



*An NGO supporting the indigenous Jumma Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*  
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Honorable Ambassador, Ashraf-ud-Doula,  
Bangladesh Embassy, Tokyo

May 12<sup>th</sup> 2008

Subject: Request for investigation of Sajek arson incident and relief for victims

Dear Sir,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the tragic arson attack that occurred in Sajek Union of Baghaichari sub-district in Rangamati district on April 20th 2008 from around 9:30 PM until early the next morning. According to local sources, a group of more than 100 people assaulted 8 villages inhabited by indigenous Jumma peoples, looting and burning down at least 77 Jumma houses. We have heard that a place of worship, 2 schools operated by UNICEF, and several dozen huts built by Bengali settlers were also burnt down. The victims rendered homeless are in a desperate situation, some remaining hiding in the forest for fear of further attacks.

The attacked villages, Nursery Para, Daney Bhaibachora, Bamey Bhaibachora, Purbopara, Balughatpara, Retkaba, MSF Para and Gongaram Mukh, are in a reserve forest area under jurisdiction of the Forest Department, but the indigenous peoples have lived there for many years as shifting cultivators according to their customary law. Bengali settlers had moved into the area in recent years, and tensions had been increasing, especially since this March when Bengali settlers started to arbitrarily construct huts in close proximity to Jumma dwellings.

According to a citizen's investigative team of Bangladeshi human rights workers and journalists who interviewed both Jummas and settlers in the affected area on April 28th - 29th, many of the Jumma victims claimed that they had witnessed military personnel among the attackers, whereas the Bengali settlers claimed that a group of outsiders wearing black clothes and masks, rather than local people, had carried out the attack.

The affected area has many army check posts and camps strictly monitoring people's movements, so we wonder why the military was unable to stop the attack before so much damage was done. The citizen's investigative team also noted that, except for in Gangaram Mukh, huts built by the Bengali settlers remained standing among Jumma dwellings that had been burnt down, suggesting that they had been selectively set on fire. From these circumstances, we are deeply concerned that the attack was most likely premeditated with the intent of evicting the Jumma peoples and grabbing their lands.

In light of the above, we call upon your government to take the following measures.

1. Establish an independent and impartial Judicial Inquiry Commission, required to publish its report within a fixed time period; prosecute and provide exemplary punishment to those found responsible for the attacks;
2. Provide adequate compensation and undertake prompt rehabilitation of persons affected during the arson attacks in Sajek Union, including reconstruction of houses;
3. To release the three persons held in the Baghaichari Army Camp;
4. To cease all Bengali settlements in Sajek Union and the three Hill Districts;
5. In accordance with the CHT Accord 1997
  - a) To activate the Land Commission, to review and settle all land disputes;
  - b) To withdraw army camps from the CHT; and
  - c) To enable full functioning of the civil administration, including through effective functioning of the CHT Regional Council.

Sincerely,

Takashi Shimosawa  
President, Jumma Net, Japan