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CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Reclaiming Human Dignity . Protecting Fundamental Human Rights

May 06, 2017

Immediate Press Release:

**RE: CALL FOR ACTION TO INSTILL A FULLY PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY,
CIVIL, HUMAN AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH**

I respectfully greet you in the name of the Canadian Human Rights International Organization (CHRIO) – a non-for-profit organization, founded by and made up of professionals of law, social work, psychology, criminology and civil citizens who monitor and defend human rights abuses in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set forth by the United Nations.

This letter addresses the current situation in Bangladesh and requests your immediate support to combat the ongoing Human Rights abuses occurring in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is in need of immediate political, economic a social reform – with over a 164 Million lives at stake. Bangladesh has a strong civil society that longs to create a peaceful and secure environment for its people, despite its long fought battle with unaccountable and misguided governance, and various forms of social and economic inequalities that produced lasting negative consequences for the people of Bangladesh.

The majority of the people, both in rural and urban communities face the deeply ridden challenges of extreme poverty. This had lead to a rising concern for the continuously growing social and economic disparities, frequent cases of political and civil unrest and the daunting challenge of natural hazards, likely to be further compounded by climate change in the years to come. Extreme hunger, child labour, poor access to clean water and inadequate sanitation services are just some of the consequences that the political, economic, and social instability in Bangladesh has created.

Despite significant economic progress over the last 15 years and achievements in areas such as poverty alleviation, health and education, Bangladesh still faces a number of developmental challenges related to violence, lack of access to justice, and limited citizen inclusion in decision-making processes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to focus attention on many of these challenges, especially with the Agenda's inclusion of Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to an agreement of the United Nations Conference on sustainable development to develop a set of future international development goals. On 25th September of 2015 leaders of 193 countries of the world unanimously adopted the post-2015 international development agenda for the period of 2015-2030. SDGs is the framework for global development after the terminal year (2015) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With 17 goals and 169 targets SDGs represents a bold new agenda to end poverty, fight inequality, tackle the adverse effects of climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all.



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Bangladesh has fixed 47 targets in various sectors for the upcoming SDGs proposal. The SDGs targets include establishing rights for children in the due time, reducing child-labor by 50%, reducing violence against women by 75%, and reducing dropout rates by 10%, by establishing stronger access to formal education. Additionally, 20% of the education sector will focus on for technical and developing hard skills. Lastly, Bangladesh's plans to fully eradicate poverty, education and health issues, child mortality and maternal mortality, gender equality etc.

The key challenges for Bangladesh for implementing the SDGs as

1. Integration in the national planning process
2. Financial and non-financial resources
3. Institutional mechanism for implementation
4. Data for Monitoring
5. Participation and accountability

Attainment of the SDGs would require a strong and effective institutional mechanism involving all stakeholders including public representatives across the country, government and the bureaucracy, private sector, civil society, knowledge community, and development partners.

Currently, 40% of the population of Bangladesh is estimated to continue to live below the national poverty line, while child malnutrition rate has climbed to 41% for children under the age of 5. The sex ratio between male and female populations was 19:20 in 2007. More than a third of the total population is under 15 years and more than half between the ages 15 and 59. The demographic dependency ratio is about 76.6 per cent. This young age structure creates sustained momentum for population growth, which will continue well into the future – some estimates go as far as until 2060 – even in the case of rapid declines in fertility rates. Many locals fear that the Public Sector in Bangladesh lacks the capacity and accountability to effectively support the next generation in a sustainable manner.

The Monitoring of Employment Survey of Bangladesh 2009 estimated that 53.7 million from the working-age population (15 years and above) are in the workforce. 40.2 million workers are male and 13.5 million are female. The female labour force increased by nearly 12 per cent between 2006 and 2009, and the male labour force increased by nearly 8 per cent. This indicates increased presence of women in the job market, but continues to demonstrate an existing gap that fails to be addressed. There is still a 3:1 ratio of male to female workers in the labour market. Furthermore, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimated in 2010 that 89% of jobs in the labour market fall within the category of informal employment – where employers do not comply with tax, labour market obligations, or product market obligations. With little to no incentive to adhere to basic Human Rights, millions are at the expense of capitalism, and the pursuit to maximize profit. This is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas, where women are more likely to be employed under informal arrangements.

