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and Protection of Minorities

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GENEVA

Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 12th Session, 25-29 July, 1994

A statement made by the Jumma delegation on behalf of the Jumma Nation, the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh.

Madame Chairman, Honourable Members of the Working Group and friends,

Thank you for your permission to submit my statement. I, Ramendu Shekhar Dewan, am a Jumma from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh. It is hoped that my report will make some contribution to the understanding of the Working Group about the developments in the area in the past one year.

There is a Passenger Shed at the Launch Ghat (pier) of Naniachar Bazaar. The Military Authorities have been using it as a checkpost to detain, harass, rape, torture and even murder the Jumma passengers and passers-by including the Members of the Hill Student Council (HSC), who are stepping up their campaign for the restoration of the Jumma Nation's right to self-determination. Naturally, the HSC appealed to the Local Authorities to withdraw the Military checkpost from the Passenger Shed and restore it to the public. Having its genuine demand rejected by the Local Authorities, the HSC called a protest meeting at Naniachar Bazaar with the permission of the Local Authorities on 17 Nov., 1993. The Bangladesh Government sees the HSC as a thorn in its flesh and so it seized the opportunity to crush the latter once and for all and directed the local Military, Police and Civil Authorities to massacre the Jumma students at the meeting.

As per the instructions of the Government, the Local Authorities mobilised the Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators to help them carry out the massacre so that the blame did not fall on the Government. At first, the Muslim settlers attacked the unarmed Jumma students with knives, spears, sharp weapons, iron bars and wooden & bamboo sticks. Then they attacked the Jummas in the Bazaar, in the Jumma residential areas of the Bazaar and on motor launches & boats. Naniachar Bazaar is surrounded by the Kaptai Lake on three sides. When the Jummas tried to flee along the only land route, the Military and Police personnel shot at them. Many Jummas tried to flee by swimming across the lake but the Muslim infiltrators followed them by boat and hacked & clubbed them to death. The massacre continued from 4.15 p.m. to 11 p.m. To cover up the massacre, most of the dead bodies were thrown into the lake but the bullet-hit bodies were burnt to ashes because the Government wanted to conceal the evidence that its Security Forces had participated in the mass-killings. Initially, the Local Authorities told the Pressmen that only five people were killed and a few.....page /2-

a few scores injured. After a couple of days, some bodies were washed ashore and the Local Authorities had to admit that nineteen people were murdered. In fact, atleast sixtythree Jummas were slaughtered, over five hundred injured, many of them seriously, and many still unaccounted for. So the death-toll should be much higher. The Local Authorities also stopped the supply of electricity to hospitals to let the injured Jummas die without medical treatment. The massacre was so well-planned and so well-executed that the Military Commander of Naniachar, Lt. Col. Abu Nayeem sent a wireless message at 6-30 p.m. to Maj. Gen. Azizur Rahman, the General Officer Commanding of the Chittagong Division of the Bangladesh Army, saying gleefully - "The Naniachar massacre has been committed nicely".

Under massive world-wide public pressure, the Government had to appoint Justice Habibur Rahman to investigate the said massacre and had to promise to make his report public within a month after the occurrence of the mass-killings. Despite repeated requests by various human rights groups, it has not yet published the report indicating that it is still attempting to cover up the massacre. It may be recalled that the Government has never published the original report on the Logang massacre of 10 April, 1992, investigated by Justice Sultan Hossain Khan. I, therefore, appeal fervently to you to send out a UN Special Rapporteur to Naniachar and Logang so that the Bangladesh Government cannot get away with all the massive ethnic-cleansing crimes it has been committing against the helpless Jumma people as part of its sinister policy what its Military Leaders publicly declared - "We want only the Land and not the People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts".

The Government is dragging its feet on the negotiation with the Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS). It was promise-bound to give its final opinion on the modified demands of the JSS at the Fifth Round of the Dialogue held on September 18, 1993. But it failed to keep its promise even at the Seventh Round which took place on 5 May, 1994, confirming that it has no intention to find a negotiated solution. Doubtless, the Government is not negotiating with the JSS in good faith and it is talking with the JSS just to placate the donor countries. Perhaps, it is worth-mentioning that the Bangladesh Security Forces are breaking all the terms and conditions of the ceasefire by attacking the Members of the Shanti Bahini (SB), the armed wing of the JSS, by setting up new Military camps, by bringing in more Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators and by perpetrating incessant atrocities on the innocent Jumma people. Needless to say, the peace-loving JSS is strictly adhering to all ceasefire agreements despite all forms of provocations from the Government side and is sincerely continuing the Dialogue in the face of the Government's refusal to meet its genuine demands.....page /3-

demands.

379 Jumma Refugee families were repatriated from the Tripura State of India to the CHT region of Bangladesh in February last on condition that the Government would implement its 16-point Benefit package immediately after their repatriation. On 25-29 April, 1994, an evaluation team consisting of three Indian Officers and eleven Jumma Refugee Leaders visited the CHT to evaluate the situation of the repatriated Refugees. It found that the Government had not yet fulfilled most of the commitments given to the Jumma Refugees before their repatriation. For example, most of the Refugees could not get back their ancestral villages and agricultural lands as the Bangladeshi Security Forces and Muslim settlers were refusing to vacate those Jumma villages and farmlands. The Refugees have also not yet received the agricultural grant of Tk.8,000/- per family, the subsistence allowance of Tk.5,000/- per family, job facilities, admission to educational institutions and so forth. In these circumstances, the Jumma Refugees desperately need the involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross in their repatriation and rehabilitation.

I would like to thank you once again for giving me an opportunity to read out my statement and also for lending me your ears.

1. Ramendu Shekhar Dewan

Dated            July, 1994