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BANGLADESH: INTERIM GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS INCONSISTENT WITH JULY DECLARATION

The one-year anniversary since mass protests that ousted Bangladesh's former Awami League government provides a moment of reflection for the interim government headed by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus.

Reading out the July Declaration at the South Plaza of the National Parliament on 5 August, he acknowledged what he described as the people's "desire for ensuring good governance and fair elections, rule of law and economic and social justice, and for introducing lawfully democratic reforms for all state and constitutional institutions".¹ He further conveyed, on behalf of the people of Bangladesh, their aspirations for "establishing a society and a democratic state system that upholds rule of law and human rights and moral values, and is free from corruption and exploitation."² While these stated goals reflect the language and aspirations expressed in the declaration, the track record of the interim government over the past twelve months have not aligned with these aspirations.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR JULY-AUG 2024 PROTEST RELATED VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES

A UN fact-finding report found that,

"Based on a thorough and independent assessment of all the information collected, OHCHR finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the former Government and its security and intelligence apparatus, together with violent elements associated with the Awami League, systematically engaged in serious human rights violations, including hundreds of extrajudicial killings, other use of force violations involving serious injuries to thousands of protesters, extensive arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture and other forms of ill-treatment. OHCHR has reasonable grounds to believe that these violations were carried out with the knowledge, coordination and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector officials, in pursuance of a strategy to suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent. These serious human rights violations also raise concerns from the perspective of international criminal law, so that additional criminal investigations are warranted to determine the extent to which they may also amount to crimes against humanity and, torture (as a stand-alone international crime), as well as serious crimes under domestic law."³

Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's trial began on 3 August 2025 in absentia, where she is being tried by the domestic International Crimes Tribunal for crimes against humanity including murder linked to the mass protests of 2024.⁴ The UN estimates that as many as 1,400 have been killed during the violence.⁵ Co-accused in the case is Bangladesh's former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullaah Al Mamun.⁶

¹ July Declaration: Read the full text here, *The Business Standard*, 05 August 2025, available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/july-declaration-read-full-text-here-1205106>

² July Declaration: Read the full text here, *The Business Standard*, 05 August 2025, available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/july-declaration-read-full-text-here-1205106>

³ OHCHR Fact-Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, *UN OHCHR*, 12 February 2025, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-fact-finding-report-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-related>

⁴ Bangladesh tribunal commences trial of deposed PM Hasina over crimes against humanity, *The Economic Times*, 03 August 2024, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bangladesh-tribunal-commences-trial-of-deposed-pm-hasina-over-crimes-against-humanity/articleshow/123074603.cms>

⁵ OHCHR Fact-Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, *UN OHCHR*, 12 February 2025, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-fact-finding-report-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-related>

⁶ Bangladesh tribunal commences trial of deposed PM Hasina over crimes against humanity, *The Economic Times*, 03 August 2024, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bangladesh-tribunal-commences-trial-of-deposed-pm-hasina-over-crimes-against-humanity/articleshow/123074603.cms>

In his July declaration, the Chief Advisor stated that the people of Bangladesh wish to see accountability for alleged crimes including “oppression, violence and looting of state property,” as well as enforced disappearances, killings, and crimes against humanity. He attributed these acts to the former Awami League government, describing it as a “fascist” regime during what he called a sixteen-year-long “anti-fascist agitation” and the events of the “July mass uprising” in 2024 as part of the context for the proposed trials.⁷ However, one year on, little information is available on the progress of the investigations and trials of other suspected perpetrators of violence including those from the defence apparatus and associated with the Awami League such as the Bangladesh Chhatra League. Even under the current interim government, concerns around adhering to due process safeguards, arbitrary arrests, the availability of sufficient admissible evidence of individual criminal wrongdoing - still remain.

Despite being a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Bangladesh’s interim government has chosen not to invoke the jurisdiction of the Court to pursue accountability for international crimes within court jurisdiction. Amnesty International has urged⁸ the interim government to consider referring the incidents which took place between 1 July – 15 August to the ICC – in line with the recommendation of the UN report.

The interim government should also support a resolution for the establishment of an independent mechanism at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that can collect, investigate, analyse, report and store evidence, including for human rights violations prior to 2009, and can provide assistance to credible and independent national and international bodies towards accountability for human rights violations.

