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Professor Muhammad Yunus
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Dear Chief Advisor Yunus,

I write to you at a pivotal moment for Bangladesh, as the country approaches national elections on 12 February under the stewardship of the interim government. This period presents both responsibility and an opportunity to restore public trust, strengthen governance, and ensure full respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In the past, under successive governments, Bangladesh has experienced persistent and serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, restrictions on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and reprisals against journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents, and civil society actors. These violations have occurred in a context of shrinking civic space, weak institutional safeguards, and entrenched impunity for state actors.

The interim government had a unique opportunity to change this trajectory by restoring public confidence, strengthening governance including through respect for the rule of law, and initiating meaningful human rights reforms. While we recognize measures taken, such as the ratification of the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), and acknowledge that systemic changes take time, significant challenges remain in ensuring the protection of the human rights of all people in Bangladesh.

In this spirit of constructive dialogue to protect and promote human rights and uphold accountability, I wish to share Amnesty International's concerns and recommendations regarding the protection of fundamental rights in the lead-up to the elections.

The elections slated to be held on 12 February 2026 represent a critical moment for Bangladesh to chart a new course, towards a country where the rights and dignity of all people are not only respected but fostered. Although Bangladesh is a party to some of the core international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), barriers persist in the effective implementation of these standards through laws, policies and in practice.

Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of association, as enshrined in Articles 19, 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, are of particular importance in the period leading up to elections. The ability of individuals and groups—including political parties, trade unions, student groups, journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations—to speak freely, organize and gather peacefully, and associate together without fear of surveillance, harassment, or reprisal is essential for free and informed political participation. Restrictions on these fundamental freedoms undermine public debate, distort the electoral environment, and weaken public trust in institutions. The interim government has a responsibility to ensure that laws, policies, and practices fully protect these rights, both online and offline, and that no one is arrested, intimidated or attacked for exercising their rights.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the continued misuse of anti-terror legislation, including the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), to target journalists for their perceived political views or affiliations, in violation of the rights to freedom of expression and liberty. For instance, on 28 August, journalist Monjurul Alam Panna, was arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), a day after he was accused at a roundtable discussion on the Liberation War and the constitution of being a sympathizer of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and of conspiring to overthrow the interim government.¹ Similarly, on 15 December, journalist Anis Alamgir was detained under the ATA for allegedly spreading propaganda in favour of the Awami League.² These arrests form part of an alarming trend of journalists being targeted for their perceived support of the Awami League.

Following the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, on 18 December 2025, some protesters resorted to violence and set alight the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, attacked Chhayanaut and Udichi Shilpi Gosthi (both cultural institutions), and harassed the editor of the English newspaper, New Age, Nurul Kabir.³ Furthermore, Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu garment worker, was lynched by a violent mob, following allegations of blasphemy.⁴ These attacks are indicative of a critical failure to protect human rights – including the right to life, the right to security of person and the right to freedom of expression under articles 6, 9 and 19 of the ICCPR. Moreover, they are part of a documented pattern of attacks against journalists, media workers, minorities and artists by non-state actors in 2025.⁵ Not only is Bangladesh duty bound to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, authorities must also seek to prevent attacks by private actors. The delayed response and ineffectiveness of law enforcement in the face of such violence reflects a failure of the authorities to uphold their human rights obligations.

In light of these concerns, Amnesty International urges the interim government to take immediate steps to ensure that protection of human rights are at the centre of Bangladesh's upcoming elections. This includes ending the misuse of security legislation against journalists and critics, ensuring that law enforcement authorities act promptly and lawfully to protect those exercising their rights and guaranteeing accountability for attacks on media workers and minorities. The period leading up to the 12 February 2026 elections will be a decisive test of the interim government's commitment to Bangladesh's international obligations and to the rule of law. The choices made now will shape Bangladesh's human rights trajectory for years to come, and the interim government must seize this opportunity to demonstrate genuine leadership by ensuring that all people in Bangladesh can participate freely, safely, and without fear in the country's future.

Yours sincerely



Agnes Callamard
Secretary General

¹ Reporters Without Borders, *Journalist arrested after taking part in roundtable, in new use of Bangladesh's anti-terrorism law*, 28 October 2025, rsf.org/en/journalist-arrested-after-taking-part-roundtable-new-use-bangladesh-s-anti-terrorism-law

² Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Journalist targeted with anti-terror legislation must be released*, 17 December 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/bangladesh-journalist-targeted-with-anti-terror-legislation-must-be-released/

³ Amnesty International on Twitter, 19 December 2025, x.com/amnestysasia/status/2002083084104319107

⁴ BBC, *Crisis in India-Bangladesh relations spirals amid violent protests*, 24 December 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gekjjqn1ro

⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Attacks on Freedom of Expression and Democratic Participation: Joint Statement*, 22 December 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/22/attacks-on-freedom-of-expression-and-democratic-participation-in-bangladesh