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Bangladesh

Harassment of leaders of the indigenous people

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Amnesty International is concerned about reports that four leaders of Bangladesh's indigenous populations – three of whom are from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) – have become the targets of official harassment and intimidation for demanding the fulfilment of the indigenous peoples' rights. According to newspaper reports, Mangal Kumar Chakma, Mrinal Kanti Tripura, Ina Hume and Albert Mankin are to appear before the parliamentary Standing Committee on the CHT Affairs Ministry in Dhaka for comments they made at the United Nation's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in May 2005.

A summons to this effect is reportedly being prepared by the standing committee. It is believed to have been prompted by allegations sent to the committee through the Bangladeshi diplomatic mission in the United States alleging that the statements of the indigenous leaders contained anti-state references. The committee has said that if the indigenous leaders did not provide satisfactory answers, legal action would be taken against them.

Amnesty International has studied the statements of the indigenous leaders to the above-mentioned UN forum and has found nothing outside the remit of their fundamental rights to express their political views freely and peacefully. The issues they have raised are fully compatible with the purpose of the UN forum and with the provisions of the CHT peace accords, which were signed in December 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh and representatives of the CHT tribal people. Their demands for the implementation of the provisions of the peace accords amounts to nothing more than a legitimate criticism of the government's failure to fully abide by its obligations within the ambit of the Peace Accords.¹

The issues raised by the indigenous leaders and the manner in which they have been voiced at this UN forum are fully in line with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which the Government of Bangladesh is a party. In particular, they fall within the ambit of Article 2 of ICCPR which states:

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

The standing committees' plan to summon the indigenous leaders may amount to a politically motivated measure aimed at suppressing the peaceful expression of their critical views.

¹ For a detailed study of the peace accord and its human rights implications in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, see: *Bangladesh: Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (AI Index: ASA 13/001/2000) published by Amnesty International in February 2000.
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA130012000?open&of=ENG-BGD>

The tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have for long been the targets of massacres, arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial executions during the years of armed conflict (mid-1970s to 1997). The signing of the peace accord between the Government of Bangladesh and tribal representatives in December 1997 appeared to provide assurances that their civil and political rights as well as their economic, social and cultural rights would be respected. However, seven-and-a-half years after the signing of the accord, the Government of Bangladesh has failed to implement fully some of the most crucial provisions of the accord. These include the rehabilitation of all returned refugees and internally displaced families, settlement of land confiscated from the tribal people during the conflict, withdrawal of non-permanent army camps from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and transfer of power within the provisions of the peace accord to the local CHT administration.

Tribal people continue to be the targets of mass attacks by Bengali settlers apparently aided by army personnel with impunity.² The government has failed to prevent these abuses or to bring those perpetrating them to justice.

Amnesty International's recommendations to the Government of Bangladesh:

- ensure that the four indigenous leaders (Mangal Kumar Chakma, Mrinal Kanti Tripura, Ina Hume and Albert Mankin) are not subjected to harassment and intimidation for comments they have made at the United Nation's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 2005;
- ensure that the fundamental rights of Bangladesh's indigenous people, including the tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tracts, to express their views peacefully within and outside Bangladesh is respected at all times;
- ensure that provisions of the peace accord, which promise to enhance the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights of the tribal people of the CHT are fully implemented;
- ensure that reports of human rights abuses against the indigenous people are investigated by an independent and impartial body, and those found responsible are brought to justice.

What you can do: Please write to the following authorities in Bangladesh in support of Amnesty International's recommendations:

1. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia: Office of the Prime Minister, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880-2-811 3244, 811 3243,
e-mail: pm@pmobd.org, pstopsecy@pmobd.org, psecretary@pmobd.org

2. Mohammad Mosharaf Hossain, MP, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Bangladesh National Assembly, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Fax: +880-2-8823702

3. Mani Swapan Dewan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Building No. 4, 6th Floor, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880-2-956 5300

E-mail: mochtadh@btb.net

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² For example, no rigorous investigation has been carried out and no one has been brought to justice for an incident on 24 July 2005, when dozens of tribal villagers were reportedly subjected to severe beating and ill-treatment by the army personnel at Fakinala Nee Aung Karbari Para under Manikchari sub-district in Khagrachari. See also *Bangladesh: Chittagong Hill Tracts, a call for justice at Mahalchari* (AI Index: ASA 13/003/2004) published by Amnesty International in March 2004. No has been brought to justice for the human rights abuses against the indigenous people cited in this report. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA130032004?open&of=ENG-BGD>