Textile Industries:



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In Bangladesh, 3.5 million workers in 4,825 garment factories produce goods for export to the global market, principally Europe and North America. The Bangladeshi garment industry generates 80% of the country's total export revenue. However, the wealth generated by this sector has led to few improvements in the lives of garment workers, 85% of whom are women. The majority of garment workers in Bangladesh earn little more than the minimum wage, set at 3,000 taka a month (approximately \$48 CAD), far below what is considered a living wage, calculated at 5,000 taka a month (approximately \$81 CAD), which would be the minimum required to provide a family with shelter, food and education.

As well as earning a pittance, Bangladeshi factory workers face appalling conditions. Many are forced to work 14-16 hours a day seven days a week, with some workers finishing at 3am only to start again the same morning at 7.30am. On top of this, workers face unsafe, cramped and hazardous conditions which often lead to work injuries and factory fires. Since 1990, more than 400 workers have died and several thousand more have been wounded in 50 major factory fires. Sexual harassment and discrimination is widespread and many women workers have reported that the right to maternity leave is not upheld by employers. Factory management also take steps to prevent the formation of trade unions, a right protected under the Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining ILO Conventions, which Bangladesh ratified in 1972.

Water and Sanitation:

There is a lack of clarity or fulfillment of the roles and responsibilities amongst the agencies involved in establishing and operating water and sanitation systems in Bangladesh. As a result, the human resource (HR) capacity within the sector remains fragmented, communities suffer from a lack of food security, and they are unable to economically sustain themselves. There is a need for a single agency with a clear mandate to provide the strategic lead and co-ordinate activities within the sector.

In Bangladesh 97% of the population currently has access to water, but only 40% have access to sanitized water. That leaves a staggering 60% of the population, who use water for drinking, food preparation and irrigation at the risk of arsenic contamination.

Water in Bangladesh comes in large fluctuations throughout the year, with the warmer temperatures bringing water in monsoons – and the colder weather producing extended droughts that significantly reduce agriculture production in the country. Poor infrastructure and organization of human resources in the Sector has produced no effective or innovative methods of storing excess water from the monsoons that could be used safely for drinking water or for crops during drought seasons. With over two-thirds of the population working in the agriculture industry, many communities struggle with a lack of food security and the ability to economically sustain themselves through the droughts.

Malnutrition is widespread in Bangladesh and is a major consequence of poor access to clean water. Rates of malnutrition in Bangladesh are among the highest in the world.⁵ More than 54%



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of preschool-age children, equivalent to more than 9.5 million children, are stunted, 56% are underweight and more than 17% are wasted.

Political Instability

It has been 46 years since Bangladesh achieved independence, but the achievements in the spheres of democracy and development are not noteworthy. In Bangladesh every political leader or party, civil or military, popular or unpopular, big or small, in or out of power, talk about democratic incessantly. Even so the nation has failed to put it into practice. Parties voted into power to strengthen democracy have all failed to encourage its values. Taking advantage of this situation, military leaders intervened to practice their own version of democracy, which only exacerbated the crisis. The country today is riddle with numerous problems threatening the very development of democracy. Bangladesh's society is composed of a weak political culture, that lacks participation due to poverty ridden individuals who are illiterate, and have been strategically isolated from understanding the importance of a democratically based political organization, institutions and practices. However, the prospects for a politically developed and economically prosperous nation are marked by the people's eagerness to foster the principals of a democracy. Equal economic growth is a product of a democracy.

Bangladesh, like most of the third world countries, has a twin challenge to face: the institutionalization of a democratic order, while simultaneously attaining a target rate of economic growth for development. Therefore democracy and economic development has to develop in parallel. The level of poverty, illiteracy, starvation, disease and malnutrition that prevails among nearly eighty percent of the population certainly does not make it easy for any country or government to undertake such a challenge. Since independence in 1971, democracy has been in crisis in Bangladesh. The country was born out of a long democratic movement initially aimed at achieving autonomy for the rights of the majority population of Pakistan. Towards the end of this movement almost the entire population of Bangladesh was drawn in an armed struggle to establish their rights of self-determination as guaranteed in the charter of the United Nations. The cherished goal of democratic rights of the people were enshrined in the constitution of the country in 1972 but in less than two years after the first parliament was elected, the structure and character of the fundamental law of the land was changed and the country's political system was turned into a one-party monolithic structure. All political parties were dissolved and all newspapers were banned except four to be retained by the state; the fundamental rights were suspended and made non-enforceable and the judiciary was reduced into a subservient agency of the executive branch of the state (Ahmed, 1994).

