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Parbatya Chattagrani Jana Santhati Sarni i

(United Peoples Party)

Central Office: Kalyanpur, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh
Tel: +88-0351-61248, E-mail: pejss.org@gmail.com / pejss@hotmail.com Web: www.pejss-cht.org

Item 3

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Forum on Minority Issues

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Agenda — 3 Respecting Minority Rights as a means of preventing or mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises

StateMent by:

Tit inad Chakrna

<trijinadchakmal5@gmail.com>

Parbatya Chattagrani Jana Samhati Samiti (POW)

Honourable Chairperson, distinguished delegates, indigenous and minority representatives,

The agenda "Recovering from a crisis: ensuring durable solutions" is of serious concern to indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, as we are daily confronted by conflicts and humanitarian crisis in our homelands.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is one of crucial regions in Bangladesh in terms of conflicts and humanitarian crisis. Indigenous Jumma peoples of the CHT have regularly spoken about their problems relating to conflicts, militarization and population transfer perpetrated upon them since 1970s.

The indigenous Jumma peoples have been struggling for decades long to safeguard their national existence and to establish right to self-determination. After a long struggle, they have compelled the government of Bangladesh to engage in negotiations resulting in the signing the 'CHT Accord' on 2nd December 1997 in order to resolve the CHT crisis through peaceful and political means. The CHT Accord had ended the decades long fierce armed conflict between the Jumma peoples and government of Bangladesh.

However, many crucial provisions of the CHT Accord, including on de-militarization, self-rule government, return of lands forcibly taken over by settlers, rehabilitation of Jumma refugees and internally displaced families, mixed policing, preservation of Jumma-inhabited characteristics of CHT region and so forth, remain unimplemented. Although the former PCJSS guerillas have laid down their arms, a sustainable peace and recovering from the crisis is yet to be achieved and hence durable solutions is also yet to be ensured.

The Jumma people are still under military rule through the Operation Uttoron (Upliftment) which was imposed in 2001 after signing the CHT Accord. Under this Operation Uttoron, the military forces can commit any kind of atrocity with impunity. Hundreds of military camps still remain in CHT, and non-indigenous settlers continue to illegally and forcefully occupy

our lands with the support of the government and the state military. In the recent past, they committed 18 large-scale communal attacks even during the post-Accord period after 1997. It is observed that the non-implementation of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between indigenous peoples and States is a source of conflict. This is also true in Bangladesh, where CHT remains largely un-implemented. This is a cause of the continuance of conflict situations.

With this backdrop, in order to recovering from the on-going crisis and ensuring durable solutions in the CHT, I, on behalf of indigenous Tamma peoples, would like to appeal to the international community including UN Forum on Minority Issues to influence the government of Bangladesh for:

- Demilitarization of the CHT region through withdrawing all temporary camps and de facto military rule 'Operation Uttoron'.
- Rehabilitation of Bengali settlers outside CHT with dignity.
- Declaration of a timeframe road map for the speedy, proper and full implementation of the CHT Accord.

Thank you Honourable Chair.