

Letter of Appeal to Mr. Junichiro KOIZUMI, Prime Minister of Japan

Through: Mr. Nobutaka Machimura
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of Japan
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Tel: (03) 35803311
Date: 13.....July, 2005

Subject: Appeal to review the Japanese ODA policy on the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and take positive action on Chittagong Hill Tracts issue.

Honourable Prime Minister,

The Jumma People's Network-Japan, an organisation of the indigenous Jummas in exile in Japan, supported by the Japanese NGOs attached herewith, is writing to seek intervention of the government of Japan to save the ethnic identity of indigenous Jumma peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Majority of the indigenous Jumma peoples are Buddhists, followed by the Hindus and Christians and they are facing onslaught of the majority Muslims.

We have been constrained to write to you because of the sponsored population transfer of reportedly 65,000(According to UPDF source) Muslim settler families in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, forcible eviction of 300 Jumma families after burning down the villages, increasing land grabbing for militarisation to facilitate the sponsored settlement of the Muslim settlers and providing of free rations to the 28,000 settlers families in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Kindly allow us to draw the attention of the situation as to why we are seeking the intervention of the government of Japan.

I. Ethnic Cleansing in the CHT

The government of Bangladesh has planned to settle 65,000(sources of UPDF) Bengali families in Sajek Union in Rangamati district. As part of the plan the government has already constructed a road from Baghaihat to Sajek to facilitate the settlement and set up army camps in the area to ensure safety of the settlers.

Since 23 June 2005, the Bangladesh Rifles have forcibly evicted about 300 indigenous Jumma families after destroying their houses in Devachari, New Lonkor, Old Lonkor, Halimbari and Chizhok villages in Sajek Union under Rangamati district for settlement of

the plains settlers. The destruction of the villages continues and majority of the settlers will be settled in Baghaihat-Sajek road in the dense Kassalong reserve forest. Between 1979 and 1983, the government of Bangladesh had settled about 500,000 plain settlers in violation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts 1900 Regulation. The plain settlers conducted over a dozen massacres to grab the lands of indigenous tribal peoples.

The transfer of 65,000 Bengali Muslim families which is about 400,000 persons with each family consisting of 6 persons will increase the population in the CHT by 25%. All these Bengali settlers will be settled in Rangamati district and they pose the most serious threat to the indigenous Jumma peoples. The government of Bangladesh consistently and rightly sponsored resolutions and voted against the settlement of the Israelis in the Palestinian territories. But, back home in the CHT, the government practices similar population transfer policies.

II. Land grabbing spree

The Bangladesh security forces continue their militarisation programme mainly to facilitate the settlement of Bengali settlers.

1. The government acquired 9,650 acres of land in Bandarban for the expansion of Ruma garrison. On 22 March 2005 the government surveyed the area and put up poles marking the acquired land.

The government acquired the land despite protests from local people. The move will displace approximately one thousand families belonging to ethnic people such as Murang, Tripura and Marma. Most of them practice Jum cultivation in the area.

2. The government has planned to acquire 183 acres of land in Balaghata in Bandarban district for the expansion of army brigade headquarter.
3. The government has already acquired 11,446.24 acres of land in Sualok Union of Bandarban in the name of an Artillery Training Centre, uprooting 4 hundred indigenous families. Each family was provided a paltry sum of Taka 3 - 8 thousand as compensation.
4. A process is now underway to acquire 26,000 acres of land in Bandarban for the construction of a training centre for the Bangladesh Air Force. The proposed site falls in Sualock Union of Bandarban as well as in Lama Thana.
5. A plan to acquire 19,000 acres of land in Bandarban for the expansion of an Artillery Training centre is now under consideration.
6. In Chimbuk of Bandarban a total of 5,600 acres of land have been acquired in the

name of constructing an Eco Park.

(Sources of ACHR, please see the website provided later part of this appeal)

7. A process is now underway to acquire 5,500 acres of land in Sangu Mouza of Bandarban district in the name of creating an “Abhoyarannyo” (animal sanctuary).
8. A process is underway to lease away 40,071 acres of land in Lama, Nikkyong Cahri, Alikadam and Bandarban Sadar to private individuals for rubber and tea plantation.
9. The government issued land acquisition notices for the purpose of construction of a battalion headquarter for the Bangladesh Rifles in Babuchara in Khagrachari. It seeks to acquire 45 acres of land belonging to the Jumma people.
10. In Pujgang of Panchari under Khagrachari district the army acquired 450 acres of land after destroying the villages of the Jumma people. The army is now constructing a cantonment on the illegally occupied land.

The above instances of land grabbing in various pretexts are not exhaustive. We continue to receive report of such incidents.

III. Providing free ration to more new Settlers

A larger majority of the plain settlers have no means of survival. The UNDP and Government of Bangladesh in their Joint Risk Assessment Report stated:

“The pervasiveness of poverty is also signified by the large number of Bengali families who have continued to receive rations since the 1980s. The number of households is currently 28,200, which at around 5.5 persons per family equals almost 140,000 persons or over 10% of the current population. On the spot checks reveal that many migrant villages in land constrained conditions, strive to receive rations, because no rice can be grown there. A question should be raised how long one can maintain some 10% of the population on rations. An inquiry should reveal whether local livelihoods are truly unsustainable and deserve long term food support and whether other solutions should be sought.”

Article 28 of the constitution of Bangladesh prohibits discrimination based on “religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and allows the government to take “special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.”

