



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**  
*Briefing Series on the Shrinking Space for Civil Society*

**Human Rights in Bangladesh**

**Tuesday, December 1, 2015**  
**10 AM – 11 AM**  
**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Panelists**



**Rafida Ahmed Bonya**, a humanist activist, published science author, and moderator of the blog *Mukto-Mona*, a well-known hub for Bengali-speaking freethinkers and rationalists. She is the widow of assassinated Bangladeshi-American writer and blogger Dr. Avijit Roy, who founded *Mukto-Mona* in 2001, and was murdered by extremists while visiting Dhaka with Ahmed in February 2015. Bonya was seriously injured in the attack.



**Sahar Chaudhry** is a Senior Policy Analyst with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which she joined in October 2010. Her areas of responsibility include South Asia, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the island of Cyprus. Before joining the Commission, she was a research analyst for religion & world affairs at the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life. Her work focused on governmental and societal restrictions on religions and Muslim demography. She also contributed qualitative and quantitative analysis to several public opinion surveys and demographic reports of religious groups. She has also worked at Shearman & Sterling, LLP, where along with her regular position as a legal assistant for Corporate Finance, she donated her time to assist on several religious asylum and political asylum cases. Ms. Chaudhry received her Master's degree in International Political Economy from Claremont Graduate University and holds Bachelor's degrees in Economics and International Politics from Connecticut College.



**Bharath Gopalaswamy** is the Director of the South Asia Center. Prior to joining the Atlantic Council, Gopalaswamy managed the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he oversaw developing projects on South Asian security issues. He has held research appointments with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and with Cornell University's Judith Reppy Institute of Peace and Conflict studies. Dr. Gopalaswamy holds a PhD in mechanical engineering with a specialization in numerical acoustics from Trinity College, Dublin. In addition to his studies abroad, he has previously worked at the Indian Space Research Organization's High Altitude Test Facilities and the EADS Astrium GmbH division in Germany.



**Karin Deutsch Karlekar** is the director of Free Expression Programs at PEN American Center, the largest branch of the world's leading free expression and literary organization with a membership of over 4,200 authors, journalists, editors, publishers, and graphic novelists. She focuses on global press freedom, digital rights, and broad freedom of expression issues. Prior to joining PEN, she served from 2001–15 as director of Freedom House's Freedom of the Press project, coordinating the production of a flagship annual report that tracks trends in global media freedom and

rates every country in the world, and serving as an expert spokesperson on press freedom issues at conferences, meetings, and in media appearances. Dr. Karlekar has authored a number of special reports and academic papers, and conducted research, assessment, and advocacy missions to Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. She also served as Freedom House's South Asia analyst, authoring a number of country reports for Freedom in the World and Freedom of the Press, including Bangladesh. She holds a Ph.D. in South Asian History from Cambridge University and a B.A. from Vassar College.

### **Moderator**

**Michael De Dora** is director of the Center for Inquiry's Office of Public Policy and the organization's representative to the United Nations. In addition, he serves as president of the United Nations NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

