



March 12, 2026

## Re: Human Rights Priorities in Bangladesh

Dear Prime Minister Tarique Rahman,

We are writing following your recent election victory. As you have acknowledged, this is a time of opportunity to write a new chapter in your country's history. Your actions will have a profound impact on the rights of people in Bangladesh for years to come.

We are writing on behalf of nine rights groups to draw your attention to some of the urgent human rights challenges facing Bangladesh. We welcome your pledges, and steps by the previous interim government, that would enhance human rights protections if they are implemented effectively. For instance, the commitment to investigate, prosecute, and prevent enforced disappearances is a crucial step, although the families of at least [287 people](#) that are still missing are awaiting answers. Various commissions set up by the interim government have made valuable recommendations that would help to achieve your promise to strengthen institutions. A strong and independent National Human Rights Commission is essential to investigate cases and prevent future abuses. Although many of the human rights violations that occurred under the Hasina administration have ended, others such as widespread arbitrary detentions persisted under the interim government. Freedom of expression, though somewhat improved, remained at risk with arrests and attacks on journalists and media houses. An uptick in mob violence challenged the rule of law, particularly placing minority communities at risk. The rights of women and girls need to be protected in an environment where religious groups wish to restrict their freedom. Security forces have continued their violations, such as assault or torture in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. We remain concerned about the fate of the Rohingya refugees who are crowded into settlements in Cox's Bazaar and on Bhasan Char, without proper access to livelihood or education even as humanitarian assistance is dwindling.

We recognize that you are assuming office at a time of great challenges, with significant strategic, trade, and economic pressures. The international situation is also especially challenging for human rights. Respect for the international rule of law is threatened, economic difficulties abound, and millions of people's rights are threatened by climate change. While all governments must focus on issues at home, this is also a time for Bangladesh to play its part in promoting human rights not just at home but also abroad.

We urge you to use your time in office to create a legacy of positive change, including to support systematic reform and accountability. In particular, we want to draw your attention to the following issues and offer some recommendations. For ease of reference, a list of some of the laws and ordinances which most require amendment or repeal to protect human rights standards, as well as key ordinances issued by the interim government which strengthen rights and should be approved by parliament, is presented at the end.

We recognize that this may appear to be a long list of recommendations. However, these are important steps that are required to protect the rights of all people in Bangladesh.

We look forward to close partnership with your government to support these efforts.

Amnesty International

ARTICLE 19

Committee to Protect Journalists

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

FIDH

Fortify Rights

Human Rights Watch

Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center

Tech Global Institute

Cc: Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Md Asaduzzaman;  
Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs, Salahuddin Ahmed

## Key Human Rights Concerns

### *Freedom of Expression*

Successive governments have sought to curtail the human right to freedom of expression in Bangladesh, including by targeting journalists and other media workers, media and cultural organizations, as well as seeking to limit expression online. There is a history of draconian legislation, some of which the interim government attempted to repeal or amend, although much more remains to be done. Meanwhile, some of the ordinances promulgated by the interim government include provisions that threaten the right to freedom of expression and should not be passed permanently into law.

Journalists, musicians, artists, and writers – among others – also face attacks and threats from violent mobs and groups who wish to silence them or through vexatious legal action. Your government should not only ensure that the law upholds the right to freedom of expression, but that everyone in Bangladesh is protected from violence or the misuse of the law.

We urge your government to:

- Publicly affirm its commitment to press freedom, media independence, and pluralism as cornerstones of a rights-respecting society.
- Implement, through an inclusive and transparent process, the recommendations of the Media Reform Commission that align with international standards on press freedom, regulatory independence, and journalist safety.
- Protect the right to freedom of expression online by ending arbitrary and unlawful surveillance, censorship, internet shutdowns, and content restrictions. Establish transparent oversight and judicial safeguards that conform with international standards and best practices for any regulatory measures affecting digital communications.
- Ensure that journalists and other media workers detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression are immediately and unconditionally released, including by directing executive and prosecutorial authorities to review such cases in accordance with international laws and standards. Refrain from instructing or encouraging prosecutors to oppose bail in cases arising solely from the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Ensure that national security related charges,

charges of murder, and other serious charges are not misused to punish the exercise of human rights.

