

## **UN Human Rights Council: 32nd Session (June 13-July 1, 2016)**

### **Item 4, General Debate**

#### **Speaker: Michael De Dora, Main Representative**

#### **A Human Rights Crisis in Bangladesh**

Mr. President,

There is a human rights crisis in Bangladesh. Since February 2015, militant Islamists have killed six secularist writers and publishers.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, these attacks have continued and widened in scope — claiming professors, students, LGBT activists, the wife of a top police investigator, and religious minorities including Hindus, Christians, Shias, and Sufis.

Al Qaeda and ISIL have claimed responsibility for many of these attacks, several of which have also been claimed by local terror groups.<sup>2</sup>

The response from the Bangladesh government to these attacks has been appalling. They have failed to fully investigate and prosecute these crimes; made few legitimate arrests;<sup>3</sup> provided no significant support to victims and others who remain threatened;<sup>4</sup> blindly denied the existence of terror groups operating in the country; and devoted insufficient resources to preventing further killings and addressing the rise of militant thinking and rhetoric.

Instead, its leaders have publicly condemned criticism of religion — even suggesting that the deceased are culpable for their own murders.<sup>5</sup> This obstinacy has created a culture of impunity that has led many Bangladeshis to question whether their government cares if they live or die.

Civil society actors have acted admirably to defend and help threatened individuals escape danger, but there are simply not enough resources to rescue all those threatened in Bangladesh. And even so — who then would remain to defend pluralistic democracy and human rights?

This crisis threatens not just the fundamental rights to freedom of religion, belief, and expression in Bangladesh, but the very future of the country, and the stability of the entire region.<sup>6</sup> We implore the Bangladesh government to more forcefully promote democratic values and human rights, both in word and in deed. We also urge member states to assist and hold Bangladesh to account. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://bit.ly/1SNriGq>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://nyti.ms/1N0XHSI>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://cnn.it/239DK6c>, <http://bit.ly/1VXI497>, <http://cnn.it/1UyJq3i>, and <http://bit.ly/1PvhXhz>. We would warn that indiscriminate crackdowns, such as mass arrests, likely include innocent persons and could escalate violence.

<sup>4</sup> Police have advised numerous writers, activists, and minorities that there would be no protection and that they should leave the country. Many have gone into hiding or else fled the country entirely, shattering families and communities.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://bit.ly/21t54vc>

<sup>6</sup> The Bangladesh Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, speech, and expression <http://bit.ly/1G6VIQT>; Bangladesh is also a signatory to the ICCPR <http://bit.ly/Jz4HwZ>