



24<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council  
Item 6: Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Plenary on Bangladesh

Oral Statement Delivered by Mr. Ahmed Adam on Behalf of  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Friday, 20 September 2013

Thank you, Mr. President. FORUM-ASIA notes that the government of Bangladesh made its written responses to recommendations by the UPR Working Group available well in advance in July. While we appreciate Bangladesh's decision to accept recommendations relating to freedom of expression, protection of human rights defenders and ensuring a safe enabling environment for civil society and independent media (129.101, 129.103 and 129.104), we are deeply concerned at the deteriorating situation of freedoms of expression, assembly and association in recent months within the country. Examples include the blocking of a newspaper, two television channels, blogs and Facebook pages<sup>1</sup>, as well as attempts to ban political rallies.<sup>2</sup> We also remain disturbed by the arrest of bloggers and the continued detention of Mahmudur Rahman, editor of the Amar Desh newspaper.<sup>3</sup> The government of Bangladesh must demonstrate its genuine commitment and take concrete steps towards implementing the UPR recommendations that it accepted.

Mr. President, we draw the urgent attention of the Council to the arbitrary arrest on 10 August of Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of a local human rights organization Odhikar and an Executive Committee member of FORUM-ASIA.<sup>4</sup> We call on the government to ensure that due process is followed in his trial and urge that Odhikar and its staff do not face further harassment and intimidation. We are disturbed at hurried amendments to the Information and Communication Technology Act by way of ordinance, within days of Adilur Rahman Khan's arrest, which puts voices of dissent and criticism in danger of legal harassment.<sup>5</sup> The amendments to the ICT Act must be retracted immediately.

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA welcomes the interest expressed by several States during the UPR Working Group session in April, towards strengthening the structure and functioning of Bangladesh's National Human Rights Commission. We appreciate the government's positive response to South Africa's recommendation (129.26) to increase resources for enhancing the NHRC's efficiency. We urge the government to take into serious account additional suggestions and inputs contained in the stakeholders' submissions, including equipping the NHRC with an effective complaints mechanism.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, FORUM-ASIA calls upon the government of Bangladesh to publicly set out a comprehensive, measurable and time-bound action plan for the implementation of UPR recommendations, in cooperation and consultation with civil society. Thank you, Mr. President.

<sup>1</sup> FORUM-ASIA, Oral Statement, 23<sup>rd</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, 3 June 2013

<sup>2</sup> FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, "Bangladesh: Ban on Political Activities Condemned - Government Urged to Refrain from Restricting Freedoms of Assembly, Association and Expression", 20 May 2013

<sup>3</sup> FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, "Bangladesh: Arrest of the Bloggers and Editor - Government Must Refrain from Muzzling Freedom of Expression", 18 April 2013

<sup>4</sup> Odhikar, Statement on Adilur Rahman Khan, 14 August 2013; FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, "Bangladesh: Arbitrary Arrest of Human Rights Defender Condemned. Adilur Rahman Khan Must be Released Immediately", 11 August 2013

<sup>5</sup> FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, "Bangladesh: Government Must Retract Proposed Amendments to the Information and Communication Technology Act", 23 August 2013

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Forum Bangladesh, Joint Submission 10 to the 16<sup>th</sup> UPR Working Group Session, 9 October 2012; Press Statement, "HRFB Disappointed Over Government Denials of Violations of Human Rights", 20 May 2013