23 December 2015

Citizen Statement
Deep concern over decision to establish economic zone on agricultural land of Chandpore Tea Estate in Hobiganj

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned that a government authority is trying to hurriedly implement a decision to establish an economic zone on 511 acres of agricultural land of Chandpore Tea Estate in Hobiganj district. Based on our field visits and newspaper reports we have little doubt that the entire land transferred for economic zone is agricultural land. At least two crops are grown here every year. We are deeply concerned that the local administration has transferred 511 acres of agricultural land to Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) showing them as non-agricultural land.

Of 3,951 acres of land in Chandpore Tea Estate 951 acres are agricultural land. We have learned from our investigation that the ancestors of tea workers and their families who have been cultivating this land prepared this agricultural land 150 years back along with preparing land for cultivation of tea. The crops they produce in this land are important for their subsistence. There are many families cultivating this land have no work in the tea garden. These families depend on this land for mere survival. We believe an injustice will be done to the tea workers and their families of Chandpore Tea Estate if the agricultural land is transferred without properly consulting them or taking their economic fate into consideration. We have witnessed how thousands of people of tea communities, in their attempt to protect land, have been organizing massive protest rallies from 13 December 2015.

We appeal to the government to hold full-scale and open consultation with the tea workers as regards establishing an economic zone in the agricultural land that they cultivate. Economic zones are important for the economic growth of the country. However, we appeal to the government to make sure no injustice is done to the tea workers who are among the most marginalized people of the country. Just as economic zones are important for national development so is agriculture and other productive sectors. Thus we hereby also appeal to the government to initiate a larger national discussion around economic zones and wise and rightful use of land required for them.

Signatories:
1. Hossain Zillur Rahman
2. Hameeda Hossain
3. Anu Muhammad
4. Khushi Kabir
5. Shahidul Alam
6. Jyotirmoy Barua
7. Rahnuma Ahmed
8. Tanzimuddin Khan
9. Shamsul Huda
10. Hasnat Quaiyum
11. Philip Gain
Selected links to see report on the statement:


http://www.now-bd.com/manabzamin/2015/12/24/101854.htm

http://old.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2015/12/24/127262


http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/consult-workers-first-191932
