



Bangladesh: End Torture and Ill-Treatment of Student Protesters

30th July 2024 – The United Against Torture Consortium urges the Bangladeshi government to immediately end the torture and ill-treatment of student protesters and hold perpetrators accountable amid the violent crackdown by security forces that has killed hundreds and injured thousands.

Since mid-July, the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has pursued an increasingly violent crackdown against student-led protests opposing the reinstatement of quotas for government jobs that the protesters say favour members of the ruling party. Although the Supreme Court of Bangladesh later reduced the quota to 5 percent, the protests have not stopped, and human rights violations continue to be documented.

On 26 July, three key figures in the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement were arbitrarily arrested while receiving treatment in a Dhaka hospital. One of the three, Nahid Islam, a Dhaka University student, was receiving treatment for injuries he says were inflicted by Bangladeshi police during detention. A photograph published by AFP showed Islam with severe bruising on the underside of one arm, consistent with his account related to [The Guardian](#) that he was beaten by police using metal rods.

Despite Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan's [assertion](#) that the arrests were for the student leaders' own safety, UATC expresses its grave concerns for the health and well-being of all those detained in this latest crackdown.

Last week the UN human rights chief, Volker Türk, [called](#) on the government of Bangladesh to carry out an independent investigation into the “horrific violence” and ensure all operations of law enforcement agencies are conducted strictly in line with international human rights norms and standards, particularly regarding the policing of protests, including use of force. Indeed, multiple instances of excessive use of force and use of lethal force have been documented in the last two weeks. A reporter for [The Guardian](#) witnessed the Rapid Action Battalion “fire teargas from a helicopter on crowds below and army forces fire at protesters with what appeared to be light machine guns”. Analysis of footage from protest scenes by [Amnesty](#) International confirmed the use of teargas and lethal firearms – including shotguns, assault rifles and grenade launchers – by police and paramilitary forces against the unarmed protesters.



Further violations over the past two weeks include restrictions on freedom of assembly and the shutdown of broadband and mobile internet on 18 July, severely limiting media coverage and access to information.

In response to the ongoing situation, the UATC urges the Bangladeshi government to:

- Immediately end the torture and ill-treatment of protesters, and lift all restrictions on freedom of assembly;
- Release all organizers and peaceful protesters who have been arbitrarily detained;
- Conduct independent and impartial investigations into all alleged human rights violations, hold those responsible accountable, and provide redress to victims.
- Dissolve the Rapid Action Battalion and investigate and prosecute alleged torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances by its members.
- Meaningfully engage with the international community including by implementing recommendations by the [Committee against Torture](#), the [Universal Periodic Review](#) and [UN independent experts](#).

We call on the international community to hold Bangladesh to account on its human rights record including through the use of sanctions against those responsible. We further highlight that Bangladesh greatly benefits from the EU's [Generalised Scheme of Preferences](#). We particularly urge the European Union to demand a stop to the violations and meaningful progress on the rule of law, the protection of civic space and accountability for torture and other grave violations, before any further trade negotiations can take place.

The UAT [consortium](#) is an EU-funded project that pools the strengths and expertise of six international anti-torture organisations, in partnership with over 200 civil society organisations and other partners in 100+ countries, to strengthen and expand torture prevention, protection, rehabilitation and strategic litigation.

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