Present Features of Bangladesh Democracy:

1. Absence of democratic political culture: Bangladesh is lacking a democratic political culture. Democratic orientations and practices are not seen in Bangladesh's polity and society. People's competence to cope with the democratic norms and values is not adequate. Equal opportunities for democratic learning are not available in Bangladesh's



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educational or political institutions. Thus, democratic norms and values could not strike root in society and polity.

2. Absence the rule of law: In true and real sense there is no rule of law in Bangladesh today. Law in Bangladesh follows a course of selective and discretionary application. Institution and procedures required for ensuring rule of law also are not effective in the country. Today it has become the part of Bangladesh's political culture for police to take action against any opposition, and turn a blind eye to the perpetrators. In the case of bail for political activists, judges simply obey the wishes of political masters, and their self-interest in the situation – failing to remain impartial.
3. Lack of political morality: Bangladesh's politician's lack political morality, which gave rise to the system of a caretaker government to arrange national elections. It is a sign of popular distrust that the people have for their politicians.
4. Absence of strong civil society: Bangladesh has failed to establish a strong civil society, which could ground the liberalism and put flesh on the skeleton of democracy. Even we are lacking a civil culture which structure the social space of civil society in public regarding ways, anchoring individual identify and conscience in shared norms of solidarity trust and reciprocity. Bangladesh's intellectuals are merely the prop of ruling classes.
5. Absence of strong political leadership: Bangladesh lacks strong patriotic political leadership essential for leading the nation toward progress and stability. Bangladesh's leaders do not hold an image to unite the nation through a platform. They consider themselves, as leader of their party not the nation as a whole.
6. Confrontational politics: Politics in Bangladesh are often confrontational in nature where there is no cooperation, trust and solidarity among political parties and groups. There is no census among political parties on issues of national interest. They oppose each other only for the sake of opposition.
7. Ineffective political institutions: Political institutions are not strong and developed enough to render required services on way of democratization and political development. The parliament does not work effectively due to continuous boycott by opposition and its role as a ground for deliberation proved to be ineffective. Political parties are safe shelter of vested interests. Thus their role to institutionalize democracy is not only inadequate but also unacceptable.
8. Corruption and terrorism: Corruption and terrorism are two terrible barriers to democratic development in Bangladesh. Although the then govt. refused the claim, Transparency International has ranked Bangladesh as most corrupt nation of the world four times. Terrorism is not unconcerned to none of the citizens. thus, greatest challenge. Before the nation is to uproot corruption and terrorism from society.
9. Negativity/Double standard: Double standards and attitude is a great barrier to democratic development as it discouraged to accept others. Everything is just if it favors one's own interest, otherwise it is wrong. An election is fair if the result is favorable otherwise it is unfair. Such kind of attitudes forces politicians to stereotype enmity and distrust.
10. Lack of tolerance and reciprocity: There is a lack of tolerance, mutual respect, trust and reciprocity among politicians and political parties. Compromise and consensus is absent from Bangladesh's polity, which inflames enmity among politician and endangers the growth of democracy in the country.



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Basic Principals/Requisites Required for Inclusive and Participatory Democracy:

1. Liberty
2. Equality
3. Fraternity
4. The people as an ultimate source of sovereignty
5. Fundamental Rights to the People
6. Independence of Judiciary
7. The people are considered as an end, and State as the means in a democracy
8. Welfare State

Conditions for the success of Democracy in Bangladesh:

