



Bangladesh: Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances amidst political impasse must end

(Bangkok/Dhaka, 10 February 2015) - The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), express deep concern over the extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances by the security forces of Bangladesh, centering on the current confrontations between the ruling Awami League (and its 14-party Alliance) and the BNP-led 20- Party Alliance over free, fair, credible and participatory national elections under a neutral interim government, which has resulted in large scale violence and human rights violations all over Bangladesh.

Conflicts between these two political groups escalated after the then Awami League government repealed the provision for an interim caretaker government in 2011. The current political impasse was triggered mainly due to two issues: when the government did not allow the BNP-led 20-Party Alliance to hold a political meeting in early January 2015, which resulted in indefinite blockade programmes called by the BNP-led Alliance; and the repressive measures resorted to by the government, including the mass detention and arrest of the leaders of the BNP led 20-Party Alliance and the confinement of BNP Chairperson, Begum Khaleda Zia in her party office since January 3, 2015.

AFAD and FORUM-ASIA marked that one of the most horrific aspects of the violence in Bangladesh are the arson and petrol bomb attacks, often hurled indiscriminately at public transport attempting to pass through transport blockades called by the 20-Party Alliance since January 6, 2015; and plying the roads during the general strikes that are being declared during the blockade. Newspaper reports between January 6 and February 7, 2015 state that 49 people have died after being seriously burnt in these petrol-bomb attacks.

At a meeting with high level law enforcement officials on January 28, 2015, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina authorised the security forces “to take any action whenever and wherever deemed necessary” to stop the attacks on citizens during the blockades and general strikes; and that she would take all responsibility. Several ministers, members of the ruling party alliance, police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) high officials have issued directives to shoot suspected attackers on sight, encouraging law enforcement agencies and RAB to further use excessive force.

From January 5 to February 8, 2015, 32 people were killed extra-judicially (of which 22 were killed in alleged 'crossfire') and 14 people were disappeared by the law enforcement agencies.

The repressive measures taken by the government due to on-going political violence are worsening situation in the country which has experienced a continued series of protests that led to serious human rights violations and massive casualties of the ordinary citizens. AFAD and FORUM-ASIA call on both the ruling and opposition parties to refrain from violence and ensure the full respect of human rights at all times.

AFAD and FORUM-ASIA also criticize the government for clamping down on freedom of speech and expression by closing down media, mostly run/owned by persons affiliated with the BNP-led 20 party Alliance and restricting numerous social media and online messaging applications. AFAD and FORUM-ASIA had earlier made repeated calls to the government of Bangladesh and all political parties to refrain from violence and ensure the protection of freedoms of expression, assembly and association, as well as the protection of the rights of human rights defenders.

AFAD and FORUM-ASIA urge the Government of Bangladesh to provide the necessary space for peaceful political activity and refrain from using excessive force to stop protests. AFAD and FORUM-ASIA also call for all parties to instruct their members to refrain from violence. The state authorities need to ensure their response to respect the rights of all and avoid arbitrary use of force, arrests, and disappearances. AFAD and FORUM-ASIA also condemn the ongoing political violence in Bangladesh and urge the Government to provide all means necessary for peaceful political activity, including free and fair elections, the cessation of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and justice for victims of all forms of human rights abuses.

AFAD and FORUM-ASIA also urge the international community and development partners in Bangladesh to play a stronger and more effective role in putting an end to violence and bringing to justice all those responsible for all violations of human rights.

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