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April 11, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Suzan Johnson Cook  
Ambassador-at-Large, IRF  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry and Ambassador-at-Large Cook,

We are writing on behalf of the Center for Inquiry (CFI), a nonprofit organization that advocates for the rights to freedom of religion, belief, and expression, with a particular emphasis on the rights of secularists and dissidents.

CFI is deeply concerned about the current situation in Bangladesh regarding a crackdown on religious freedom and free expression. As you might already be aware, the government has arrested several prominent atheist bloggers for “hurting religious sentiments,” under Section 295A of the Bangladesh Penal Code. Home Minister M.K. Alamgir warned that the government has a list of seven more “atheist bloggers” who will soon be targeted. Just today, a newspaper editor was arrested for printing quotations from the targeted bloggers. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of protesters belonging to the radical group Islami Andolan Bangladesh have rallied in the country’s capital, Dhaka, for tougher blasphemy laws and more arrests. They have threatened violence if their demands are not met by April 25.

Bangladesh is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 18 and 19 of which guarantee every individual the rights to freedom of belief, religion, and expression. As such, not only should the government of Bangladesh reject new blasphemy laws; it should also repeal its current law against “hurting religious sentiments” and end proceedings against bloggers for criticizing religious ideas.

We respectfully request that the State Department do all it can to raise awareness of this situation and pressure Bangladesh to honor its obligations to the international community.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Very truly yours,

Ronald A. Lindsay  
President and CEO, Center for Inquiry

Michael De Dora  
Director, CFI — Office of Public Policy