We also urge the interim government to cooperate with the UN Special Procedures and agree to visit requests of the Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, and on extrajudicial executions.

RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND NEW LAW REFORM INITIATIVES

Earlier this year, Amnesty International and others raised alarm⁹ over arrests and incidents of harassment and violence against individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression. Journalists, authors, poets and human rights defenders were the subject of attacks, while Bangladesh’s Cyber Security Act - a draconian law previously used by the former regime against government critics, human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers in a manner which contravenes the right to freedom of expression, was once again utilized by the interim government to deter activism. Although the Act was repealed this year, a replacement has been brought in by way of a Cyber Protection Ordinance¹⁰ – subject to the approval and adoption into law by a future parliament.

Separately, the International Crimes Act (ICA) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) are among the laws that the interim government has chosen to reform. Many stakeholders, including the UN, have provided technical feedback on compliance with international human rights law and standards.¹¹ Heeding such recommendations and engaging in broad consultations with civil society and other stakeholders will be a testament to the interim government’s willingness to respect its international obligations during this period of reforms.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

During its one year in power, the interim government has managed to embark on some positive steps towards a rights-respecting polity, especially with regards to enforced disappearances. The release of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearances is a big first step for victims who have been seeking truth, justice and accountability. Additionally, signing up to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in

⁷ July Declaration: Read the full text here, *The Business Standard*, 05 August 2025, available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/july-declaration-read-full-text-here-1205106>

⁸ Amnesty International South Asia Regional Office on X: <https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1945467195745796539>

⁹ Bangladesh: Interim government should protect freedom of expression and opinion, *Amnesty International*, 21 March 2025, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/9165/2025/en/>

¹⁰ Cyber Security Ordinance approved with softer penalties, more bailable offences, *The Business Standard*, 06 May 2025, available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/govt-approves-cyber-security-ordinance-2025-repeals-9-sections-previous-law-1135181>

¹¹ OHCHR Technical Note: Preliminary Assessment of May 2025 Amendments to Bangladesh’s International Crimes Act (November 2024 revision) and Anti-Terrorism Act (2009), available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/OHCHR-Technical-Note-May-2025-Amendments.pdf>

2024 is another positive development.¹² In the same vein, it is encouraging to see the mandate of the current Commission on Disappearances extended during the visit of the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances¹³ in line with calls made by Amnesty International and others.¹⁴

REFORM AGENDA

Amnesty International understands that reports of the 11 Commissions set up on various thematic reform areas (including women, the police, the judiciary and the media) have now been handed over to the Chief Advisor and a National Consensus Commission is holding discussions with political parties to reach an agreement on the path forward for reforms in line with some of the recommendations that have been made.¹⁵ In this endeavor, it is essential that women and minorities' rights are given due consideration and the death penalty is abolished.

Additionally, Amnesty International urges¹⁶ the interim government to take steps to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission (HRC) in accordance with international standards, particularly the Paris Principles. This includes the ability to impartially investigate all human rights violations and abuses, including those allegedly perpetrated by security forces, and make recommendations accordingly. Such a mechanism must be given sufficient power and financial independence to investigate human rights violations and make recommendations including on reparations and rehabilitation. The existing legislation which governs the HRC must be repealed and replaced with stronger legislation which will ensure the HRC is able to operate in an independent and effective manner.

It is critical that Bangladesh does not miss this opportunity for reform. While initial positive steps have indeed been taken to change course, bolder efforts must be made to break away from abusive past practices and impunity.

¹² Bangladesh: Signing of Convention on Enforced Disappearances is a much welcome first step, *Amnesty International*, 30 August 2024, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/bangladesh-signing-of-convention-on-enforced-disappearances-is-a-much-welcome-first-step/>

¹³ UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances on X: <https://x.com/WGEID/status/1934840004544500011>

¹⁴ Bangladesh: Extend the Mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances to Ensure Truth and Accountability, Amnesty International, 16 June 2025, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/9500/2025/en/>

¹⁵ National Consensus Commission holds meeting, *The Business Standard*, 04 August 2025, available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/national-consensus-commission-holds-meeting-1204136>

¹⁶ Bangladesh: National Human Rights Commission must not be forgotten amid reform agenda, *Amnesty International*, 27 May 2025, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/bangladesh-legal-and-institutional-reforms/>