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Bangladesh: Amnesty International calls for thorough unrestricted inquiry into violations by security forces

In a letter to Bangladesh's leader, Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Amnesty International called on the authorities to ensure that all violations reported in the context of recent student unrest are thoroughly investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

In the letter, Amnesty International refers to a newly established judicial investigation by Justice Habibur Rahman Khan which is to submit its findings to the government on 11 September 2007.

The organization calls on the government to ensure that the inquiry is fully independent, has access to all persons and information that it considers relevant to its inquiries, and is able to ensure protection of witnesses. The inquiry's conclusions and recommendations should be made public, and the government should issue a public response indicating the steps it will take to implement recommendations made by the inquiry.

The letter from Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan comes after reports of excessive use of force by security personnel following outbreaks of violence involving student demonstrators and law enforcement personnel in Dhaka and several other cities between 20 and 22 August, 2007.

Use of excessive force by police as well as reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees while being interrogated by law enforcement personnel is deeply concerning. Detainees have also been denied access to lawyers and family members in clear violation of international human rights standards.

Demonstrations occurred after an altercation between students and military personnel attending a soccer match at Dhaka University on 20 August, which resulted in a number of students being beaten by soldiers. In subsequent, often violent, protests hundreds were reportedly injured as law enforcement personnel used batons, rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse demonstrators. At least one person was killed after being hit by a rubber bullet at Rajshahi University on 22 August, according to media reports. Several law enforcement personnel were also injured by stones and bricks thrown by protestors.

The organization also urged the authorities to take concrete measures with regard to the reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees at the hands of members of the security forces. Amnesty International expressed concern for those detained and for extended periods denied access to lawyers and family members, including Dhaka University professors Harun ur Rashid and Anwar Hossain, and Rajshahi University professors Sayedur Rahman Khan, Abdus Sobhan and Moloy Kumar Bhowmik.

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