

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate Release  
Thursday, July 21, 2016

### **BANGLADESH: Dysfunctional justice system and increasing extremist violence**

Secular bloggers, academics, gay rights activists, foreigners and members of religious minorities including Shia, Sufi and Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists have been victims of targeted killings and many of them hacked to death. The wave of targeted killings began in 2013 and intensified since April 2016. Many of the attacks were claimed by Islamic militants. The initial response from the authorities lacked decisive action and was inefficient to prevent future attacks. In June 2016, almost within 5 days, the government arrested over 11,000 people, most young men, in connection to the spree of killings. According to the police sources only 145 of those arrested were suspected militants having a membership to militant organisations. Though this is not a sufficient evidence to show that they were connected to the brutal killings. The authorities should investigate the attacks and bring those responsible to justice, but the mass arbitrary arrests without proper evidence of a crime will lead to lack of assurance that the monstrous killings will be stopped and those responsible will be found while due process is upheld.

The initial targeted killings began in 2013, were mainly against secular and atheist bloggers. The government condemned the killings but also called for curbing the activities of the bloggers. In 2013, the authorities arrested bloggers for “hurting religious sentiments”: a phrase which is repeatedly used by the authorities including Prime Minister Sheik Hasina and Bangladesh’s Inspector General of Police after the murder of the bloggers. The attitude of the authorities indicated that “hurting religious sentiments” was a crime, not freethinking and should not be tolerated while protecting right to freedom of expression was pushed aside. In addition, the government’s crackdown on political dissent since the national elections in 2014, which left the country without a parliamentary opposition due to low voter turnout and opposition’s election boycott, involved enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings and torture. The militant and extremists groups have reorganised and become active in such an environment, which manifested itself as violent attacks against secular bloggers, minorities and foreigners in 2015. According to the reports from international human rights organisations, some arrests and prosecution of suspects lacked transparency and mainly based on confessions in custody. Given the documented track record of the authorities in committing custodial abuse, the credibility of confessions is questionable. Subsequently, the government’s response to rising extremism and attacks undermined the due process, and contributed to further alienation to be exploited by these militant and extremist groups. The situation prevails to date.

#### **Call for Action**

The scale and ferocity of the pervasive violent attacks against secular bloggers, academics, gay rights activists, foreigners and members of religious minorities including Shia, Sufi and Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists are a harrowing indication of the authorities’ failure in protecting these individuals. The failure continuously reinforces widespread impunity for the perpetrators. Therefore, Bangladeshi authorities should:

- Ensure effective protection of people who are exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of religion and engaging in peaceful activism.
- Carry out investigations in accordance with the national procedures with respect to Article 33<sup>1</sup> of the Constitution and also international human rights standards.
- Bring those responsible to justice while upholding rule of law.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/sections\\_detail.php?id=367&sections\\_id=24581](http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/sections_detail.php?id=367&sections_id=24581)

### **The timeline of violent attacks since April 2016**

- On 7 April 2016, four masked men attacked Nazimuddin Samad, 28 and hacked him with machetes before shooting him dead. Samad was a student activist and organiser of secular campaigning group on social media. Ansar al-Islam, a Bangladeshi militant group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, claimed the responsibility.
- On 23 April 2016, men attacked Rezaul Karim Siddique, 58, a university professor, with machetes as he walked to the bus station in the city of Rajshahi. Islamic State (IS) claimed to be behind the brutal killing.
- On 25 April 2016, Xulhaz Mannan, 35, the founder of Roopbaan, Bangladesh's first LGBT magazine, and his friend Tanay Mojumdar were hacked to death in Mannan's apartment by a group of attackers posed as couriers to gain access to the building. Al-Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Islam claimed the responsibility.
- On 30 April 2016, attackers hacked Nikhil Joarder, a Hindu tailor, to death in front of his shop in Gopalpur Upazila. IS claimed responsibility.
- On 7 May 2016, Mohammad Shahidullah, 65, a local Sufi Muslim leader, was found hacked to death in a secluded mango grove, the police said.
- On 14 May 2016, at least four people attacked Maun Shue U Chak, 75, Buddhist monk, and hacked him to death at a Buddhist temple in the south-eastern district of Bandarban. IS claimed the responsibility.
- On 20 May 2016, machete-wielding assailants hacked Sanaur Rahman, 55, a doctor, to death in Kushtia district. His friend, Saifuzzaman, 45, a professor of Bengali literature, was seriously wounded. According to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadist websites, IS claimed the responsibility for the attack, saying that he was killed for "calling to Christianity". Christian missionary organiser in Kushtia district dismissed the claim and said Sanaur Rahman had no relation with missionary activities, reported by the local newspapers.
- On 25 May 2016, Debesh Chandra Pramanik, 68, a Hindu businessman, was killed in his shop in Gaibandha. IS claimed responsibility while the local authorities stated that the brutal murder did not match the pattern, which was observed in the previous incidents.
- On 5 June 2016, attackers stabbed and shot Mahmuda Akter to death, the wife of a senior counter-terrorism official, outside of her house in Chittagong.
- On 6 June 2016, unidentified attackers hacked Sunil Gomes, 65, a Christian trader, to death at his grocery shop close to a church and Christian neighbourhood in the village of Bonpara.
- On 7 June 2016, unidentified attackers killed Anando Gopal Ganguly, 70, a Hindu priest, in Sonaikhali village in Sadar upazila. The body of Ananda Gopal Ganguly was found in a field near his temple.
- On June 10 2016, unidentified attackers hacked Nityaranjan Pandey, a volunteer at a Hindu ashram, to death when he was taking his early morning walk about half a kilometre away from the ashram located in Sardar upazila.
- On 15 June 2016, three young people hacked Ripon Chakrabarty, a Hindu mathematics teacher at a local college, with sharp weapons when he answered the doorbell at his home in Madaripur. He survived the attack and suffered from injuries to his head and hand.

- On 1 July 2016, three young people killed Shaymanonda Das, 45 a Hindu priest, with machetes in the Jhinaidah district, 300km south west of the capital, Dhaka and fled away. He was collecting flowers to prepare for the morning prayers at the temple.
- On 1 July 2016, attackers killed 20 hostages at a café in Gulshan district of Dhaka, which is the diplomatic district of the capital city. Most of the hostages were hacked to death with sharp weapons. IS claimed the attack. Two police officers were also killed during the attack and the security forces killed a pizza maker at the café.
- On 7 July 2016, militants attacked the police guarding the largest Eid gathering in Bangladesh, throwing homemade bombs and launching a gun attack. About 300,000 people had gathered for the Eid prayers at the Sholakia field in Kishoreganj district when the attack on a security checkpoint began. Police say four people, including two officers and one attacker, were killed.