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Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

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.



Denial Of Freedom Of Expression And Civil Liberties Under Digital Security Act (DSA) In Bangladesh

Journalists and media outlets in Bangladesh face many forms of pressure, including frequent lawsuits, harassment, and serious physical attacks. Throughout 2022, journalists were arrested for critical reporting on the government, repression which has escalated under the AL government. A climate of impunity for attacks on media workers remains the norm, and there has been little progress made to ensure justice for a series of blogger murders since 2015. Dozens of bloggers remain in hiding or exile. The authorities cracked down strongly on peaceful protests and dissent. Criticism of the government led to arrests and ill-treatment of journalists, cartoonists, writers and critics' family members.

The 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA) allows the government to conduct searches or arrest individuals without a warrant, criminalizes various forms of speech and filing of criminal cases, including sedition and defamation. At the premise of this act, artistic expression contained in books, films, and other materials are occasionally banned or censored. The DSA has enabled the government to increase censorship of digital content and surveillance of telecommunications/ social media and has also procured phone surveillance and hacking equipment. Between October 2018 and 2022, Amnesty International found that more than 1400 cases have been filed and nearly 1200 individuals had been arrested under the DSA for mostly politicized and minor offenses.

The government authorities imprisoned 433 people under the Digital Security Act, the majority of whom were held on allegations of publishing “false or offensive information” under Section 25. This represented a 21% year-on-year increase in the number of people detained under the Act. Section 25 (publication of false or offensive information), Section 29 (publication of defamatory information) and Section 31 (offence and punishment for deteriorating law and order) of the Act were used systematically to target and harass dissenting voices, including those of journalists, activists and human rights defenders. These actions contravened Bangladesh's commitments under the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) as well as its domestic constitutional obligations.

We look forward to a positive response from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Special Rapporteurs (SR) on this gruesome negligence of the Bangladesh's government and urge to take up the issue of systematic persecution civil liberties/ journalism in Bangladesh in the context of basic human rights violations.