1. Sound System of Education: Where there is illiteracy, it becomes difficult to make democracy successful because many qualities are needed to make democracy a success. The citizens can acquire these qualities only through literacy. The people should have the sense of understanding political problems. They should possess such qualities as sacrifice, sympathy, selfless service of the country., discipline, fraternity, etc. As far as possible, education should be free and the rich and the poor should be given equal opportunities for their development. The citizens should strive for mental and physical development through education. Otherwise employment shall prove harmful for democracy. In short, ideal citizens are prepared through education without which democracy cannot become successful.
2. Enlightened Citizenship: People should have the knowledge of their rights and duties to make democracy as success. So long as the citizens do not perform their duties is essential, it is equally essential for the citizens to become conscious of their 5 rights, without which there is every possibility of the government becoming autocrat. Therefore, it is said that 'Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.'
3. Political Awakening: It is essential to inculcate political awakening among the citizens to make democracy a success. Where there is no political awakening, the citizens fail to understand the political problems. They are also unable to elect their representatives properly. Political disinterestedness does not help the citizens to understand the economic and political problems of the day and contribute their mite to the implementation of various national plans defense efforts of the country.
4. Freedom: Democracy guarantees the citizens the freedom of expression, freedom of profession, freedom of religion and freedom to form associations. A free and fearless press is the basic need of democracy in order to keep under checks the autocratic activities of the government. In the countries where press is not free, citizens cannot criticize the government with the result that they cannot fully enjoy much freedom. In Russia, china and other Communist countries, the press is not free to criticize the government. Press is also not free in the countries where there is military dictatorship.



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5. Equality: Democracy does not recognize class distinctions. It is based on social, economic and political equality. In democracy all are equal before law and there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, color, religion, sex and economic status. Economic equality does not mean that everybody should be given equal monuments; it means equality of opportunity and a fair and open field for all. This kind of equality ensures social justice, which is the very life-breath of a democracy. Equality thus means giving everybody right to vote and contest election irrespective of caste, religion, property, sex, color and creed.
6. Law and Order: The maintenance of law and order in society by the government is another essential condition for the success of democracy. Anarchy prevails where government fails to maintain law and order and the people's faith in government is shaken. They look towards dictatorship in order to get rid of anarchy.
7. Spirit of Co-operation: Every democracy has to face many economic, social, religious and political problems. In dictatorship, these problems are solved by the dictator according to this own whim. In absolute monarchy, the situation is similar to dictatorship, but it is different in a democracy. In democracy the Prime Minister or the President cannot act arbitrarily but they have to find the solution of problems according to the wishes of the Parliament or of the people. These problems can be solved by the co-operation of the people. Further, a democracy can flourish only if there is no big gap between the thinking of the people and of the government and when there is a spirit of co-operation between them.
8. Decentralization of Powers and Local self-government: For the success of a democracy, decentralization of powers is essential. The concentration of power makes the government autocratic. With the division of power between the center and the provinces, the burden of the Center is reduced and the provinces get autonomy, which ultimately brings efficiency in the administration. With the introduction of local self-government, people take interest in the administrations and they give full support to the government. The French writer De Tocqueville has rightly said that, "Local institutions constitute the strength of free nations. A nation may establish a system of free governments but without municipal institutions cannot have the spirit of liberty."
9. High Moral Standard: The success of democracy also depends upon the high moral standard of the people as well as of the government. Where there is dishonesty, black-marketing, hoarding and smuggling and where the ministers and public servants are corrupt, the question of the success of democracy does not arise. People should have the spirit of patriotism, discipline, self-control, and honesty in payment of taxes and willing obedience to the laws of the land. The government should follow the ideal of service to the community, because a welfare state and a democracy are two inseparable things.
10. Social and economic Security: Economic security is essential for the success of democracy. The people should be given the right to work and it is the duty of the government to provide them with suitable employment. In case the government is unable to provide it to the people, it should at least provide them with shelter, clothing and food. In Russia and in many other Communist countries, the government has given this right to the people in their constitution. The government should also recognize this right of the people for the success of democracy in the country. Besides, social security is also essential. Nowadays, the government fixes hours of work, salary, bonus, paid holidays and compensation for fatal



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accidents in order to save the laborers from exploitation by the capitalists. The government should provide social security to the people in case of their being disabled due to old age, illness, accident or any other cause. Without this provision, democracy shall be considered useless. People in Russia have full social security. In India, too, some concrete steps have been taken in this direction.