- Ensure that law enforcement authorities carry out prompt, thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into attacks on journalists, media and cultural organizations, including on the offices of *Prothom Alo*, *The Daily Star*, and Chhayanaut, and where there is sufficient admissible evidence of wrongdoing, hold perpetrators criminally accountable in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty. Take proactive steps, in line with the government's obligations under international human rights law and standards, to prevent further incidents.
- Establish a transparent process to review and report on cases filed under past cybercrime laws. Ensure that all cases that infringe on the right to freedom of expression, including but not limited to politically motivated and vexatious cases, filed under laws including the *Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006*; the *Digital Security Act, 2018*; and the *Cyber Security Act, 2023* are promptly dismissed and that those impacted are provided with effective remedies. Ensure that no individual continues to face prosecution or any other form of retaliation or punishment for protected expression.

### ***Accountability for Past Rights Violations***

For decades, successive Bangladeshi governments have committed severe human rights violations with impunity. A commission of inquiry formed by the interim government found that at least 1,569 people were subjected to enforced disappearance under the former government of Sheikh Hasina, including 287 who remain missing and may have been killed. Security forces were frequently accused of committing extra-judicial killings. According to a United Nations fact-finding report, around 1,400 people were killed during the 2024 protests that overthrew Hasina's government, many of them shot by security forces. Torture and other human rights abuses in police custody, sometimes allegedly resulting in custodial deaths, has long been endemic and continued under the interim government.

Some of those allegedly responsible for human rights violations – including serving members of security agencies – are facing trial at the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). However, we remain very concerned that the ICT does not adhere to domestic or

international fair trial standards. In particular, its use of the death penalty, an inherently cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment, should be ended.

We urge your government to:

- Conduct credible, independent, and impartial investigations into killings committed during the 2024 protests and ensure that those responsible are held accountable through fair trials without recourse to the death penalty. Ensure that the ICT has the independence, resources, and legal framework to meet domestic and international standards, and that it is required to ensure the full respect of all relevant human rights in its proceedings.
- End the use of the death penalty, including for ICT convictions.
- Work towards holding alleged perpetrators who have fled Bangladesh accountable in fair trials without the recourse of the death penalty and cooperate with authorities in other countries conducting investigations under the principle of universal or other forms of extraterritorial jurisdiction.
- Refrain from instructing or encouraging prosecutors to arrest or detain individuals unless there is substantial and credible evidence of wrongdoing sufficient to meet the applicable criminal standard of proof.
- Direct all security and law enforcement agencies to fully co-operate with investigations into human rights violations and suspend from active duty and make available for administrative or legal proceedings any service member against whom there is credible evidence of human rights violations.
- Fully implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances in its January 2026 report, including by reforming the security sector, protecting victims and witnesses, and through the creation of an independent National Preventive Mechanism to monitor detention sites.
- Ensure that all evidence collected by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances is preserved.
- Ensure that allegations of human rights violations, including deaths in custody, are credibly investigated, and where there is sufficient admissible evidence of wrongdoing, hold perpetrators criminally accountable in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

- Provide redress, including reparations as well as physical and psychological therapy and rehabilitation as required, to surviving victims of past rights violations. Adopt measures to train law enforcement officials in international human rights standards and in accordance with the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.
- Implement security and justice sector reform through a consultative and transparent process, making use of the recommendations of the Police Reform Commission and the Judicial Reform Commission which adhere to international laws and best practices.
- Accept visit requests of the UN Special Rapporteurs, including on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, and on extrajudicial executions. Extend invitations to the Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, and any other UN special procedure.
- Provide full support to the International Criminal Court as a state party.

### ***Security Sector Reform***

To ensure that past rights violations including crimes against humanity, such as widespread and systematic enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings, are not repeated, it is vital to reform the security sector.

We urge your government to:

- Disband the Rapid Action Battalion, which the interim government announced would be renamed the Special Intervention Force, and which faces credible allegations of carrying out enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and other human rights violations, as well as the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre.

