

10 May 2017

Sheikh Hasina Wazed

Hon'ble Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Prime Minister's Office, Old Sangsad Bhaban, Bir Uttam Ziaur Rahman Rd
Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh

Re: Calling for judicial investigation into Romel Chakma's death

Hon'ble Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned indigenous peoples and human rights organizations, **call for immediate judicial investigation into the death of Romel Chakma** after alleged brutal torture at the hands of Bangladesh Army. Further, we urge you to **ensure delivery of effective justice** for the death, including compensation for Romel Chakma's family and stringent penalty for those responsible.

19-year old Romel Chakma from Hatimara village of Burghat Union in Naniarchar Upazila, Rangamati was visually impaired in his right eye. He was a young rights activist working for the recognition of the ethnic identity and rights of the indigenous tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. He was taking Bangladesh's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination that began on 2 April 2017.

As per reports, officers of 305 Infantry Brigade led by Major Syed Tanvir Saleh of Bangladesh Army arbitrarily arrested him on 5 April 2017 on his way back home from Naniarchar Bazaar. Then, he was taken to the Naniarchar Zone Headquarters where the Major and Lt. Col. Bahalul Alam allegedly tortured him. When his condition deteriorated, the army tried to hand over the dying student leader to Naniarchar Police Station but they did not accept him due to his critical state.

Afterwards, the army tried to get him admitted to Naniarchar Upazila Hospital for treatment, which transferred Romel Chakma to Chittagong Medical College & Hospital on 6 April. He succumbed to his severe injuries on 19 April while undergoing treatment. All along, the army did not allow the family members to even see him. Following his death, an unnatural death case was filed with Panchlaish Police Station in Chittagong the same day.

In the night of 20 April, the police handed over Romel Chakma's dead body to his relatives in Naniarchar bazaar. However, immediately after, army officers came and forcibly took away the body from the relatives while they were taking the body home by boat. The body was kept at a shop in Burighat bazaar under army custody the whole night. The army took the body to the jungle 2kms off the bazaar the following day and burnt it to ashes with petrol. Azgar Ali, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Kawkhali Upazila and also Naniarchar Upazila in-charge, Major Zaki Ahmed and Major Zaki Ahmed Chowdhury of Naniarchar Army Zone, a local headman, two Upazila members and two uncles of the deceased were present when the body was burnt in the presence of a Buddhist monk, whom the army had picked up from Mohalchar of Khagrachari. Thus, **Romel was cremated without proper funeral and religious rites.**

Lt. Col. Mohammed Rashidul Hasan, Director of Bangladesh's Inter Services Public Relation Directorate, on 22 April 2017, confirmed that the army had arrested Romel in connection

with two cases filed over torching a truck and looting two buses. However, he also claimed that Romel was handed over to Naniarchar police the same day, which the Police Station in-charge has denied saying that they only took Romel's dead body after post mortem on April 19. Hasan also falsely asserted that Romel's funeral was undertaken in presence of his family members in Hatimar village under police supervision.

Romel's death has sparked protests across the country with various student organizations and political bodies calling for actions against those responsible. On 23 April, Rangamati Police has begun investigation into the death but only focusing on identifying the cause of death. However, even after almost three weeks since the death, **Bangladeshi authorities have not ascertained the cause of death – let alone identifying and arresting those responsible.**

In relation to an application of Kanti Chakma, Romel's father, to Bangladesh's National Human Rights Commission filed on 6 April demanding justice over his son's arbitrary arrest, the Commission, on 23 April, has formed a three-member fact-finding committee under Commissioner Banchita Chakma on Romel's death to submit its report within 15 working days.

Various civil society and human rights organizations and student groups have also condemned the unlawful arrest and death of Romel due to torture and demanded, among others, a judicial investigation into the death. So, we hereby join in **calling on the Government of Bangladesh for immediately undertaking a judicial investigation into Romel's death in an independent and fair manner.**

We would also like to note that this is not the first time Bangladesh army has been alleged for torture and killing an indigenous person in Chittagong Hill Tracts. In August 2014, Timir Baran Chakma also reportedly died from injuries due to army torture in Khagrachari district. After the post-mortem, his body was also burned to ashes after the army declared it "unidentified" and the report was never revealed.

We thus strongly urge that adequate mandate and authority for judicial investigation into Romel's death should be provided so as to ensure that all facts relating to the death are examined and revealed. The investigation should lead to effective justice for the death, including moral and financial compensation to the family and penalty against the culprits.

