



House of Lords

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Bangladesh seminar: The Roadmap to Parliamentary Elections?

Bangladesh reminded of its obligation to hold a free and fair election

A seminar attended by distinguished speakers on Bangladesh titled ‘The Roadmap to Parliamentary Elections?’ was held today (Monday 25 Feb 2008) in The Moses Room at the Houses of Lords, organised by the International Bangladesh Foundation and chaired by Lord Avebury, the Vice Chair of All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group and Chairman of International Bangladesh Foundation. The seminar was attended by MPs, MEP, Peers, Councillors and representatives of human rights organisations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Global Human Rights Defence, Jumma Peoples Network, Nirmul Committee and the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

Lord Avebury in his opening remarks said, we are concentrating on the conditions that will enable free and fair elections to be held as scheduled before the end of the year. He reminded that according to the electoral roadmap published by the caretaker government, talks with political parties were to be completed by the end of 2007, and the reforms to the laws on elections were to be passed by March. These targets have slipped. It would surely be useful if a revised roadmap were to be published with new deadlines for the remaining stages of the process.

Saida Muna Tasneem, Counsellor of the Bangladesh High Commission in London, gave a presentation and an overview of the caretaker government’s commitment to the roadmap to parliamentary elections by Dec 2008 & progress in vote registration and various reforms it has already implemented including the separation of the judiciary and the formation of independent election commission, anti corruption commission and an independent national human rights commission. Ms Tasneem called for continued support from international partners to successful completion of the caretaker government’s roadmap and reforms which was followed by respondents from Baroness Pola Uddin, Chairman, Britain-Bangladesh All Party Parliamentary Group, Anne Main MP, Chairman, Conservative Friends of Bangladesh, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Britain-Bangladesh All-Party Parliamentary Group & Vice-



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Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, Robert Evans MEP, Chair of the European Parliament's South Asia Delegation, Dr Charles Tannock MEP, Conservative Friends of Bangladesh. Vice-President, European Parliament's Human Rights subcommittee, Tim Parritt, Deputy Asia Programme Director, Amnesty International, Brad Adams, Asia Director, Human Rights Watch, Sultan Shariff, Awami League, Joshna Miah, BNP, M A Rauf, Gano Forum and Dr Ahmed Ziauddin, Bangladesh Centre for Genocide Studies, Belgium. Ms. Sally Kebble MP also attended the seminar.

In the general discussion that followed contributors from the floor included Cllr Ayub Korom Ali, former Cllr M A Rohim, BNP President Md Kamar Uddin, Communist Party of Bangladesh representative Dr Rafiqul Hasan Khan, Westminster Cllr Mustaq Qureshi, Jenny Lundstrom of Global Human Rights Defence, Lord Bew, Koysor Syed of Mukti Joddha Sangsad, Murad Qureshi, Member London Assembly, Sally Keeble MP and Simon Lever from the Foreign Office.

Speakers expressed their deep concern at the human rights abuses under the country's state of emergency and the caretaker government's failure to restrain the security forces. Other speakers raised the issue of the trial of war criminals and the failure to bring the perpetrators that has led to culture of impunity. Speakers also appreciated the various steps taken by the present government against corruption, terrorism and welcomed Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed's recent comments against the war criminals but stated that it is the duty of the government to initiate the cases and take initiatives against the alleged war criminals.

All the UK and the European parliamentarians reminded Bangladesh government as friends of a free and democratic Bangladesh, the caretaker Government should live up to its political obligation by lifting emergency rule to allow political activities and political reform. Human rights violations, lifting of emergency rule must be placed on the reform agenda as a top priority and the government must respect human rights of its citizens and ensure no torture takes place.

Lord Avebury in his concluding remarks said, "There has to be freedom of expression and of assembly if elections, are to be free and fair. Elections aren't only about having the right laws, an accurate register and impartial officials. They depend on the preconditions in the months before polling day, and crucially, on the maintenance of a peaceful environment during election campaign."

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