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Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Ongoing, Reoccurring and Unacceptable “Genocidal Crime” Committed against Minorities in Bangladesh

The continuance of xenophobia and atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh demand world attention. Bangladesh not only violated its obligation under UN treaties it also ignored the obligations of Rome statute for which it is a state party [1].

The ordeal of Bangladesh minorities started in 1946 and continues till date: the 75 years of pillaging and massacres. On 10th October 1946, Islamists attacked Hindus of East Bengal, mercilessly butchering them, holding their women captive, raping and converting them [2][3][4]. These marauders massacred more than 5000 men and women and displaced 50000 to 75000 Hindus [4][5] under the watch of British governor, “Sir Frederick John Burrows”. On August 14, 1947, British India divided in two parts: India and Pakistan. Following which East Bengal was renamed as East Pakistan.

The Pakistan that born out of Islamic movement unleashed reign of terror against Hindus and other minorities in both West and East Pakistan. A series of massacres took place in East Pakistan in which law enforcement and Islamists went on rampage against Hindus. The biggest massacres of Hindus and other minorities in East Pakistan took place during 1949 [6][7], 1950 [6][7], 1964 [8] and 1971 [9]. From August 1949 to January 1950 Muslims went on pillaging Hindu women and massacred thousands of Hindus and indigenous people [6][7]. More than 3.5 million took shelter in neighbouring India to escape violence [10][11][12]. This did not stop government forces and Islamists in east Pakistan attacking Hindus and other minorities. The sporadic attacks followed by mass attacks on January 2nd, 1964 [11][12][13][14][15]. Following the continued ethnic cleansing of Hindus and Tribals, Pakistan promulgated an Ordinance (I of 1964) that prohibited Hindus to sell their property [16]. This promulgation forced Hindus to abandon their properties and escape to India during pogroms. As such, Pakistan declared property of Hindus who took shelter in India as “enemy property” [18]. Pakistan’s state sponsored discrimination against Hindus and Tribals continued, and the state used every excuse to unleash reign of terror against them. In 1971, Pakistan killed 3 million people and gang raped 400,000 women and girls (mostly Hindus) in a campaign of systemic rape [18][19][20][21][22][23][24][25][26][27] and forced 10 million (mostly Hindus) to flee East Pakistan [11][19][20][21] to neighbouring India. Nearly 30,000 women and girls who were brutally gang raped committed suicide and an estimated 170,000 received unlawful abortion [18]. It is an irony that Pakistan never been held accountable for war crimes of 1971.

This background is important to depict the plights of Bangladesh minorities across generations. There has not been any respite to ongoing atrocities and state sponsored discrimination against them even after the independence of Bangladesh. The plights continued [28]. In fact, Bangladesh also enforced Pakistan’s “enemy property act of 1965” as “Vested Property” act taking over properties of minorities that were confiscated by Pakistan” [29]. In 2001, Bangladesh enacted the “Vested Property Return Act” with a view of restoring ownership of the lost land to many Hindu families. But no records have been prepared to enforce this law, according to the study [30][31][32].

In 2008, Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM) filed a writ before Bangladesh High Court seeking proper repeal of the act [33]. Despite the pending writ and without the regards for the High court ruling, the Bangladesh government passed a controversial repeal act of 2011 [34]. In fact, it is alleged that “Awami League” (current ruling party) of Bangladesh have misappropriated Hindu land through state-authorized confiscation of Hindu land for 35 years [35][36].

In February 1972, President of the country visited refugee camps [37] in India but till date their reparation and rehabilitation are not discussed, nor any steps taken to recognize them. The UNHCR also didnot enquired about the state of their wellbeing and other allegations of forced migration [37] [38] of Hindus from Bangladesh to India.

In 1975, President Ziaur Rahman began to introduce Islamic symbolism in all spheres of national life [36]. Later in 1988, President H. M. Ershad declared Islam as State Religion [36]. These steps embolden Islamists to continue violence against minorities. Sporadic violence against minorities took place immediately followed by mass attacks in 1990 [36][37][38][39][40], 1992, 1994, 1996 [40][41][42] and 2000 [43]. In its report dated July, 2000, HRCBM comprehensive accounts of rape, abduction of Hindu women and girls, murder of Hindu men and destruction of minority properties throughout the country [43]. Further attacks continued in 2001 and 2002 [44][45]. Subsequently Amnesty International [45] also provided detailed account of atrocities against minorities during 2001 pogrom [45][46][47][48].

A series of reports published by HRCBM, and other news media indicated 15 thousands Hindus displaced in one district and hundreds of thousands in other districts of Bangladesh. Hindu women and girls were hounded throughout the country and many Hindu men were killed during the pogroms of 2001 and 2002 [49] and the attack continued to 2003. The most salient attack of 2003 was the massacre of Banskhalī in which Islamists burned alive 11 members of a Hindu family in Banskhalī, Chittagong [50][51][52]. In 2006, HRCBM filed a writ before Bangladesh Supreme Court alleging government's failure to protect Hindus, Buddhist and Tribals from ongoing eviction, torture, humiliation, persecution, rape and killing [53]. In the writ 3380 of 2006, HRCBM provided evidence of 15,000 incidents of killings, rapes, and tortures on the minorities, grabbing of their lands, and arson attacks on their houses took place since the elections held on October 1, 2001 [53][54]. Despite the favourable ruling, Bangladesh government completely ignored the ruling and did not take steps to protect minorities. In their 2006 report, the USCIRF expressed serious concern about government's reluctance apprehend criminals that encourages Islamists to prowl on minorities [55][56]. The attacks continued throughout Bangladesh again from 2011 to 2013 [57][58][59][60] in which thousands of Hindus and Indigenous people were displaced while their properties were destroyed [61].

In recent years, at least 3679 attacks took place against minority communities in Bangladesh [62]. In 2020, there have been sporadic attacks against minority across the country in which 71 people were injured, 11 houses destroyed and hundreds of houses belonging to minority community were looted [63]. On March 17, 2021 Islamists attacked Hindu villages in Shalla, Sunamganj and looted hundreds of houses and destroyed three temples in the locality [64][65]. These attacks were followed by mass attacks against Hindu communities across Bangladesh in October 2021 [66][67]. Islamists first placed Islam's holy book "Quran" at a Puja pandal and spread the rumors that Hindus have desecrated "Quran". What followed was large scale attacks against Hindus throughout the country [68][69][70]. HRCBM did an investigation across 34 districts of 64 districts. The findings were heartrending; at least 600 women and girls were sexually assaulted in a single town of Hajiganj, 15 Hindu men were hacked to death, 5 Hindu women and girls were gang raped, hundreds of houses, businesses and temples belonging to Hindu community were destroyed and looted [71][72]. Following the attack, a writ was filed at the High Court of Bangladesh seeking judicial enquiry to mass attacks of October 2021 against country's minorities [73][74]. However, government of Bangladesh requested postponement of judiciary enquiry [75].

The government of Bangladesh also concealed the findings of a prior judicial enquiry conducted by "Sahabuddin Commission" following 2001 massacres [76][77]. Till date more than 20,000 cases of atrocities against minorities are still pending in Bangladesh [78]. Additionally, Bangladesh has arbitrarily detained minority people on the false pretext of blasphemy to instigate fear among the community members and force them to refrain from sharing news of atrocities [79].

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