- Withdraw military personnel from all civilian law enforcement roles, as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.
- Initiate legislative reforms to limit the role and authority of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) strictly to military intelligence, as recommended by the UN's 2025 fact finding report.
- Introduce an independent and rigorous human rights vetting process for security personnel nominated for UN peacekeeping missions.
- Commit that any future incidents resulting in deaths during law enforcement operations are subject to prompt, independent, impartial, and rigorous investigations, and establish a credible mechanism to carry this out. If there is any evidence of wrongdoing, perpetrators should be held accountable in fair, independent, and impartial legal proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.

### ***Women and Girls***

Women and girls in Bangladesh are especially at risk of human rights abuses including sexual and other gender-based violence, which is often inadequately investigated or prosecuted, early or forced marriage, discriminatory property laws, and a lack of representation in politics, government, and many fields of public life.

We urge your government to:

- Take steps to implement the recommendations of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, which align with Bangladesh's obligations under international law.
- Ensure that all those suspected of being perpetrators of gender-based violence are held accountable in fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty.
- Take concrete and effective steps to end the practice of early and forced marriage and implement the existing legal safeguards in line with international human rights law and standards.
- Take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and ensure women have equal rights to vote, stand for elections, participate in forming government policy, and hold public office.

- Repeal section 19 of the *Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017* which allows for legal child marriage in certain cases.

### ***LGBT People***

The criminalization of adult consensual same-sex conduct denies lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) people their human rights, and exacerbates the risks that they face, such as harassment, intimidation, and violence, including by mobs.

- Decriminalize adult consensual same-sex conduct and ensure that LGBT people are protected from harassment and other abuses, and can fully exercise their human rights without discrimination.

### ***Rohingya Refugees***

Bangladesh is host to nearly 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, who are unable to return to their homes in Myanmar due to continuing grave rights violations there. No part of Myanmar, including Rakine state, is currently safe to return to, and we welcome your recent statement in a [Reuters interview](#), that “as long as it is not safe, they are very welcome to stay here.”

Bangladesh’s foreign partners should increase their support to the Bangladesh government and to agencies managing the refugee camps, to ensure that refugees’ rights are upheld while they remain in Bangladesh.

We urge your government to:

- Prevent forced repatriation of refugees to Myanmar while the situation does not allow for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable returns.
- Close the Bhasan Char camp. Ensure that those currently on the island are allowed to relocate voluntarily and without coercion to the mainland camps, and that no further relocations to the island occur.
- Phase out restrictions on access to livelihood opportunities and freedom of movement for refugees, and allow refugee children to receive formal education following the Burmese curriculum.

- Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and develop a domestic legal framework to regularize the status and protection of refugees.
- Recognizing your [position](#) regarding the sensitivity of cross-border corridors, Bangladesh should take a leadership role in facilitating UN-supervised humanitarian aid into Rakhine State.
- Establish structured and inclusive consultation mechanisms whereby Rohingya refugee representatives, civil society, host-community leaders, and independent observers can engage with policymakers on issues that directly affect their lives.

### ***Arbitrary Detention***

Successive Bangladeshi governments have used politically motivated cases against perceived political opponents, resulting in arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention through weak charges and the state's opposition to bail.

This practice was widespread under Sheikh Hasina's government and continued under the interim government resulting in the detention of thousands of people perceived to be associated with the Awami League. In some cases, people are detained under the *Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009* and *Special Powers Act, 1974*, both draconian pieces of legislation that have long been used to enable arbitrary detention. These practices have no place under a rights-respecting government.

We urge your government to:

- Ensure every person in pre-trial detention is swiftly brought before a judge or equivalent who will review the legality and necessity of their continued detention and order their immediate release if their detention is not lawfully justified.
- Form a committee of qualified and independent human rights experts and lawyers to urgently assess the large number of cases of people allegedly arbitrarily or unlawfully detained or arrested, including those which are politically motivated. This committee should recommend that where no sufficient evidence exists, cases are dropped.
- End unnecessary pre-trial detention by instructing prosecutors not to oppose bail unless strictly necessary to address verifiable risks, and issuing guidance to courts to treat pre-trial detention as an exception, not the rule. The prosecution should

need to justify pre-trial detention on an individual basis, for example where it is necessary for the safety of witnesses or there is a risk of absconding.

