

## Bangladesh: Killing of journalists and human rights defenders must stop

(Bangkok, 8 February 2017) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) strongly condemns the killing of Mr. Abdul Hakim Shimul, a prominent journalist of the Bangladeshi daily newspaper, Samakal, and human rights defender. Mr. Shimul was hit by a bullet allegedly fired by Shahzadpur Municipality Mayor Halimul Haque Miru, while he was covering clashes between two rival factions of the Awami League in Shahzadpur on 2 February 2017. FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of Bangladesh to conduct an impartial investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. We also call on the Government to initiate specific measures to ensure the protection of journalists and human rights defenders in the country from harassment, attacks and killings, and to create a safe and enabling environment for them.

On 2 February 2017, Mr. Shimul was hit in the head and face during clashes, in which at least 10 people were injured. He was taken to a nearby local clinic. However, he died the following day while being transferred to a hospital in Dhaka. Mayor Miru has since been arrested.

Mr. Shimul was a journalist with the daily newspaper, Samakal. He was associated with local human rights group Odhikar and had been documenting human rights abuses in Bangladesh.

‘The killing of an on-duty journalist is a worrisome incident, which the police and other security institutions should have prevented. The Government of Bangladesh must ensure a thorough and impartial investigation into this case and bring the perpetrator to justice’, says John Samuel, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

FORUM-ASIA has continuously raised concerns about the deteriorating situation of freedom of expression in Bangladesh. At least four journalists were arrested in relation to their work last year.<sup>1</sup> Attacks, judicial harassment, abduction, imprisonment and killings are the fate of scores of journalists and human rights defenders in the country.<sup>2</sup>

‘The last few years have seen a steep decline in the climate for freedom of expression in Bangladesh. The recent killings and arrests of journalists, bloggers and online activists are all indicative of the further backsliding of human rights in the country’, continues John Samuel.

The Government of Bangladesh must ensure a safe working environment for journalists and human rights defenders in the country. ‘When journalist and human rights defenders are attacked for expressing themselves, a crime is committed not only against them, but against the free flow of information and ideas in a society’, adds John Samuel.

FORUM-ASIA takes note that the Government of Bangladesh will undergo its International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) review by the UN Human Rights Committee in March 2017. ‘The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=21477>

<sup>2</sup> [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/BGD/INT\\_CCPR\\_CSS\\_BGD\\_26483\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/BGD/INT_CCPR_CSS_BGD_26483_E.pdf)

Government of Bangladesh must show its commitment to promote and protect human rights on the ground as they are party to the ICCPR and other key international human rights instruments', concludes John Samuel, 'Ensuring justice for Mr. Shimul needs to be part of that'.

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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