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Minorities in situation of Humanitarian Crises
Presented by

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Iteam; Legal Framework and Key Concern

Honorable Madam Chair and distinguished participants,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present before you the case of religious and ethnic cleansing that the minorities of Bangladesh have been subjected to for decades, leading to a continuous exodus.

Minority situations, its character and nature might differ from country to country but no doubt end result of same which is being experienced by every country is the humanitarian crisis.

In Bangladesh, it is the religious, ethnic and indigenous minorities who were ruthlessly subjected to genocide and mass destruction during the nine months war of liberation in 1971. It is a matter of great regret and sorrow that even after 45 years of independence the religious, ethnic and indigenous minorities are the main target of mass atrocities. They are continuously suffering from communal persecution, discrimination, torture and deprivation in all sphere of life. They are also the main target of present terrorism which is being inspired and influenced by Islamic State, Taleban, Al-Qaida.

The Hindus, Buddhists and Christians of the country which include approximately 2.5 million indigenous peoples, are being systematically eliminated through blatant discrimination, denial of access to legal protection and violence. Acting with complete impunity, the Muslim nationalists and extremists have conducted pogroms against the minorities whenever they have wanted to, and regardless of which political party has been in power.

I am presenting below two recent incident of atrocities on minorities, one in the southern part and the other in northern part of Bangladesh which took place in the last one week i.e. from 30th October to 6th November, 2016. On 30th October in Village-Nasirnagar of Brahmanbaria District, hundreds participants of two Islamic fundamentalist rally took part in three hour attack from 11 am on Hindu's houses, temples and business establishments. They looted at least 200 houses 17 temples have been demolished. Police and local administration were silent spectators. Local parliament member Md. Sayeedul Haque, who is also a senior cabinet minister, came to his constituency after three days of the incident and abused the victims, the Hindu minorities in filthy languages and blamed the media for alleged exaggeration of the incident. Minister's statement, five days after the incident, the attackers again torched five houses of Hindus at Nasirnagar On November 4, 2016. The attack of similar type occurred in other parts of several districts namely, Barisal, Thakurgaon, Jessore, Sylhet, Habiganj, Feni, Noagaon, Manikganj, Netrakona and Faridpur. Another incident took place on 6th November, 2016 in Gobindaganj of Gaibandha District where about 1200 sauntal (indigenous) families have been evicted, their houses have been looted and burnt to ashes, four sauntals

have been killed. The eviction drive carried out by a sugar mill authority in close connivance with local Member of the Parliament Abul Kalam Azad in presence and active co-operation of law-enforcing agency. In fact, the local inhabitants of sauntal (indigenous) villages were in cultivation of the land from their previous generations.

According to eyewitness report, the eviction drive was conducted directly by the police with the backing of the ruling party Lawmaker Abul Kalam Azad. Bangladesh's leading human rights activist Sultana Kamal speaking at a rally condemning this attack: "Awami League's party men were directly involved in several communal attacks on the minorities across the country."

It may be noted that I have not included in my statement the ISIS-inspired killings of the minority priests that have occurred in the country in recent times.

A well-known researcher of Bangladesh Professor Abul Barkat of Dhaka University predicted on November 20, 2016 that at the current rate of exodus of the Hindus no will be left in Bangladesh after 30 years. The minorities constituted about 20 % of the total population but today, they constitute less than 9 % of the population.

It is the government that has robbed the minorities of their equal rights by declaring Islam as the state religion in 1988 and then reaffirming it by the currently ruling secularists in 2011 through the 15th Amendment to the constitution. Successive governments seized 2.8 million acres of land from the minorities.

Honorable chair, and distinguished participants, since the campaign of religious & ethnic cleansing is happening in Bangladesh with the direct or indirect support of the government, and since it is not happening due to war or conflict, it can easily be stopped by the government. The ruling Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina can stop this vicious campaign by taking the following measures:

1. Restore the 1972 constitution thus restoring equal rights for all citizens.
2. Enact a Hate Crime & Speech Law; and, then prosecute and punish the perpetrators of crime against the minorities under those laws, so the majority group will cease to think the minorities as an expendable commodity.
3. Equal rights and Dignity
4. Empowerment and Representation
5. Elimination of Constitutional Discrimination
6. Revisit the *Vested Property Restoration Act of 2011* and include language in the legislation so that owners of properties seized by the government under the "Enemy Property Act/Vested Property Act" and/or their rightful heirs may claim their property any time in the future regardless of their residency status.

Honorable Madam chair, if you feel that the remaining 20 million religious & ethnic minorities of Bangladesh deserves to live in their ancestral homeland with human dignity enjoying the very basic human rights, please include the suggested measures in your list of recommendations.

Thank you.

Amarendra Roy