- Instruct police to make arrests in response to first information reports only in cases where there is sufficient evidence against the accused.

### *Freedom of Association*

Civil society associations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in upholding human rights and in many other fields, and are protected by international human rights law, regardless of whether they have legal personality or are informal. In Bangladesh, members of NGOs have faced censorship, threats, undue restrictions of their rights, and unwarranted legal action under successive governments.

Additionally, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant treaties, which Bangladesh is a party to, the right to freedom of association includes the right of individuals to form and join trade unions. In Bangladesh, garment workers often face restrictions of the right to organize into trade unions, collectively speak out against human rights abuses, and take collection actions.

We urge your government to:

- Remove legal and policy measures that impose undue restrictions on the right to freedom of association, including burdensome oversight by the NGO Affairs Bureau. Ensure the NGO Affairs Bureau operates independently and creates an enabling environment for civil society.
- Establish a comprehensive protection mechanism for human rights defenders at risk, and individuals and organizations exercising the right to defend human rights, including by adopting a specific law on the protection of human rights defenders in consultation with them, and in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 27/31 and relevant international standards.
- Ensure that there are no unwarranted restrictions on registration or access to resources, including international funding for civil society organizations.
- Ensure that screening and scrutiny of international funding by law enforcement and intelligence agencies are carried out not as a matter of course, but only as an exception to investigate credible allegations of criminal wrongdoing.

- Urgently revise laws and regulations to remove all arbitrary and excessive obstacles to workers' right to freedom of association
- Ensure that all workers are freely able to form trade unions in all sectors of work, including in the so-called “gig” or “platform” economy, where work is assigned and managed through apps and online platforms.

### *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*

Economic, social, and cultural rights that are protected under international human rights law include the rights to work for fair wages in safe conditions, benefit from social security, and to have access to health and education services, and form a central part of the human rights framework. We welcome that your party has made critical manifesto commitments to bring Bangladesh closer to its obligation to use the maximum of its available resources to realize economic, social, and cultural rights, in particular by raising education spending to 5 percent of GDP, extending public health services, and strengthening social security provision through the Family Card program.

We urge your government to:

- Implement your manifesto commitments to enhance health and education services and increase public funding for each of these sectors to at least 5 percent of GDP, in accordance with benchmarks used globally.
- Develop a universal social security system covering at least the following four social security guarantees recognized by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as the “[social protection floor](#)”: access to essential health care, including maternity care; basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care, and any other necessary goods and services; basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity, and disability; and basic income security for older people.
- Review and raise the minimum wage for garment sector and other workers to ensure it provides at least an adequate living wage according to ILO standards. Wage levels should be reviewed periodically and adjusted based on up-to-date data such as cost of living and inflation statistics.

- Support a strong UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation that is aligned with human rights standards and enables Bangladesh to expand its fiscal space to fulfil economic, social and cultural rights.
- Strengthen laws on the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and harassment, including effective implementation of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. This should include requiring companies to publish and implement inclusion policies and take a zero-tolerance approach to workplace gender-based violence and harassment.

### ***Indigenous Peoples and Minorities' Rights***

Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh have long faced human rights violations and other discrimination at the hands of security agencies and non-state actors, including Bengali settlers. These violations continue in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere. It is deeply unfortunate that while the Bangladesh army serves on UN missions to preserve peace around the world, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts – which is under military control – human rights violations are rife. Security forces also often fail to protect members of Indigenous peoples from attacks by members of other groups, or to appropriately prosecute such crimes. Members of religious minorities including Hindus and Ahmadis are also at risk, including numerous lethal attacks against them by mobs since the fall of the Hasina government.

We urge your government to:

- Fully implement all human rights provisions of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.
- Demilitarize the Chittagong Hill Tracts and ensure the protection of land rights and other human rights of the Indigenous peoples.
- End the discrimination, harassment, and violence against the Bawm community by state and nonstate actors. All Bawm detainees should be immediately released, unless sufficient admissible evidence against any individual exists, in which case they should be promptly charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offence.

