



MEDIA RELEASE

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Human rights defenders in Bangladesh face dire threats

26 June 2014 - Independent civil society groups and journalists exposing human rights violations are coming under increasing pressure by Bangladeshi authorities warns CIVICUS, the global civil society alliance. Individuals and organisations speaking out against the volatile political climate in Bangladesh which has taken a turn for the worse following the flawed January 2014 elections – boycotted by the opposition - are being subjected to various forms of persecution by state institutions.

“In recent months, Bangladesh’s government has been extremely hostile towards human rights defenders subjecting them to various forms of unwarranted surveillance and malicious prosecution,” said Mandeep Tiwana, Head of Policy and Research at CIVICUS. “Many critical voices have already been silenced while those who continue to expose violations remain severely threatened.”

Human rights advocacy organisation, Odhikar is facing serious threats to its existence. Its Secretary, Adilur Rahman Khan and Director Nasiruddin Elan are currently facing several politically motivated criminal charges for their work in documenting human rights violations. The organisation has also been subjected to various forms of intimidation including persistent surveillance of its staff and repeated inspection of its records by Bangladeshi authorities.

The Acting Editor of the newspaper Daily Amar Desh, Mahmudur Rahman is currently in custody facing several criminal charges for carrying out his professional responsibilities as a journalist and for being critical of the Bangladeshi government. Several journalists and human rights defenders are facing legal persecution under Bangladesh’s notorious Information and Communications Technology Act 2006 which was amended in 2013. The law contains a number of broad and vaguely defined provisions carrying heavy punishment of up to 14 years imprisonment for “publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form.” The law also empowers law enforcement agencies to carry out arrests without a court warrant and makes it difficult to obtain bail.

Bangladesh’s Cabinet recently cleared the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation 2014 to cut off sources of international funding for outspoken advocacy groups in a bid to silence them. The regulation, which is due to be presented in Parliament, contains a number of provisions to subject civil society groups seeking international funding in Bangladesh’s resource constrained environment to excessive government control.

Key challenges with the draft regulation include the requirement to obtain project approval from the official NGO Affairs Bureau and concerned government ministries prior to receiving international funds; power of state officials to monitor the activities of NGOs and review their progress through monthly coordination meetings; and powers to suspend the registration of NGOs and appoint an administrator to initiate dissolution proceedings. NGOs are also subjected to exhaustive reporting procedures under the draft regulation making them vulnerable to bureaucratic delays and red tape.

CIVICUS calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to exercise restraint in the country's politically charged environment and urges it to (i) cease the persecution of human rights defenders and journalists, and (ii) initiate a broad public dialogue on restoration of democratic freedoms in the country as a prelude to free and fair elections monitored by international observers.

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Notes to editors:

[CIVICUS](#) is a global network of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS proudly promotes voices from the global South and has members in more than 130 countries throughout the world.

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