If indeed government wanted to take any affirmative programme for “any backward section of citizens”, it should have been targeted towards the indigenous Jumma peoples who have been displaced from their homes. Instead, the government of Bangladesh provides free food rations only to the plain settlers - who in the first place displace the indigenous Jumma peoples, grabbing the lands and resort to serious human rights violations. This clearly violates Article 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh and Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to which Bangladesh is a party.

If the government sponsors settlement of 65,000 Muslim settler families in the CHTs, they will be once again provided free rations by the government.

IV. The issue of the Peace Accord of 1997

The Chittagong Hill Tracts in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh is home to 11 ethnic nationalities, who are collectively known as Jumma people. Before the colonization by the British in 1787, the CHT enjoyed almost independent status free from outside control, except paying Carpas (Raw cotton) as revenue to Mughal Sultans and then to the British in exchange for Sovereignty(Naeem Mohaimen,"Chittagong Hill tracts:Peace in our Time", The Daily Star, Nov.26,1997). When the Indian subcontinent was divided into two states, India and Pakistan in 1947, the CHT was awarded to Pakistan against the will of the Jumma people. It became a part of Bangladesh in 1971, when East Pakistan seceded from West Pakistan and formed a new state.

The successive governments of Bangladesh refused to recognise the separate identity of the Jumma people and pursued a policy to turn the CHT into a Bengali majority area. This resulted in massive militarization of the area and settlement of 500,000 Bengali people from different plain districts of the country. Human rights violations became the order of the day. Since 1980 more than a dozen massacres took place resulting in the death of hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent Jumma people. Naturally, popular resistance to these policies of the government developed under the leadership of the Jana Samhati Samiti which ultimately signed an Accord with the Government of Bangladesh on December 1997. The accord was also opposed by a sustainable portion of the Jummas who continued campaign for full Autonomy. Seven years have passed, since signing the Accord, but peace in the region is still far cry.

The present policies of the government of Bangladesh have thrown the CHT Accord of 1997 out of the window. The Awami League led government was not serious about its implementation. The present Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led alliance government opposed the CHT Accord while in opposition and staged a so-called Long March from Dhaka to CHT demanding cancellation of the Accord. The BNP government has not only put spanner in the process of implementation of the Accord, it also stepped up repression of the Jumma people.

Appeal

Japan is one of the major donors to Bangladesh. Its aid and grants are crucial for the economy of Bangladesh. While we are aware of the humanitarian aspect of the aid given to Bangladesh, it is essential that the government of Japan ensures that its aid and grants do not directly or indirectly help the government of Bangladesh to sustain its policy of ethnic cleansing of indigenous Jumma peoples. We are apprehensive that the grants and aid to Bangladesh might be used to settle 65,000 Bengali families in Sajek, contributing to the displacement of the ethnic Jumma people. And even if the money is not directly spent on expansion of Bengali settlement, it will render internal resources of Bangladesh free to be used for the purpose.

Therefore we would like to make the following appeal to your government:

- a. Review the appropriateness of ODA policy against Bangladesh and work on the Bangladesh government to abandon its plan to settle Bengali families in Sajek Union under Rangamati district and stops grabbing lands in various pretexts as explained earlier;
- b. Review the appropriateness of ODA policy against Bangladesh and work on the Bangladesh government to cancels the programme of providing free rations to 28,000 Muslim settler families who were brought by the government between 1978 to 1983 in the CHTs;
- c. Urge the government of Bangladesh to respect and observe international standards of human rights and stop all form of repression on the members of the Indigenous Jumma activists, particularly those who have been campaigning for legitimete rights of the Jumma ethnic minorities of Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh;
- d. Urge the government of Bangladesh to restore land rights of the Jumma people by withdrawing the military camps and state-sponsored Bengali settlement built on the lands of Jummas peoples;
- e. Pressure the Bangladesh government immediately stop further forcible eviction of Indigenous Jumma peoples and ensure proper rehabilitation of the evicted Jummas in their own land at Devachari, New Lonkor, Old lonkor, Halimbari and Chizok region of Rangamati Hill district of Bangladesh;
- f. Bring an end to government-sponsord and politically willfull settlement of the non-Indigenous Bengali Muslims into the predominantly Indigenous Chittagong Hill Tracts(CHT); and provide fund to rahabilitate them properly outside CHT.
- g. Presure the government of Bangladesh to start fresh dialogue with the leaders of all factions of the Jumma peoples for permanent political solution of CHT problem..

We remain,

Chichikko Chakma-President,

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NGOs supporting are:

<u>Jumma Ayumukai</u>	<u>http://www.ihope.jp/jumma.htm</u>
<u>Jumma Net</u>	<u>http://jumma.sytes.net</u>
<u>Mori no Tame no Kai(MTK)</u>	<u>http://www015.upp.so-net.ne.jp/ayukawa19/index.htm</u>
<u>Shimin Gaikou Centre,</u>	<u>Contact:kimuramakiko@hotmail.com</u>
<u>Japan CHT Committee,</u>	<u>http://www.thirdculture.com/jpa/jcc/index.html</u>
<u>CHT Kodomo Kikin</u>	<u>http://cht-kodomo.hopto.org/%7Ekodomo</u>

Sources:

1. Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)
2. United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) website:www.updfcht.org
3. Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR) website:www.achrweb.org
4. Jumma Peoples Network-United Kingdom, Website:www.jpnuke.org.uk
5. Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, Website:www.unpo.org
6. Japan's Country Assistance Programme for Bangladesh-Interim report
7. Drishtipat:Voice for Human rights in Bangladesh, Website:www.drishtipat.org
8. Bangladesh rights Network, website:www.banglarights.net
9. News from Bangladesh, Website: www.bangladesh-web.com
10. Various organizations and individual of the jummas Worldwide

