

Joint oral statement delivered by Mr. Sayeed Ahmed on behalf of  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and  
Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)

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Item 6: UPR Plenary on Bangladesh

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Thank you, Mr. President. FORUM-ASIA and ASK, along with Human Rights Forum on UPR in Bangladesh - a coalition of 17 human rights, women's rights, labour and indigenous people's and development organizations, seek to take this opportunity to highlight some of the key human rights concerns and challenges yet to be effectively addressed by the Government of Bangladesh.

We welcome the recent decision of the Government to establish tribunals for the trial of those responsible under the International Crimes Act 1973. We remain dismayed, however, despite the electoral manifesto pledges and the Foreign Minister's announcement at the last UPR Working Group session regarding the policy of "zero tolerance", such killings have continued to take place without any substantive efforts to investigate or take appropriate action. Alarming, in the period from January to May 2009, at least 25 people have been killed extra-judicially by the Rapid Action Battalion, police and army, with the Government defending such action as self defense. In regards to the freedom of expression, the state media remains largely controlled by the executive with the focus primarily being on the activities of Ministers. There is a growing media monopolization of private channels being owned by political leaders. Violence against women remains to be of grave concern, with 73 incidents of rape or attempted rape, 44 dowry related violence, and 6 cases of fatwa related violence since January 2009. No steps have been taken as yet by the Government to announce a review of laws and policies to ensure effective redress for the victims of such violence.

Mr. president, the aforementioned issues are not exhaustive, and we have yet seen any significant measures taken in relation to the powers for executive magistrates, education for children with disabilities and indigenous children, violence against children including corporal punishment, child labor, expropriation of the property right of minorities, occupational safety and health policy for workers, caste-based discrimination, legal protection for migrant workers, rights of refugees, to name a few.

In this respect, we urge the Government of Bangladesh to make concrete, measurable and time bound commitments to address those human rights issues. This includes investigations into ongoing and past human rights abuses, including war crimes, extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detention, and cases violence against women, minorities, and indigenous people, and providing adequate reparation to victims and families. The Government should take priority action to consider the pending private member's bill on remedies for torture. It should also call for a clear road map regarding repeal of discriminatory laws, with particular emphasis on those affecting religious minorities, workers and persons with disabilities as well as juvenile justice and gender-biased personal laws. The enactment of the Domestic Violence Act needs to be a priority with action to implement the Sexual Harassment Guidelines as pronounced recently by the High Court. We also strongly urge the Government to take concrete steps for the full implementation of the peace accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Thank you, Mr. President.