11. Tolerance and Spirit of Unity: It is the responsibility of the people to make democracy a success. For this, the spirit of tolerance and unity is needed. Bangladesh has a number of religions, languages and casts, where major disparities between the rich and the poor are found.. In spite of mutual disagreements, the people should join together to face a national crisis. In case of foreign aggression, the people should forget their differences of caste, religion, language and province and try to preserve the freedom of their country with a spirit of devotion and sacrifice.
12. Sound Party System: In a democracy difference in views is not only tolerated but it is encouraged, because constructive criticism has an important place in a democracy. For this reason, many parties crop up in a democratic set-up. In the countries where there is only one party, and where other parties are banned democracy cannot develop, only dictatorship develops there. It happened in Germany during the time of Hitler and in Italy during the regime of Mussolini Now-a-days, this type of dictatorship is found in Russia, China, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Poland. In order to make democracy a success, a healthy and influential opposition is a must; otherwise the ruling party will become an autocrat 7 after winning the elections. The Opposition keeps a check on the autocratic activities of ministers. Without it, there is every likelihood of their being power-corrupt. Where there is a bi-party system, the task of making democracy a success becomes easier because on party rules and the other keeps an effective check over its activities. Where there are many parties, the legislature is divided into many small groups and no single party is in a position to form the government. The result is that coalition governments are installed which is not stable. Therefore, bi-party system is better than multi-party system. There is a bi-party system in England and in the U.S.A. There is a multi-party system in France, Italy and West Germany. That is why democracy is more successful in England and the U.S.A, than in other countries where there is multi-party system. In France during the Third and Fourth Republics the government was very instable. As compared to France, there are fewer problems in Italy and West Germany, because certain parties are very powerful in these countries. In India, after he Fourth General Elections, we witnessed political instability because the Congress Party was unable to secure majority in some states. In certain states opposition parties established coalition governments, which could not survive long (Agarwal, 1991).
13. Written Constitution and Independent Judiciary: For the successful functioning of democracy, people are given fundamental rights and written constitutions are introduced with a view to checking autocratic activities of the government. Where there are no written constitutions, the government can extend and exercise its powers in an autocratic manner. Judiciary is the guardian of Constitution and fundamental rights, and the independence of judiciary from the control of executive has been guaranteed. Where judiciary is not independent, there is no guarantee of the fundamental rights of the people and the



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constitution becomes useless. This is the condition in Russia, China and many other Communist countries.

14. Independent, impartial and periodical elections: Independent, impartial and periodical elections help in establishing faith of the people and the opposition a democracy, otherwise the opposition party will not get an opportunity for forming the government and there will be no respect for public opinion. In the absence of independent, impartial and periodical elections, the opposition parties shall try to change the government by a revolution with the help of military or by the use of violent force. In Pakistan, elections were not held for many years. The result was that military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan was established in 1958, which have a severe blow to democracy.
15. Political security, good administration, economic prosperity and wise leadership: Efficient administration is another condition for the success of a democracy. In fact, the success of democracy depends upon efficient administration. People's faith in democracy is shaken in a corrupt administration. Political security is also essential because people start feeling the necessary of dictatorship, if a democratic government is unable to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country at the time of foreign invasion. If a government fails to remove the scarcity of essential commodities, if the prices of these commodities are abnormally high and if people starve owing to abject poverty, the people's faith in democracy is shaken and they start feeling the necessity of some other type of government. Thus to protect democracy from being usurped by dictatorship intelligent leadership is very essential.

Closing:

From the above discussion we can say that from very early of civilization democracy was discussed from various viewpoints and applied it various way. Today most of the people want to enjoy this form of government. The people of Bangladesh are not out of them. But Bangladesh has been facing various problems to institutionalize democracy since its independence. Yet it, prospects of democracy in Bangladesh today are not insignificant. I think the suggested measures given above would be helpful for the policy makers of the state for democratic development. For this the media, civil society and socio-political organizations and institutions must play the pioneering role – therefore we request the support of the international community to intervene, and tackle the various challenges Bangladesh faces to achieving a fully participatory democracy.

If you have any questions or require further information and / or supplementary documents to backup claims please do not hesitate to contact me by email at Mario.Guilombo@Chrio.ca Thank you very much for your time and consideration, I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.



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Sincerely,

Mohammed Mominul Haque
Executive Director of Asia Missions
Canadian Human Rights International Organization



Mario Guilombo
Founder and Director of International Missions
Canadian Human Rights International Organization