

**Remarks for Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
Briefing on Human Rights in Bangladesh
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Let me first thank Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and also the Center for Inquiry for inviting me to highlight the stories of human rights violation and the impunity in Bangladesh. The extent of impunity is so great today that the Islamic terrorists are attacking the secular bloggers, writers and even the publishers in broad daylight, in front of thousands of people or even inside their own residences or offices.

These terrorists killed five secular bloggers, writers, and a publisher so far this year and wounded many others. My husband Dr. Avijit Roy and I were hacked in the middle of a crowded street in Dhaka, this year on Feb 26th, while we were visiting our homeland for a book-signing event. Though I survived with four head injuries and a sliced off thumb, Avijit was not so lucky. He died in the hospital. A month later, they hunted down the writer/blogger and our close friend Ananta Das on his way to work close to his house. They killed blogger Washiqur Rahman Babu in the street. Then they did not even hesitate to appear in blogger Niloy Neel's house and hack him to death in front of his partner.

Then, on October 31st they targeted two publishers who dared to publish Avijit's books and the books of these writers on free thought, secularism, and freedom of speech. They killed publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan, owner of Jagriti Publishers, in his office. The other publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, owner of the Publishing house Shudhoshwar, got lucky and survived multiple machete stabs. Writer and blogger Ranadipam Bashu and poet Tareq Rahim were with him in his office at that time. Both of them were injured as well. Tarek Rahim was gravely injured with multiple stabs and a bullet stuck in his abdominal area.

The situation is dire. These bloody days are becoming a norm, and hacking people with voices is becoming a monthly chore for Islamic terrorists. Because these killers were never brought to justice now they are attacking the foreign workers and even other Muslims from a different sect. We have seen attacks on Shia festival and in a Shia mosque in recent days.

You will make a mistake if you think we are facing attacks only from these religious fundamentalist killers. To make it even worse, our own government has implemented and amended the so-called Information and Communication Technology Act. This ICT Act outlaws any publications, broadcasts, or websites that are 'fake and obscene,' as well as any communication that 'causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief', which are all incredibly vague terms. The new amended ICT Act has made the criticism of religion on the internet punishable with up to 14 years of imprisonment. The government of

Bangladesh has even arrested quite a few bloggers and even journalists under this act for hurting religious feeling in their writings.

The Bangladeshi government stayed completely quiet after the first three murders of the secular or atheist bloggers. And then, when they were forced to say something after the fourth murder, they instead told us to be careful about what we write. None of these real killers have been captured or tried yet by the government or the judiciary system. When some of these bloggers went to the police to notify about the threats, the police decided to remain silent and inactive. In some cases they even encouraged the bloggers to leave the country. Our government said that they were walking a fine line because of the electoral politics, and that they cannot risk their alliance with the religious groups by supporting secular writers of the country. They are refusing to accept the existence of rising Islamic terrorism in the country because of political reasons.

With due respect, I would also like to point this out while I am here that the war criminals who have been tried in Bangladesh should not be considered as the “opposition leaders.” They are war criminals with proven and well-documented records of mass murders and tortures during our liberation war in 1971. We strongly believe that Bangladesh has come to this stage partly because these religious fanatics and the war criminals were allowed to be rehabilitated in Bangladesh decades after the new nation state was formed. We might agree to disagree on the kind of punishment given to them but we will do a great disservice to the secular Bangladeshi community if we do not agree on the heinous crimes these war criminals committed during the war.

The Bangladeshi government needs to understand that they cannot stop these terrorists unless they openly condemn their acts and take action to bring them to justice. They cannot claim to be a secular government or a secular political party unless they protect freedom of expression for every citizen. We are seeing the classic dilemma between freedom of religion and the liberty to freedom of expression. You will not be able to protect the religious rights of your citizens in a secular country unless you protect the freedom of expression regardless of religion or no religion.

These brave Bangladeshi journalists, writers, bloggers, and publishers love their country and want to make a difference in their own homeland. They are out, along with the citizens of Bangladesh, in the street to protest these murders, the impunity, and the inaction of the Bangladeshi government. We have been continuing our work knowing the constant threats. We are asking the international community to come forward to help us save our voices and help us maintain a healthy secular society. Thanks.