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January 24, 2018

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Office of the Prime Minister
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Re: Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh

Dear Prime Minister Hasina,

We write to request you to take urgent steps to confirm the whereabouts and seek the release of the men currently detained by Bangladesh law enforcement or intelligence agencies outside the authority of the courts. We urge you to also take all possible steps to bring the current practice of secret detentions and enforced disappearances to an end, which is now affecting hundreds of Bangladeshi families.

Human Rights Watch is an international non-government organization working on a range of human rights issues in over 90 countries worldwide. We have been following and reporting on Bangladesh for over two decades. We accept no funding from any government or political entity to ensure our independence.

Enforced disappearances have emerged as a key and pressing concern in Bangladesh. Human Rights Watch has reported extensively on the issue. We have frequently raised our concerns in meetings with senior government officials over many years. In the 2013 Universal Periodic Review, the Bangladesh government agreed to “thoroughly and impartially investigate and ... prosecute all allegations of human rights violations, in particular enforced disappearances, custodial torture and extra-judicial killings,” including violations by members of the security forces. However, except for a few isolated incidents, the government has failed to honor this commitment.

According to data collated by [journalists](#) and [Bangladeshi human rights groups](#), [hundreds remain victims](#) of enforced disappearance, even as the authorities ignore appeals from family members and even threaten them for speaking out. Over 80 cases of disappearances were reported in 2017, with seven later reported killed and 17 still missing. It is suspected that there are many other cases which have not been reported.

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In July 2017, Human Rights Watch released a [report documenting](#) a number of enforced disappearances since 2013, including at least 90 victims in 2016. While most were produced in court after weeks or months of secret detention, Human Rights Watch documented 21 cases of detainees who were later killed in so-called gunfights or “crossfire,” and nine others whose whereabouts remain unknown.

During Human Rights Watch investigations into disappearances, witnesses confirmed the involvement of law enforcement agencies; including the police, the Detective Branch of the police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). Some of these disappearances appear to be politically motivated with several members of opposition parties or their relatives still missing, including Sajedul Islam Sumon, Adnan Chowdhury, Mir Ahmed Bin Qasem, and Abdullahil Amaan Azmi. Salauddin Ahmed, spokesperson and joint-secretary of the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP), was disappeared for three months and later found in India. Hummam Qader Chowdhury, the son of a senior BNP leader, SQ Chowdhury, was released after six months of secret detention with no government explanation or compensation.

In the vast majority of cases of enforced disappearance, police refuse to allow the families to file a criminal complaint against state agencies, at most only permitting them to file a ‘missing person’ complaint. In addition, Bangladesh authorities, at the highest levels, have chosen to dismiss or deny the allegations instead of investigating these cases and helping family members. [You have said](#) that while the government of Bangladesh has an obligation to protect its citizens, other countries such as the UK and US have larger numbers of disappearances, conflating enforced disappearances by Bangladeshi authorities with disappearances for other reasons in the UK and US. The Home Minister has attempted to dismiss the problem by [stating that people have faked their disappearances](#) for personal reasons, such as debts or crimes, or to embarrass the government. Even if this turns out to be true in some cases, it is an abdication of responsibility to take no action in the large number of cases of genuine disappearances.

We are concerned that ahead of upcoming national elections there may again be a spike in politically motivated disappearances, as happened at the time of the 2014 polls.

With denial and impunity the norm, an independent investigation is necessary. Human Rights Watch recommends that the government invite such an investigation during the upcoming visit by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We further recommend that the government invite relevant UN special procedures—including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the working group on arbitrary detentions; and the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman

or degrading treatment or punishment—to visit Bangladesh to investigate and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice and accountability, as well as reform of the security forces so that they will act independently and professionally. We note that although the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances has repeatedly requested an invitation to visit Bangladesh, it has received no response.

We also urge Bangladesh to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

We request specific information about the disappeared individuals, contained in the appendix to this letter, who were picked up in the last two years by state agencies and remain missing. Please contact my colleague Shayna Bauchner at bauchns@hrw.org or via fax at +1-292-612-4333 with any questions or information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brad Adams
Asia Director
Human Rights Watch

CC:

The Honourable Anisul Haq
Minister of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs

The Honourable Mahbubey Alam
Attorney General
Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan
Minister of Home Affairs

Mr. Didar Ahmed
Detective Branch Additional Commissioner

Mr. Benazir Ahmed
Director General
Rapid Action Battalion

Major General Md Saiful Abedin
Director General
Directorate General of Forces Intelligence

Brigadier General SM Matiur Rahman
Director, Counter-terrorism and Intelligence Bureau
Directorate General of Forces Intelligence

Mr. Hussain Muhammad Ershad
Special Envoy to the Prime Minister

Mr. Houssain Toufique Imam
Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Political Affairs

Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique
Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Security Affairs

Appendix: List of those disappeared since January 2016, provided by Bangladesh human rights activists

Maroof Zaman

Maroof Zaman, a former Bangladeshi ambassador to Qatar and Vietnam, [disappeared](#) on December 4, 2017, when he drove to Dhaka airport to pick up his daughter. Subsequently, masked men entered the family house and took away his computer and other devices.

