

PUBLIC

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UA 276/08 Medical concern/Torture/Legal concern

BANGLADESH Rang Lai Mro (m), indigenous community leader

Indigenous community leader Rang Lai Mro, who is serving a jail sentence imposed after an unfair trial, is being refused medical treatment for a serious heart condition. He is the head of a community of indigenous Mro people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), in the south-east of the country, and is held in Chittagong District Jail. He is at risk of having a heart attack any time.

He was arrested in February 2007, charged with possessing a pistol without a license. Four months later he was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment for the offence, though his lawyers had produced evidence in court that his pistol was licensed. His lawyers have since claimed that they were not allowed to produce any witnesses at the trial. He is believed to have been targeted because, as the head of a local NGO, *Mrochet*, working to improve the facilities available to the Mro people in the region, he had protested to the army about the security forces' December 2006 efforts to evict hundreds of Mro families to make way for an army training centre in a remote part of the Bandarban Hill District. According to his lawyer, he had been preparing a petition for the authorities about the situation of Mro people in the area, and the army's action in driving them out of their homes.

After his arrest he was severely beaten by army officers in custody at the local army headquarters, Bandarban Cantonment. This torture has never been investigated. He had to be treated in Bandarban General Hospital, where doctors found he had suffered a heart attack. He was sent back to jail without appropriate medical treatment. In October 2007 his health further deteriorated, and he had to be treated in hospital, where doctors said he needed treatment in a hospital with better equipment, but he was once more sent back to jail, without any improvement in his health.. He still has not received appropriate medical treatment for his heart condition and other medical complications, and his health continues to deteriorate.

The government has transferred over a dozen prisoners needing specialist attention to well-equipped hospitals so far this year, but Rang Lai Mro has not been one of them. Some of these prisoners have even been allowed to go abroad for treatment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The present government is a caretaker administration in Bangladesh backed by the army. Army personnel have been involved in arbitrary arrests, torture and deaths in custody, but enjoy a climate of impunity.

The CHT borders Myanmar and India, and is home to 13 indigenous tribes, including the Mro. The government has been attempting to settle non-tribal Bengalis in the region since the early 1970s, which led to armed resistance in the mid-1970s. A peace accord signed in 1997 ended the armed conflict, but the CHT has remained heavily militarized.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Bangla or your own language:

- expressing concern that imprisoned Indigenous community leader Rang Lai Mro has a serious heart condition which requires immediate and sustained medical management, and that the authorities have failed to provide him with this treatment;

- urging the authorities to allow Rang Lai Mro to receive appropriate medical attention in a hospital equipped to provide specialist treatment for his heart condition;
- expressing concern that he has been tortured, and is at risk of further torture;
- urging the authorities to order investigation by an independent, impartial and competent body to on the torture of Rang Lai Mro and the authorities' negligence of his deteriorating health, and bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Prime minister (equivalent)

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed

Chief Adviser

Office of the Chief Adviser, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 8113243

Email: info@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Chief Adviser

Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser on Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs

Raja Debashish Roy

Building No. 4, 6th Floor

Bangladesh Secretariat

Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Email: devasish59@yahoo.com

Salutation: Dear Mr Roy

Adviser to the Chief Adviser

Dr ASM Matiur Rahman

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Bangladesh Secretariat

Building No. 2, 3rd floor

Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 7169077

+880 2 9571301

E-mail: minister@bd.com

Salutation: Dear Dr Rahman

COPIES TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 October 2008.