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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Al Baraem Association for Charitable Work, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Enforced Disappearances, Arbitrary Arrest and Detention In Bangladesh

Despite the strong international criticism, Government of Bangladesh is responsible for multiple human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture. Enforced disappearances occur at an alarming rate, often anti government persons, supporters of opposition parties and vocal social/ religious activists are beleaguered. According to the Hong Kong, China-based Asian Human Rights Commission, between 2009 and June 2022, at least 2,658 people were killed extra judicially and at least 619 became victims of enforced disappearances. In March 2022, study by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) tracked down enforced disappearances cases happening between 2019 to 2021 and found that 30 percent of victims that were released, or officially arrested and thrown in jail, did not speak about it. However, all testimonies by survivors point to at least two separate confinement centres in Dhaka city, allegedly run by a security force and a law enforcement agency, and a third centre in a southern district.

The sanctions imposed by the United States of America Department of the Treasury on 10 Dec 2021, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, against 6 x former and current high officials of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) over allegations of human rights abuses are testimony of Awami League government autocratic rule of law in the country. Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director at Human Rights Watch has said that the evidence of Bangladesh authorities' involvement in countless enforced disappearances is overwhelming. The Bangladesh government should stop feigning ignorance and work with the UN to provide urgent answers and effective accountability.

In Aug 22, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, during her visit to Bangladesh called on the government to establish a "specialized mechanism that works closely with victims, families and civil society to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings." Bangladesh's strategic and trade partners have also urged the government to step up measures to hold senior members of security forces accountable and prevent future abuses.

Unfortunately, there is no visible initiative from the state over the issue. Victims and their families are met with repeated obstacles to legal redress, including police refusal to file cases and threats to drop cases. This is exacerbated for members of the opposition and those who criticize the incumbent government and the ruling party. Families of victims of enforced disappearances face serious threats and harassment by government authorities when they protest such unlawful treatment and injustice or when they seek to determine the whereabouts of their loved ones. Meanwhile, law enforcement enjoys a culture of impunity, perpetuated by the ruling party's refusal to acknowledge the occurrence of enforced disappearances or hold security forces accountable.

We look forward to a positive response from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to take appropriate action against systematic and planned persecution of political leaders/ activists on the hands of Awami League government in order to resume the rule of law and democratic practices in Bangladesh.
