



THE UN MUST REVIEW ADMISSION OF BANGLADESHI LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TO PEACEKEEPING FORCES

PEACEKEEPING FORCES SHOULD NOT HAVE TRACK RECORDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

United Nations Under Secretary General Jean Pierre Lacroix must prioritise a review of human rights violations by the security forces in Bangladesh during his visit to the country and ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations in the country do not get deployed on UN peacekeeping missions.

Bangladesh has a three-decade long history of providing forces for UN peacekeeping missions and is one of the largest contributors in the world. This is concerning, given the human rights violations perpetrated by the Bangladeshi security forces, especially the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), in the past.

RAB officers, consists of Bangladeshi Army, Navy, Air Force, Border Guards, and police force, are accused of carrying out enforced disappearances, extra judicial executions, torture, and other ill-treatment, targeting opposition politicians, human rights defenders, dissenters, and activists¹. When the United States imposed sanctions against RAB, they reportedly launched a campaign of threats, intimidation, and harassment against families of forcibly disappeared persons, human rights defenders, and the civil society². Considering these accusations of human rights violations against RAB officers, the UN should suspend the use of RAB members in UN peacekeeping forces, until it can be ensured that those who participate are not perpetrators of human rights abuses.

In addition to RAB, rights groups have reported human rights violations by the other branches of law enforcement authorities of Bangladesh³. Last year, Netra News, an independent news platform, exposed a secret prison facility run by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), where people who were forcibly disappeared were being detained and tortured⁴. Bangladeshi police opened fired at protesters in December last year, killing one and injuring

around 60 others, when thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the ruling party⁵. Police as well as the soldiers seconded to civilian law enforcement have reportedly tortured⁶ suspects, carried out various types of torture and other ill treatment including sexual crimes, and mock executions⁷.

It is paramount that the UN conducts due assessments of human rights violations when enlisting peacekeeping soldiers. The screening process should not be limited to high-ranking officials. For years, the rights groups have been requesting the UN to introduce more transparency and accountability into the selection of peacekeepers from the countries that are top contributors, which has been largely ignored⁸.

Amnesty International has documented human rights violations by the RAB and other security agencies in the past⁹, and it is alarming that despite the rights groups as well as the United Nations highlighting these violations, this has not been taken into consideration when screening security officers to be deployed on peacekeeping missions. Currently 7436 Bangladeshi security officials are engaged with the UN peacekeeping missions, to interact with other high-risk groups of people. These peacekeepers include 20 contingents of the Army, two of the Navy and four of the Air Force as well as three of the Bangladeshi police, working in 14 UN missions and activities. 572 of the 7436 peacekeepers are women¹⁰.

The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances stated that “The sources report that the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a joint task force composed of members of the police, army, navy, air force, border guards, and Ansar (a paramilitary auxiliary force), has been repeatedly accused of committing severe human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances, and of operating under complete impunity.”¹¹

Bangladesh also has a record of impunity¹² for the crimes committed by the security officials, while promoting the perpetrators to senior positions¹³.

Bangladesh should address these human rights violations, hold the perpetrators accountable, and end impunity. The human rights track record of Bangladeshi law enforcement officers should be the main focus of Lacroix’s visit to ensure that peacekeeping forces do not have a history of human rights violations in their home countries.

1 UN experts urge Bangladesh to end reprisals against human rights defenders and relatives of the disappeared | OHCHR

2 UN experts urge Bangladesh to end reprisals against human rights defenders and relatives of the disappeared

3 Bangladesh_CycleOfFear_ReportCover_DRAFT-HSN.indd (omct.org)

4 Secret prisoners of Dhaka (netra.news)

5 Bangladesh: Authorities send a 'chilling message' when opening fire at protestors | Amnesty International UK

6 Bangladesh: Hold Security Forces Accountable for Torture | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)

7 bangladesh735a_web.pdf (fidh.org)

8 <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/vetting-un-peacekeepers-reportage-ground>

9 Stop them, now! Bangladesh: enforced disappearances, torture and restrictions on freedom of expression (amnesty.org)

10 <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/9hlg7co29s>

11 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/Allegations/118_Bangladesh.pdf

12 <http://www.hscentre.org/asia-and-pacific/corrupt-enforcement-bangladeshi-police-security-forces-still-not-held-accountable-torturearbitrary-detainment/>

13 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/05/bangladesh-government-keeps-rewarding-rights-abusers>