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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN experts urge Bangladesh to end reprisals against human rights defenders and relatives of the disappeared

GENEVA (14 March 2022) – UN human rights experts* today called on Bangladesh to immediately cease reprisals against human rights defenders and relatives of forcibly disappeared persons for their activism and co-operation with international human rights bodies and UN mechanisms.

Following the announcement of sanctions imposed by the United States of America against top Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) officials on 10 December 2021, Bangladeshi authorities have reportedly launched a campaign of threats, intimidation and harassment against relatives of forcibly disappeared persons, human rights defenders, and civil society actors.

In the period between December 2021 and February 2022, the homes of at least 10 relatives of forcibly disappeared individuals were reported to have been raided late at night.

“During the raids, relatives were intimidated, threatened and forced to either sign blank sheets of paper or pre-written statements indicating that their family member was not forcibly disappeared and that they had deliberately misled the police. This is unacceptable,” the experts observed.

The experts noted with concern the increasingly challenging situation relatives, human rights defenders and civil society are facing in Bangladesh. Repeated accusations by senior Government officials against some civil society organizations of providing “false information” to the UN mechanisms risk undermining the civil society’s key role.

“Bangladesh must ensure that relatives and human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats, intimidation or reprisals of any kind,” the experts stressed. They expressed their concern that the reported reprisals may have a chilling effect and deter others from reporting on issues of public interest, including human rights, and from cooperating with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms.

Since 2009, the RAB has reportedly been involved in the perpetration of the majority of cases of enforced disappearance in the country, as noted in several reports by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.**

“Bangladeshi authorities are obliged under international law to promptly launch *ex officio*, independent, impartial and thorough investigations into these serious allegations, complemented by a thorough and comprehensive search for disappeared persons. At the same time, the RAB and other security agencies should not be shielded from scrutiny and criminal responsibility.”

The experts also reiterated their request to the Government of Bangladesh to take effective steps to protect and uphold the rights of victims and their families to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

The experts are in contact with the Bangladeshi authorities on the matter.

ENDS

**The experts: [The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#): Mr. Luciano Hazan (Chair-Rapporteur), Ms. Aua Baldé (Vice Chair), Ms. Gabriella Citroni, Mr. Henrikas Mickevičius and Mr. Tae-Ung Baik; Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); Nils Melzer, [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#); Ms. Mary Lawlor, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#); Elina Steinerte (Chair-Rapporteur), Miriam Estrada-Castillo (Vice-Chair), Leigh Toomey, Mumba Malila, Priya Gopalan, [Working Group on arbitrary detention](#); Mr. Fabián Salvioli, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence](#); Ms. Irene Khan, [Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Mr. Clément N. Voule, [Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#)*

** [A/HRC/WGEID/125/1](#), page 30, [A/HRC/48/57](#), para. 64

ecoi.net summary:

Relatives of forcibly
disappeared persons, human rights
defenders and civil society actors
targeted with threats, intimidation
and harassment by authorities

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