

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Genève, July 28, 1994

Statement of the Japan Committee on CHT Issues

Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I also would like to express my congratulations on your re-election as Chairperson of this Working Group. I'd like to read a shortened version of the statement prepared and entrusted to me by the Japan Committee on Chittagong Hill Tract Issues (JCCHTI), which indicates the growing concerns among Japanese citizens about the situation in the CHT.

The Japan Committee on CHT Issues was born in November 1993 out of the experience of a number of NGOs and individuals in Japan who organized a protest campaign concerning the Logang massacre in April, 1992. It is a national coordinating body for 130 NGOs and individuals who are concerned about the human rights situation in the CHT.

In July last year, we tried to send our own study team to the CHT in order to gather first-hand information on the human rights situations there. The Bangladesh government, however, ignored our request for permission to visit the CHT. In February this year, we requested the Embassy of Bangladesh in Tokyo to give us permission to send our members to the CHT to observe the repatriation of Jumma refugees from Tripura, India. But, again, our request was turned down. They alluded that no human rights organizations were allowed to enter the area, and they refused to issue to our organization not only permission to visit the CHT but also a visa to enter Bangladesh.

The JCCHTI also organized a letter and petition campaign on the Naniachar incident last November and lobbied several concerned agencies both of Bangladesh and Japan. When the Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited Japan last March, we handed to her through a member of the Japanese parliament our joint statement, signed by several NGOs, on the human rights situation in the CHT.

It is regrettable that the Japanese government still continues to offer a huge amount of Official Development Aid (ODA) to those countries which seriously violate basic human rights. Though the Japanese government pays a superficial lip-service to human rights from time to time, it has been turning a blind eye to its ODA being used to oppress the indigenous people in the CHT. Japan has long been the biggest donor country to Bangladesh and is the biggest contributor to the Asian Development Bank, which has been helping the Bangladesh government to carry out various so-called "development" projects in the CHT that actually have the effects of uprooting the Jummas and integrating them into the lower strata of the mainstream Bengali society.

We are not urging the Japanese government to stop all the ODA to Bangladesh, but are requesting that Japanese ODA should be used to upgrade the lives of those in real need and the discriminated. More specifically, we are requesting that the Japanese government should use its ODA for the resettlement of the Bengali settlers in the plains to facilitate the return of the Jumma refugees from India. We also believe that if the Bangladesh government shows a serious intention to faithfully keep the promise they made with the leaders of refugees regarding their repatriation, the Japanese government could increase its ODA to Bangladesh.

In order for the Jumma refugees to settle back in the CHT again, the Bengali settlers, who are now occupying the Jumma people's ancestral lands, need to be moved back to the plains. The resettlement of the Bengali settlers in the plains requires a huge amount of funding. It is inconceivable that the Bangladesh government has enough financial resources for this resettlement. The government, however, has not yet made any request for foreign aid neither for the repatriation program of the Jumma refugees nor the resettlement program of the Bengali settlers. That makes us seriously doubt whether the government has a sincere and serious intention to carry out the promise they made with the leaders of the refugees.

We have received reports from various sources that many of the refugees who returned to their village are still unable to get back to their farmlands and homesteads which are occupied by the military and Bengali settlers. Very few of them received the aid for their rehabilitation as promised by the government.

We sincerely hope that the CHT issues will be solved peacefully and justly. We request the Government of Bangladesh to continue the negotiation with the Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) in good faith and recognize the Jummas' ancestral rights. We also request the Government of Bangladesh to allow us to visit the CHT. Until the CHT is demilitarized and all the refugees return to their ancestral lands, we will continue our campaign.

In conclusion, we would like to urge the Working Group to listen to the appeal of the Jumma people and give your warm support to them, in particular to their request for the Working Group to request the Sub-Commission to send a special rapporteur to Naniachar and Logang as well as to their request for the involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross in the repatriation and rehabilitation of the refugees.

And, Madam Chair, we sincerely hope that the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will lead to an effective mechanism rather than a mere verbal statement.

Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to present our statement.

(presented by Prof. Takemasa Teshima, Adviser to the Shimin Gaikou Center, Japan)