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Call for the Implementation of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation

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24 September 2024

TO:

Dr. Mohammad Yunus, Chief Advisor, Interim Government of Bangladesh

Dr Asif Nazrul (Interim Government Advisor for Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs)

Supradip Chakma (Interim Government Advisor for Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Dear Mohammad Yunus,

I, Mercè Monje Cano, write to you in my capacity as the Secretary General of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) during this critical period of political transformation in Bangladesh. I am writing to express my concern about the future of the peoples of the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) and request the full implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord.

I am confident that the recent political changes taking place in Bangladesh, marked by the departure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the establishment of the interim government under your leadership, present a pivotal moment for the nation. As your government undertakes the significant

task of reforming key institutions and guiding Bangladesh towards a new Bangladesh, we urge you to prioritize the full implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord.

The UNPO is a collective of over 40 communities from across the world who are denied the right to self-determination that have come together in solidarity to advocate for the voices of unrepresented nations and peoples. The Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh has been a member of the UNPO since 1991. Since then, the main organization representing rights of the indigenous peoples of the CHT at the UNPO has been the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS). Given our close relationship with the peoples of the CHT and the PCJSS, I extend this request on behalf of the PCJSS and the peoples of the CHT.

The 1997 CHT Peace Accord, signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), was a landmark agreement aimed at restoring ethnic peace and recognizing the distinct identity and rights of the indigenous peoples of the CHT laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and peaceful society. By addressing long-standing grievances and promoting dialogue, the Accord aimed to strengthen Bangladesh's democracy and ensure that peace and justice extend to all corners of the country, benefiting every citizen and reinforcing the nation's commitment to democratic principles and human rights.

Unfortunately, nearly 27 years later, the promises of the Accord remain largely unfulfilled, with two-thirds of its provisions still pending implementation as has been underlined by the international community on several occasions including the recent during the recent visit in 2022, of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. On this occasion, she was barred from visiting the CHT and raised concerns about continued human rights violations, land disputes, and the need for demilitarization in the CHT. These issues have since continued to be echoed by many in the international community. In her statement, she called for the full implementation of the Peace Accord and unrestricted access for independent actors to visit the area. The UNPO shares these concerns and stresses the urgent need for transparency and international oversight in the CHT.

The UNPO expresses its further concern over the recent developments involving violent attacks against the Jumma People in the CHT – particularly in the Dighinala area. These violent attacks have resulted in many homes and local shops being burned to the ground, the death of at least four, several others injured, and many being forced to flee. Although military personnel were present during the attacks, they did not intervene to diffuse the situation and prevent the attacks against the indigenous people in Khagrachari.

We understand that the interim government's tenure is limited. However, we believe it is crucial for your administration to bring the CHT Peace Accord back onto the national agenda, specifically within the priorities of the CHT Regional Council and three Hill District Councils. These councils, as outlined in the Accord, were designed to play a central role in the administration and development of the CHT region, and we urge you to ensure it is empowered to take immediate and meaningful steps towards completing the implementation of the Accord.

The current political transformation offers a unique opportunity to address these longstanding issues. By reinvigorating the process of implementing the CHT Peace Accord, your government can take significant steps towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. This would not only fulfil

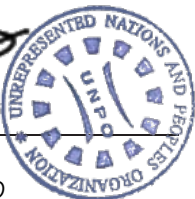

the commitments made to the indigenous peoples of the CHT but also strengthen Bangladesh's position as a country that respects and upholds the rights of all its citizens. The aforementioned attacks evidently illustrates the vulnerability of the Jumma People living in the CHT and the pressing need for the government to effectively implement the Accords for their protection.

We respectfully urge you to take the necessary actions to ensure that the CHT Peace Accord is fully implemented. This includes empowering the CHT Regional Council and three Hill District Councils to carry out its mandated responsibilities and engaging in constructive dialogue with the indigenous communities of the CHT. Your leadership during this transitional period could pave the way for a more inclusive and harmonious Bangladesh, where the rights of all its peoples are respected and protected.

The UNPO stands ready to assist in facilitating dialogue between the interim government and representatives of the Jumma people. We are open to engaging in discussions and are fully at your disposal to help coordinate meetings aimed at addressing the most urgent aspects of the Peace Accord's implementation. We believe that a direct and constructive conversation between your government and the indigenous communities is essential for making meaningful progress during this transitional period.

We look forward to seeing positive developments in the near future and stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely yours,



Mercè Monje Cano

UNPO Secretary-General