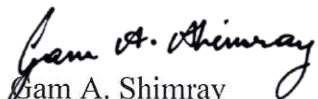
Torture killings are among many other abuses, including arson, sexual violence, extra-judicial killings, that the Bangladesh army allegedly undertakes in Chittagong Hill Tracts, where majority indigenous populations live. **This is particularly concerning as Bangladesh army is one of the armies of the world that make the most contributions to the UN Peacekeeping Operations.** Hence, we would like to remind that **the Government of Bangladesh is obliged to effectively investigate and redress for such abuses as per its national and international human rights obligations.**


Finally, we would like to note that the undersigned organisations are not alone in our concerns on the abuses against and insecurity of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. During the recent United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April 2017, the Danish government, among others, shared such concern in its statement, which reads, "*The situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts continues to give rise to concern. Reports of attacks – often with impunity – on indigenous peoples are not uncommon. This causes instability,*

insecurity and uncertainty. Denmark continues to follow developments closely and remains hopeful that peace and security will become a reality in Chittagong Hill Tracts.”

We thus hope for your positive consideration to this letter and look forward to your urgent action on the matter.

Sincerely


Gam A. Shimray
Secretary-General
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)


Julie Koch
Director
International Work Group on Indigenous
Affairs (IWGIA)

Also, on behalf of following organizations

1. CHT Indigenous Jumma Association Australia (CHTIJAA), Australia
2. Bangladesh Jatiyo Hajong Sangathon, Bangladesh
3. International Council for the Indigenous Peoples of CHT (ICIP-CHT), Bangladesh
4. Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA), Cambodia
5. Organization for the Promotion of Kui Culture (OPKC), Cambodia
6. Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA), Cambodia
7. Indigenous Peoples Rights Active Member (IRAM), Cambodia
8. Borok Indigenous-Tribal Peoples Development Centre (BITPDC), India
9. Borok Peoples Human Rights Organisation (BPHRO), India
10. Jharkhandis Organisation for Human Rights (JOHAR), India
11. Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), India
12. Naga Women Union (NWU), India
13. Adivasi Women's Network, India
14. Beldih Gram Sabha, India
15. Jharkhand Adivasi Vikas Samiti (JAVS), India
16. Indigenous Women Forum of Northeast India (IWFNEI), India
17. Indigenous Peoples Forum, Odisha (IPFO), India
18. The Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans (ACSILs), Japan
19. Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), Malaysia
20. All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC), Myanmar
21. Arakan Rivers Network (ARN), Myanmar
22. Community Empowerment and Social Justice Foundation (CEmSoJ), Nepal
23. Nepal Indigenous Disabled Association (NIDA), Nepal
24. National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal, Nepal
25. Youth For Environment, Education and Development Foundation (YFEED Foundation), Nepal
26. Indigenous Women Legal Awareness Group (INWOLAG), Nepal
27. National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF), Nepal

28. Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), Nepal
29. Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), Philippines
30. KATRIBU Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas, Philippines
31. BAI Indigenous Women's Network, Philippines
32. Papora Indigenous Development Association, Taiwan
33. Papora Indigenous Youth Council, Taiwan
34. Taiwan Association for Rights Advancement of Pingpu Plain Aborigine Peoples, Taiwan
35. Central Taiwan Ping-Pu Indigenous Groups Youth Alliance, Taiwan
36. Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT), Thailand
37. Centre for Sustainable Development in Mountainous areas (CSDM), Vietnam
38. Vietnam Indigenous Knowledge Network (VTIK), Vietnam

Letter sent via email to

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- **Bir Bahadur U Shwe Sing**, Hon'ble State Minister, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Building: 4, 6th Floor, Secretariat, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh, Email: info@mochta.gov.bd
- **Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury**, MP, Hon'ble Speaker, Parliament of Bangladesh, West Block, Room No. 521, Level -5, Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat. Email: speaker@parliament.gov.bd
- **Advocate Md. Fazle Rabbi Miah**, MP, Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Bangladesh, South - West Block, Room No. 423 -424, Level -4, Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat. Email: deputy.speaker@parliament.gov.bd
- **Kazi Reazul Hoque**, Chairman, National Human Rights Commission, BTMC Bhaban (8th Floor), 7-9 Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh, Email: nhrc.bd@gmail.com, info@nhrc.org.bd
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