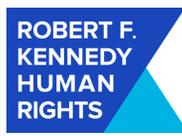




Capital  
Punishment  
Justice  
Project



November 8, 2021

Jean-Pierre Lacroix  
Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations  
United Nations Headquarters  
405 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY, 10017, USA

**Re: Human rights screening of Bangladeshi nationals**

Dear Under-Secretary-General Lacroix,

We, the 12 undersigned organizations, write to express our serious concern that the letter and spirit of the 2012 United Nations Policy on Human Rights Screening of United Nations Personnel (the Human Rights Screening Policy) is not being sufficiently applied in relation to Bangladeshi nationals.

As you know, Bangladesh is one of the top troop and police contributors to UN peacekeeping. In 2020, it was the highest contributor, deploying 6,731 uniformed personnel into various missions.

We are concerned, however, that those committing grave human rights violations within Bangladesh are being rewarded by the government with deployment to UN missions abroad. In particular, we are concerned that individuals who have served with the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) are being sent on UN missions, despite consistent and credible evidence of abuses including extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances by members of this unit since its creation in 2004.<sup>i</sup> In March 2021, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet noted that “[a]llegations of torture and ill-treatment by the Rapid Action Battalion have been a long-standing concern.”<sup>ii</sup>

We strongly urge that the UN Department of Peace Operations ban all personnel with a history of RAB-affiliation from UN deployment. In its concluding observations during Bangladesh’s 2019 review of its obligations under the Convention against Torture, the Committee against Torture stated that it is “concerned at reports that personnel that have served with the Rapid Action Battalion have frequently been deployed for service with United Nations peace missions” and recommended to “establish an independent vetting procedure, with appropriate UN guidance, for all military and police personnel proposed for deployment in UN peace missions and ensure

that no person or unit implicated in the commission of torture, extrajudicial killing, disappearances or other serious human rights violations is selected for service.”<sup>iii</sup>

In order to properly exclude police and military personnel with a history of human rights violations from UN ranks, we strongly urge that the Department of Peace Operations:

- Implement a systematic requirement to disclose all previous assignments so that UN entities responsible for implementing the Human Rights Screening Policy are able to determine in every case whether uniformed personnel deployed by the UN were previously seconded to RAB.
- Ensure that all uniformed personnel deployed by the UN, regardless of level or rank, are subject to systematic scrutiny of their individual human rights record prior to deployment. As is, we are concerned that systematic screening is being applied only at higher ranks. Ensure that UN entities responsible for conducting this screening have adequate resources and capacity to apply adequate scrutiny at all levels.
- Make clear how the screening process is implemented with independence from the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission. The NHRC cannot be objective and factual in the execution of their role in the screening process considering ongoing reports of its politicization and the fact that the NHRC’s legal framework limits its purview over security forces, in effect exempting them from any independent oversight.

The government has persisted in denying abuses and refuses to investigate allegations or hold perpetrators accountable, instead rewarding those who allegedly oversee abuses.<sup>iv</sup> For example, the current Inspector General of Police, Benazir Ahmed, received a medal for his work as the head of RAB from 2015 to 2019— a period when there were 136 reported extrajudicial executions and 10 enforced disappearances, allegedly by officers under his command.<sup>v</sup> During this time, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous appointed him as an expert member of an independent review team for an “External Review of the Functions, Structure, and Capacity of the UN Police Division.”<sup>vi</sup>

The deployment of members of the RAB in peacekeeping operations reinforces a message that grave human rights abuses will not preclude one from service under the UN flag, presenting a serious reputational risk for the UN. Even more importantly, it increases the probabilities of human rights abuses being committed in the context of UN missions.

The undersigned organizations would also be pleased to contribute information of use to the United Nations for screening. We additionally request the opportunity to meet to discuss these concerns.

Signing organizations:

1. Amnesty International
2. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

4. Asian Human Rights Commission
5. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
6. Capital Punishment Justice Project
7. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
8. Human Rights Watch
9. International Federation for Human Rights
10. Robert F. Kennedy for Human Rights
11. The Advocates for Human Rights
12. World Organization Against Torture

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<sup>i</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh’s Elite Security Force,” 2006.

<sup>ii</sup> “Bangladesh: UN rights chief urges transparent probe into writer’s death, review of law under which he was charged,” March 1, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086002> (accessed October 18, 2021).

<sup>iii</sup> Committee Against Torture, “Concluding observations on the initial report of Bangladesh,” August 26, 2019, CAT/C/BGD/CO/1.

<sup>iv</sup> Embassy of Bangladesh, “Press Release - Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Virtual Briefing on alleged “Enforced disappearance in Bangladesh” August 30, 2021, <http://www.bdembassyusa.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=502&cntnt01origid=15&cntnt01detailtemplate=detail&cntnt01returnid=85> (accessed October 18, 2021); Meenakshi Ganguly, “Despite Overwhelming Evidence, Bangladesh Authorities Deny Enforced Disappearances,” Human Rights Watch Dispatch, September 8, 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Odhikar, “Total Extra-Judicial Killing from 2001-2020,” [http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/KLEA\\_2001-2020.pdf](http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/KLEA_2001-2020.pdf) (accessed March 18, 2021); Odhikar, “Enforced Disappearances, 2009-2020,” [http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Statistics\\_Disappearance\\_2009-2019.pdf](http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Statistics_Disappearance_2009-2019.pdf) (accessed March 18, 2021).

<sup>vi</sup> “External Review of the Functions, Structure and Capacity of the UN Police Division,” May 31, 2016, [https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/external-review-2016\\_0.pdf](https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/external-review-2016_0.pdf)