- Carry out prompt and credible investigations into attacks, harassment, intimidation, and killings of Indigenous peoples and religious minorities, with a view to holding suspected perpetrators accountable in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty.
- Publicly affirm the government’s commitment to protect religious, cultural, and ethnic minorities, including Hindus and Ahmadis, and protect such vulnerable individuals and communities from further mob violence by rigorously upholding the rule of law.
- Enact legislation and introduce appropriate policies to ensure the social and legal inclusion of the *hijra* community, recognized as a “third gender” in 2013, including access to meaningful employment, inheritance rights, marriage rights, and protection from violence and discrimination.
- Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation prohibiting discrimination in law and in practice based on protected characteristics, including race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and other status, and ensure equal protection and remedies for victims.

### **Law Reform and the Passage of Ordinances Adopted by the Interim Government**

The interim government took important steps to amend or repeal some laws which were used by previous governments to violate human rights. Some ordinances which include important measures to protect and advance human rights were adopted. These ordinances now require adoption by parliament within 30 days if they are to remain in force. However, the proposed amendments to abusive laws are insufficient, and further revisions are required to bring these laws in line with international law and standards. Furthermore, some of the ordinances adopted by the interim government include provisions which could jeopardize human rights and should not be passed into law by parliament unless amended.

We urge you to consider adopting legislation requiring that all new laws and legislative amendments be accompanied, prior to parliamentary consideration, by a formal and substantive human rights impact assessment. Each proposed law or amendment should be accompanied by a declaration of compatibility, supported by a reasoned and evidence-based explanation.

We also strongly urge you to abolish the death penalty in all cases and, in the interim, introduce an official moratorium on all executions.

We present the following list (which is not exhaustive) of legislative actions which would help to protect human rights.

- Repeal or amend to bring in line with international human rights law and standards:
  - The *Special Powers Act, 1974*, which enables arbitrary detention;
  - The *Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009* and associated rules, which enables arbitrary detention;
  - The *Official Secrets Act, 1923*, which imposes draconian restrictions on protected speech,;
  - Criminal defamation and other speech-related offenses in the *Penal Code, 1860*, which criminalize legitimate speech;
  - Surveillance and interception provisions in the *Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act, 2001* and secondary legislations, which enables intelligence and security agencies to intercept, record and collect information without warrant or judicial oversight.

Any new national security–related legislation should be narrowly defined, proportionate, and include safeguards against misuse.

- Pass, with necessary amendments:
  - The [\*Foreign Donations \(Voluntary Activities\) Regulation \(Amendment\) Ordinance, 2025\*](#), which lessens strict restrictions on foreign funding to NGOs, after ensuring that it aligns with international standards for freedom of association.
  - The [\*Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, 2025\*](#), to implement the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance, after ensuring its compliance with international human rights standards including on the death penalty. The ordinance provides “legal aid, rehabilitation, compensation, and assistance to victims and their families” and establishes a victim’s fund.
  - The [\*National Human Rights Commission Ordinance, 2025\*](#), after amending it to ensure an independent appointments process consistent with the Paris Principles on national human rights institutions.

Replace or substantially amend the [Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025](#), ensuring that it avoids vague and overly broad definitions, contains stronger judicial oversight for blocking and investigative powers, mandates that all cases filed under past cybercrime laws which infringe on the right to freedom of expression and of press are promptly dismissed, ensures transparency and due-process safeguards for the National Computer Emergency Response Team, National Security Operations Center, and Computer Incident Response Teams, and fully aligns with international human rights standards.

Where an ordinance requires substantive review or amendment, it should not be adopted in its existing form but reintroduced through a new legislative process that includes extensive consultation.

- To avoid enacting legislation that could seriously jeopardize rights, the following ordinances should not be adopted in their current form:
  - The [Personal Data Protection Ordinance, 2025](#), which includes provisions related to privacy, data protection, and investigative powers that could enable future abuses.
  - The [Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulation \(Amendment\) Ordinance, 2025](#), which should be amended to regulate the use of surveillance technologies.
  - The [National Data Governance Ordinance, 2025](#), which creates an authority that would act as operator, regulator, and the venue for redress of grievances in relation to the use or misuse of private data.
  - The draft *National Broadcast Commission Ordinance, 2026*, which could undermine media independence.
  - The draft *National Media Commission Ordinance, 2026*, which could undermine media independence.