Robiul Islam

Two men, identifying themselves as members of RAB, [detained Robiul Islam](#), an alleged one-time drug dealer who at the time of his disappearance worked for the NGO "Robir Alo," saying that they wanted him to provide information. He remains disappeared since October 25, 2017.

Sohel Khan

Sohel Khan, general secretary of the youth wing of Awami League's Chingrakhali union in Bagherat, [disappeared after he was allegedly detained by RAB](#) on July 17, 2017.

Abdullah Al Faruq

Abdullah Al Faruq, a student activist of the Awami League, [disappeared](#) after he was detained in Rajshahi on July 18, 2017, by men who identified themselves as members of RAB. RAB has [denied](#) their role.

Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman Nahid

Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman Nahid, assistant general secretary of Narsingdi Government College unit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, [disappeared](#) after he was detained on June 9, 2017, by about 10 men identifying themselves as law enforcement officers.

Rizwan Haroon

Lakehead Grammar School co-founder Rizwan Haroon disappeared from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on May 10, 2017, upon his arrival from the United Kingdom on an Emirates Airways flight. According to [news reports](#), intelligence agencies suspected him of being linked to terrorism.

Emon Hossain

Emon Hossain was one of seven men picked up between May 4 and 6, 2017 from two villages in Jhenaidah district [apparently by law enforcement authorities](#). While the other six were formally shown arrested in subsequent months after a period of secret detention, Emon Hossain remains disappeared.

Abdul Kuddus Pramanik

Md. Abdul Kuddus Pramanik, a farmer, disappeared after he was detained in Rajshahi on March 30, 2017, by a group of men who introduced themselves as law enforcement officers.

Shafikur Rahman, Mohammad Hasan, and Moazzam Hossain Sathi

Shafikur Rahman, 35, and his brothers-in-law Mohammad Hasan, 21, and Moazzem Hossain Sathi, 18, disappeared in Chittagong on March 24, 2017. Rahman's wife [told journalists](#) that a day after his detention, he called relatives from his cell phone to say that a team of law enforcement officials had picked them up and tortured them.

Imrul Hossain, Ibrahim Gazi, Rezaul Islam, Alam Khan

[Six men from different villages](#) in the Sadar and Kotchandpur areas of Jhenaidah district were detained over a two-week period in March 2017. One man, Humanyan Kabir, was later released, and another, Anarul Islam, was arrested, but the other four men remain disappeared.

Shafiqul Islam Modhu

Shafiqul Islam Modhu, an employee of Rangpur Karuponno Garment Company, [disappeared](#) after he was detained in Rangpur on January 13, 2017, by law enforcement officers in front of his [family members](#).

Hassan Ali

Hassan Ali, who worked as a salesman for a clothes shop, [disappeared after he was picked up in Dhaka](#) on January 7, 2017, by plainclothes officers, one of whom was identified in CCTV footage as being from the police Detective Branch.

Abdullahil Amaan Azmi

According to his relatives and an eyewitness, Abdulahali Amaan Azmi, a former army officer, [disappeared](#) after he was [detained](#) on August 22, 2016, by security forces from his home in Mogh Bazaar in Dhaka. Azmi is the son of Ghulam Azam, a Jamaat-e-Islami leader, who died in custody in 2014 after he was sentenced to 90 years in prison for crimes against humanity during the country's 1971 independence war.

Mir Ahmed Bin Quasem

Mir Ahmed bin Quasem [disappeared](#) after he was detained on August 9, 2016 from his home in Mirpur in Dhaka. His wife, sister, and two young children witnessed his detention by law enforcement officers. Ahmed is the son of Mir Quasem Ali, a Jamaat-e-Islami leader who was executed on September 4, 2016, following his conviction for crimes committed during the country's independence war.

Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukdar

Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukdar, a British national, [disappeared](#) on July 14, 2016. [Witnesses said](#) he had been detained by members of RAB in Banani, Dhaka. Both the police and RAB deny having him in custody.

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa, suspected in the June 5, 2016, killing of the wife of a senior police officer, is still on the run according to the authorities. However, Sikdar's wife [claims](#) that he has disappeared after he was arrested in Chittagong on June 22, 2016, by a group of plainclothes policemen.

Bibhas Sangma, Rajesh Marak and Probhat Marak

Bibhas Sangma, a college student, was detained by law enforcement officials, some of them wearing RAB uniforms, on April 14, 2016. He was picked up along with his relatives Probhat Marak, a labourer, and Rajesh Marak, a student. All three, who are members of an indigenous community, [have disappeared](#).

Sheikh Mohammad Moyajjem Hossain Tapu

A student leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mohammad Moyajjem Hossain Tapu, [disappeared](#) after being detained on January 26, 2016, in Dhaka. His relatives said that according to a witness he was detained by three men who said they were members of the Detective Branch of the police.