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Human Rights Now

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For Immediate release

Bangladesh: HRN urges improvement of the on-going serious human rights violations

1. It has been more than a year since the harsh crackdown against human rights activists¹ was reported. Human Rights Now (HRN), a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, expresses its concerns about the serious human rights conditions in Bangladesh, and strongly requests its improvement.

(1) Over the past 10 years, RAB (Rapid Action Battalion), a special security force, has been committing systematic and grave human rights abuses including extrajudicial killings, tortures, and arbitrary and illegal arrests under the pretext of maintaining public security. According to NGOs and other independent sources, approximately 800 civilians were killed due to the involvement of RAB during the same period. However, no responsible party has been held accountable for these wrongs.

(2) On the occasion of the national general election held on January 2014, executive members of political parties including major opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), other members of opposition parties, and supporters of such parties were arrested by the thousands. In this context, all opposition parties expressed protests over unwarranted intervention by government authorities in the election campaign. Due to the boycotts of the opposition parties and their supporters, candidates belonging to or affiliated with ruling Awami League won uncontested in over the majority of constituencies². Currently, hundreds of opposition parties' members arrested face criminal prosecutions.

(3) Furthermore, HRN has concerns over illegitimate pressures imposed on civil society in

¹ http://hrn.or.jp/activity/2013/09/13/130913_BangladeshLetter.pdf

² Odhikar, Human Rights Monitoring Report: August 1 – 31 2014, Note.2, P3
(<http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/human-rights-monitoring-monthly-report-august-2014-e.pdf>)

Bangladesh. In particular, it notes that such illegitimate interfering acts have been made against human rights organizations and human rights defenders. For example, two prominent local human rights defenders, Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan (secretary, Odhikar) and Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan (director, Odhikar) were arrested due to the publication of a fact finding report concerning the killing and injury of citizens participating in a rally by security forces. While both defendants have been released on bail, Adilur Rahman Khan and Nasiruddin Elan face new allegations and continual judicial intimidation.

(4) While these human rights oppressions remain, economic and social rights for local residents are still in dire condition. Many of the local citizens do not have access to adequate housing, clean water, or other necessities corresponding with international human rights standards. Even though labor and construction-related laws and regulations have been changed since the Rana Plaza incident, the workers' situation still has not been considered. In addition, regarding women's rights, although four years have already passed since the enactment of the DV prevention act in 2010, there still remains no implementation of the act due to the disinterest of the government. It is difficult to say that the government is achieving its accountability.

2. Hence, HRN urges the government of Bangladesh to;

- Completely restructure the RAB, to incorporate civilians with a human rights focus. A special security force that targets organizational crime and terrorist organizations, must be comprised of individuals who place human rights at the core of its activities;
- Clarify RAB responsibilities and bring those who are responsible for past grave human rights violations, such as killings and injuries, to justice;
- Immediately release those who were arbitrarily arrested and detained with regards to the election;
- Cease all illegitimate pressures upon civil society, immediately end interventions against civic organizations and ensure to fully guarantee liberties for activities of human rights defenders and human rights NGOs which are recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and withdraw charges against Mr. Khan and Mr. Elan and liberate from the surveillance, intimidation, and intervention without any delay;
- Observe labor and construction laws and regulations and ensure to fully guarantee internationally established labor rights;
- Take adequate budgetary measures in order to implement the DV prevention act; and
- Improve the current circumstances where many citizens do not enjoy the rights to clean water, food, and appropriate housing, as the duty of a signatory party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

3. To international community and donors;

HRN strongly urges the international community to make encouragement efforts in order to drastically improve the human rights situations including those stated above. Particularly, donor countries which have strong influence should have a position that is to strongly request improvement of human rights situations.

There could be a potential harm if violations of human rights and democracy are ignored. Development without promoting a rights-based approach will continue the cycle of human rights violations.

Human Rights Now ~Protecting Human Rights for All~

Human Rights Now is a Tokyo based international human rights NGO comprising a body of experienced legal professionals dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights around the world, with a special focus on Asia. The activity includes monitoring/ fact-finding of human rights, human rights education and advocacy work. Human Rights Now has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since August 2012.
