

24 September 2024

Dr. Muhammad Yunus

Chief Advisor

Interim Government of Bangladesh

We write as human rights activists and human rights defenders across Europe and beyond to express our deepest concern regarding the arrest of Mr. Shahriar Kabir, a reputed freelance journalist in Bangladesh, a documentary filmmaker, a writer, a humanist, and above all- an uncompromising human rights activist. Mr. Kabir was the President of the Forum for Secular Bangladesh, and we highly praise his human rights activism and his work for a secular South Asia.

We are aware of the political crisis in Bangladesh that have been escalating since July 2024 that resulted into the regime change and eventually followed by taking over power by the current Interim Government headed by Noble Peace Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus as its Chief Adviser. Within a week of the new regime, on 15 September, Mr Shahriar Kabir, aged 73, was arrested from his home on a fictitious political case. We condemn the way in which Mr. Kabir has been implicated in the case and was arrested from his home despite the Interim Government's commitment not to harass and arrest anyone in any political cases without proper legal investigation. It was surprising to us that since the new regime of Dr. Yunus came to power, multiple criminal cases have been filed including one at the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh accusing Shahriar Kabir of crimes against humanity and genocide, who himself had been prominently vocal all his life against international crimes taking place in any corner of the world.

We further condemn his treatment at the court where he was physically attacked by the mob in the presence of law enforcement personnel. It is shocking that his appeal for a wheelchair, due to his advanced age and physical condition, was ignored both by the police and the court. Also surprising is that the court sanctioned against him 7 (seven) days of "remand", a tool of enhanced interrogation and torture commonly used by police, and accordingly handed him over to the Police for "questioning". We are very concerned about the treatment Mr Kabir may receive under the partisan police and jail authority of Bangladesh, known for their poor track record of human rights.

We strongly urge that Mr Shahriar Kabir is treated as per the norms of international human rights law, which the current Interim Government of Bangladesh has pledged to comply. We further urge you to take legal action against all those who defiled his image and dignity at the court premises, supposedly a safe place for any person in conflict with law. We jointly urge the government of Bangladesh to

- a) Ensure his dignity and human rights
- b) Release him on bail immediately and to release him from all the baseless politically motivated cases
- c) Avail all medical facilities, including a wheelchair for his movement
- d) Ensure him full and unfettered access to his legal counsel, and
- e) Ensure his family members and colleagues have full visitation rights.

We urge all institutions of Bangladesh to respect and observe the international human rights law.

Signed:

PAULO CASACA, Executive Director, South Asian Democratic Forum, Portugal

TARIK GÜNERSEL, Member of Advisory Board of PEN International Writers for Peace Committee, Turkey

DR HELEN JARVIS, Life Member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, Cambodia

MONA HAGHGOU, Strindberg Attorney at law, Sweden

PROFESSOR RAFAL PANKOWSKI, Sociologist, cofounder of the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association, Warsaw, Poland

NATALIA SINEAEVA, Genocide scholar and minority rights defender, Warsaw, Poland

CHRIS BLACKBURN, Activist, UK

RENÉ LIEBENTHAL, Economist, Argentina

JAMI ASLAM, Lawyer, Switzerland

DUŠAN GOJKOV, Balkan Literary Herald, PEN Arman, Serbia - Greece

TAPAS DAS, Assistant Professor, India

DR RAYHAN RASHID, Trustee, International Crimes Strategy Forum (ICSF), United Kingdom

BANAFSHEH ZAND, Journalist, Iran

NICHOLAS KAWINGA, A poet from Lusaka, Zambia

MATTHEW JOHNSEN, Human Rights Activist, United States of America

VLADIMIR BOGDANIĆ, Secretary General, Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

SANJIB BHARATIA, Human Rights Defender, India

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