



August 10, 2018

HIS EXCELLENCY ASAD ALAM SIAM

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bangladesh

Dear Honorable Ambassador Siam;

NGO Forum on ADB would like to express its strongest condemnation regarding the abusive shortcuts being used by the Bangladesh authorities to solve the public outcry regarding the death of two students last July 29 due to an over speeding bus.

The Forum also demand that the authorities should immediately release anyone they have arrested for peacefully criticizing the government, and instead should prosecute those who are attacking students for demanding improved road safety. Despite the clear and justifiable demands, this was met with unlawful attacks by the Bangladesh authorities and the Chatro League¹. They arrested students, even girls, women, and children, who are just helping restore order in the city. The authorities resorted to heavy violence against the peaceful student protesters using batons, physical threats, jamming mobile internet connections, water cannons and tear gas to disperse the marching protesters.

NGO Forum on ADB also condemns the sexual harassment² faced by girls and women during the attacks on the mass student protest. It was stated that while this was happening police authorities were just standing by, taking photos and videos to be able to identify the protesters. It was also reported that the police did not make any attempt to stop these acts aimed at unarmed youth and civilians.

Furthermore, NGO Forum on ADB demands the immediate release of renowned photographer and activist, Mr. Shahidul Alam who was arrested from his house by 30 to 35 plainclothes police officers, this is after he gave an interview with Al Jazeera regarding the protest, where he stated that what is happening is not just an issue on road safety but is about a deeper more concerning crisis such as - "looting of banks, the gagging of the media, the extrajudicial killings, disappearing's, bribery and corruption"³.

Mr. Shahidul Alam is facing charges under Section 57 of Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act), which allows the prosecution of any person who publishes, in electronic form, material that is fake and obscene; defamatory; tends to deprave and corrupt its audience; causes, or may cause, deterioration in law and order; prejudices the image of the state or a

¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/undeterred-by-violence-students-close-dhaka-s-roads-to-demand-justice-20180806-p4zvrb.html>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/06/bangladesh-stop-attacks-student-protesters-critics>

³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/06/asia/bangladesh-student-protests-intl/index.html>

person; or causes or may cause hurt to religious belief⁴. This law has been used over and over again to prosecute those who criticize the government or individual politicians. Along with Mr. Shahidul Alam; several journalists, particularly photographers and videographers have been persecuted and hurt by police and Chatro League while they were documenting the protest actions.

Lastly, this is a lucid proof of a populist and authoritarian government encroaching on the space of civil society, promoting repression, securitized environment, and criminalization of people, especially youths who want raise key issues pertaining to governance and rule of law. We urge your office to raise these issues with the necessary government agencies and restore peace, dignity, free press, human rights, and democratic practice in Bangladesh.

We demand the immediate release of Mr. Shahidul Alam from unlawful imprisonment.

We demand immediate action by the Government to end all forms of persecution and suppression of journalists, press personnel and media.

We demand that government immediately end all forms of violence and crackdown on peaceful protesters and reinstate healthy democratic practice in the state.

Respectfully,

NGO Forum on ADB

Signed in Solidarity:

1. 350.org
2. African Resources Watch (AFREWATCH)
3. Aksi! for gender, social and ecological justice
4. Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance to Stop Mining-Philippines)
5. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)
6. Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
7. Centre for Human Rights and Development, Mongolia
8. Community Policing Partners -COMPPART
9. Conseil Régional des Organisations Non Gouvernementales de Développement
10. Environics Trust, India
11. Environmental public alliance
12. Equitable Cambodia
13. Freedom from Debt Coalition
14. Friends of the Earth US
15. Friends with Environment in Development

⁴ <http://www.sacw.net/article13769.html>

16. Indian Social Action Forum: INSAF
17. Indigenous Perspectives
18. International Accountability Project
19. Jamaa Resource Initiatives, Kenya
20. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center-Kasama sa Kalikasan/Friends of the Earth Philippines (LRC-KsK/FoE Phils.)
21. Lumière Synergie pour le Développement
22. Manipur Cycle Club
23. Narasha community development group
24. Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) in Sierra Leone
25. Oyuntuya Gotov, Consumer foundation, Mongolia
26. Regional Council of Non Governmental Development Organizations
27. Sri Lanka Nature Group
28. Ulu Foundation
29. Urgewald
30. WomanHealth Philippines