

URGENT ACTION

EDITOR FEARED VICTIM OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Shafiqul Islam Kajol, editor of a Bangladeshi daily newspaper, did not return home from work on 10 March 2020, the same day the police registered a case against him under the draconian Digital Security Act. His family fears that he could be a victim of enforced disappearance. Bangladesh authorities must launch an urgent investigation to determine the fate and whereabouts of Shafiqul Islam Kajol, release him if he is in their custody and drop the case against him and 31 others.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan, MP

Minister

Ministry of Home Affairs

Bangladesh Secretariat

Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

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Honourable Minister Khan,

I am worried about the safety of **Shaifqul Islam Kajol**, a Bangladeshi newspaper editor and photographer, who has not been seen or heard from since the day police registered a case against him and 31 others, under the highly repressive Digital Security Act. He was last seen leaving his newspaper office on the evening of 10 March 2020, and his family has not heard of nor seen him since then. The police has denied having him in custody, and his family fears that he could be a victim of enforced disappearance.

I understand that Bangladesh has denied all allegations of enforced disappearance in the country, however the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance's expressed in 2017 their concern "that the practice of enforced disappearance was occurring increasingly frequently in Bangladesh."

Human rights organisation Odhikar documented 34 incidents of alleged enforced disappearance in 2019. Eight of them were later found dead, 17 were shown arrested while the fate and whereabouts of the other nine remain unknown. I find these figures very alarming, causing me greater concern for the safety and wellbeing of Shafiqul Islam Kajol.

As you are aware, the UN Committee Against Torture has urged Bangladesh to ensure that "no one is held in secret or incommunicado detention anywhere" and that "law enforcement authorities must immediately cease engaging in the practice of unacknowledged detention."

I therefore call on you and the Bangladesh government to:

- 1. Immediately launch an investigation to determine the fate and whereabouts of Shafiqul Islam Kajol, keep his family fully informed at all times, and ensure he is immediately released if under state custody;**
- 2. Put an end to the practice of unacknowledged detention and enforced disappearances, and ensure that every person arrested is adequately registered;**
- 3. Promptly ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Shafiqul Islam Kajol is a photographer and editor of the Bangla daily newspaper *Dainik Pokkhoka*. On 10 March 2020, the Bangladesh police registered a case against him and 31 others under the country's draconian Digital Security Act for publishing "false, offensive and defamatory" information on Facebook. He has not been seen since then.

His family told Amnesty International that it is unusual to not have seen or heard from Shafiqul Islam Kajol for such a long time. Both his phones were switched off after 8:00pm on 10 March. His family fear that he could be a victim of enforced disappearance because of the case that has been filed against him.

The day after, Shafiqul Islam Kajol's wife informed the local police in Dhaka that he did not come back home and urged them to investigate his whereabouts. The police denied having him in custody, and noted the complaint in a general diary, a document registered by the police.

Bangladesh authorities have an obligation under the Constitution to ensure that "no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with the law". Enforced disappearances are a crime under international law, and has attained the status of a peremptory norm of international law (*jus cogens*).

When reviewing Bangladesh's initial report on its implementation of the Convention Against Torture, the UN Committee Against Torture regretted that Bangladesh did not provide any information about the status of investigations into allegations of enforced disappearances.

The Committee called on Bangladesh to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 April 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Shafiqul Islam Kajol (he/him)