of new Mosque, Hindu temple and Buddhist temple*" in Mahalchhari sub-division without prior permission of the authorities. While the order does not specifically target any religious group, given the long history of well documented evidence of violations against the Jumma peoples the political reality is that the order is targeted at the indigenous peoples and their religion i.e. Buddhism.

On 5 November 2007, Major Qamruzzaman, Commander of Babuchara zone, summoned Sneha Moy Chakma and Santosh Jibon Chakma to his camp and ordered them not to use

loudspeakers during the celebration of the *Katina Chivor Danotsav*, the Buddhist festival that follows the end of the rain retreat of Buddhist monks.

On 31 December 2007, a group of army personnel led by Captain Soheli, Commander of Shuknachari Indra Singh Karbari Para camp of the Bangladesh Army, demolished Bhujulichuk Kuthir, a Buddhist meditation centre in Lakshnichari Upazila in Khagrachari district. Captain Soheli threatened witnesses on a prior attack that : “*We will not tolerate any Buddha house here; we want only Allah's house*”.

On 17 January 2008, the Commanding Officer of Baghaihat zone in Rangamati district threatened Reverend Dwip Bongshaw Bhikkhu, the Head Priest of Bishwa Moitri Bouddha Vihar at Hazachara village in Baghaihat. The Commanding officer threatened to demolish the temple if the priest did not leave.

### **iii. Forcible land grabbing for illegal settlement**

The fundamental reason behind attacks at the Buddhist temples across CHTs is clear: to acquire the lands of the indigenous peoples. Indigenous Buddhist Chakmas and Marmas usually live in and around their temples. Once temples are destroyed the area can be more easily cleared for illegal plain settlers.

Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) stated that it is in possession of a letter dated 19 November 2007 issued by Md. Sulut Zaman, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA). It orders the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachari district to illegally settle 812 families into the lands of the indigenous Jummas at Babuchara area, Baghaichari mouza under Dighinala upazila (sub- district) in Khagrachari district.

There are many other recent incidents of forcible land grabbing. During March 2007-November 2007, a total of 399.22 acres of land belonging to 133 Jumma individuals and a primary school in 14 villages under four Unions of Mahalchari police station and Khagrachari Sadar police station under Kagrachari district have been illegally and forcibly grabbed by the illegal plain settlers with direct help from the army.

In addition, the government is presently at the final stage of acquiring 9,560 acres of land for the purpose of expansion of Ruma Garrison in three Mouzas of Galenga, Pantola and Sengum under Ruma Upazilla in Bandarban. Out of the total land to be acquired, 1,569.06 acres belong to the indigenous peoples and 4,000 acres belong to the Forest Department. The project will lead to displacement of 4,315 indigenous persons from 644 families. Way back in 1988, a joint study team of Bandarban District Administration and the Bangladesh Military stated that the project would be disastrous for the local indigenous peoples.