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## UN PROVIDES WELCOME SUPPORT TO BANGLADESH WAR CRIMES INVESTIGATIONS

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The government of Bangladesh has sought and received UN assistance in its efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes against humanity and other serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in 1971. Four international war crimes experts, Louis Bickford, Priscilla Hayner, Bogdan Ivanisevic and Alexander Mayer-Rieckh, have been named to assist the government.

Amnesty International welcomed the news, having called on the Caretaker Government and political parties in January 2008 to address impunity for violations carried out in 1971 in the context of the independence war.

"The failure to seek truth and justice for crimes against humanity and other serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in 1971 has encouraged the persistent nature of impunity in Bangladesh," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

Demands from civil society for the investigation of the crimes committed in 1971 have been gathering momentum in the past few years. Past governments have taken no action to investigate or prosecute these crimes and no official commission has been established to provide a comprehensive account of the events of 1971.

The Bangladeshi government is also reported to have asked Pakistan and the US, which supported Pakistan during the war, to provide Bangladesh with particular documents related to the war and evidence for the trial.

The exact number of people killed by the Pakistan army and their collaborators during the 1971 Bangladesh independence war is not known. Most estimates put the figure at around one million and a further eight to ten million people, both Hindus and Muslims, fled Bangladesh in search of safety in India.

Among the dead were tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of farmers, fishermen, villagers and factory workers. The forces also targeted intellectuals, Hindus and women. According to some reports, an estimated 200,000 thousand women were raped during the conflict.

To date, no one has been brought to justice for these crimes



Irene Khan meets with the Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed, 9 January 2008

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"I hope that the initiative to seek UN assistance to address the 1971 war crimes marks the beginning of a process to heal the wounds of this war in the national psyche," said Irene Khan.

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