

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Bangladesh: Lift ban on extrajudicial killings exhibition

Amnesty International is urging the Bangladeshi authorities to lift a ban on an exhibition of photographs raising awareness about alleged extrajudicial executions carried out by a special police unit.

“Yesterday’s closure of the Drik Picture Library exhibition “Crossfire” in Dhaka is a blow to the right to freedom of expression,” said Amnesty International’s Bangladesh Researcher, Abbas Faiz. “The government of Bangladesh must act immediately to lift the police ban and protect the right to peaceful expression in words, images or any other media in accordance with Bangladesh’s constitution and international law.”

Hours before the “Crossfire” exhibition was due to open at a special ceremony in Dhaka, police moved in and demanded that the organizers cancel it. When they refused to shut it down police closed the premises, claiming that the exhibition had no official permission to open and would “create anarchy”.

The exhibition includes photographs based on Drik’s case studies of killings in Bangladesh, which government officials have portrayed as deaths in “crossfire”.

Hundreds of people have been killed in Bangladesh since 2004 when the special police force, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), was established.

In most cases, victims who die in the custody of RAB and other police personnel, are later announced to have been killed during “crossfire” or police “shoot-outs”.

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations consider these killings to be extrajudicial executions.

Human rights lawyers in Bangladesh see the closure of the exhibition as unjustified and with no legal basis. They are seeking a court order to lift the police ban on the exhibition.

Drik’s Director, Shahidul Alam says he has held hundreds of other exhibitions without needing official permission, and that “the government invoked a prohibitive clause only because state repression was being exposed”.

Abbas Faiz said: “By closing the “Crossfire” exhibition, the government of Bangladesh has effectively reinforced a culture of impunity for human rights violations. Amnesty International is calling for the government to take action against those who carry out extrajudicial executions, not those who raise their voices against it.”

The ban is also inconsistent with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s pledges that her government would take action to end extrajudicial executions.

Amnesty International is urging authorities to allow peaceful protests against the killings and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

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For a link to photographs planned for the exhibition:

<http://www.shahidulnews.com/crossfire/>

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

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