



Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE NON GOUVERNEMENTALE AYANT STATUT CONSULTATIF AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES, DE L'UNESCO,
DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE ET D'OBSERVATEUR AUPRES DE LA COMMISSION AFRICAINE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DES PEUPLES

International Federation
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional
de los Derechos Humanos

الغدرالية الدولية لحقوق الانسان

Open letter

Bangladesh

Violent repression against peaceful protest

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed
Honourable Chief Adviser
Non-Party Caretaker Government
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Paris-Dhaka, 27 August 2007

The Hon. Chief Adviser,

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) wishes to express its concern at the use of excessive force by police and army personnel against the recent student protest on 20 and 21 August 2007.

According to information received, police and army personnel responded violently to students at Dhaka University and other educational institutions protesting against a number of alleged assaults of students by soldiers in Dhaka during a recent football match. Reports indicate the students were promoting number of demands that included the withdrawal of military and police camps from all educational institutions, an apology from the army chief for the assaults, punishment of the security forces involved in the assaults, proper medical care for the injured and lifting of the nationwide state of emergency.

The police and army, as broadcast by media, displayed violent response and demonstrated a lack of discipline from those in charge in controlling law and order. Incidents of concern include the reported indiscriminate use of tear gas including, on 21 August, its use against a female students' dormitory at Dhaka University to prevent them from joining the protests. More worrying still are reports that security officers arrested a number of teachers and professors from Dhaka University without making public their whereabouts or the nature of the charges against them. These reports raise questions of compliance by officers of your government with Article 9 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to liberty and security of person. FIDH strongly underlines that the protest must not be used as an opportunity by authorities to undermine human rights.

While FIDH respects the right of the Government to maintain law and order and to protect the personal and material safety of its citizens, it is concerned at the treatment of those advocating for judicial remedies and human rights. In recognition of the right of all people to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, we emphasise that your own promise to take "stern actions against the perpetrators" made on 22 August 2007 must not be retaliatory in nature against those calling peacefully for legitimate domestic reforms nor must the government response infringe domestic and international legal and human rights norms.

We welcome the decision of the Caretaker Government to comply with the students' demands and withdraw its troops from Dhaka campus on Wednesday, 23 August, and are encouraged by the decision of your government to form a judicial inquiry committee, headed by an independent court judge, to investigate the complaints of ill-treatment that sparked the ensuing protests. We urge the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to launch an additional independent investigation into the use of excessive force by police and army personnel.

FIDH urges the authorities of Bangladesh to put an end to all acts of retaliation against legitimate and peaceful protesters. To avoid any further deterioration in the human rights situation, the current curfew, imposed on 22 August 2007, should be maintained for only so long as is strictly necessary and the return to normalcy, particularly the reopening of universities and colleges throughout the country, must be a priority. FIDH recalls the obligation of your government to at all times act in accordance with the international human rights obligations undertaken by the People's Republic of Bangladesh, particularly the right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of association guaranteed respectively under Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as the right to freedom of expression, provided for under Article 19 of the ICCPR. Finally, all individuals arrested in relation to recent events must be afforded the fundamental guarantees of due process under domestic and international law.

In the hope that you will take these considerations and requests into account,

Respectfully,

Souhayr Belhassen
President of FIDH

Adilur Rahman Khan
Secretary of Odhikar

