

PUBLIC

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**BANGLADESH Rowshan Ara Begum, her daughter Shara, and her family**

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The Government of Bangladesh has not responded to Amnesty International's concerns that it may have failed to ensure due process to Rowshan Ara Begum who is seeking legal redress for rape.

Rowshan Ara, an elected member of the Union Parishad (local council), was raped in her home by two men and three accomplices on 1 May 1999. The men came to her house in the Kishorgonj District of Dhaka and demanded that she sign a blank piece of paper. When she refused they beat her in front of her 13-year-old daughter, Shara. Shara was then locked out of the house while two of the men raped her mother.

The five accused were subsequently arrested, but three were released on bail. Since their release, the men have threatened Rowshan Ara, her children and lawyers. One of the prosecution witnesses has already failed to appear in the trial for fear of reprisal.

The Government of Bangladesh has not taken effective action to end threats, including kidnapping threats, to the victim, her lawyers or the prosecution witnesses, to ensure their safety and to punish those issuing the threats.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Before she was raped, Rowshan Ara faced continuous discrimination from within the Union Parishad because of her gender and poor background. Her determined efforts to stop the misappropriation of funds by council officials and to ensure money was used to alleviate poverty in the constituency were repeatedly blocked by male members of the council. The accused were reportedly involved - with the knowledge of the council chairman - in selling healthcare supplies and wheat intended for the community to private dealers.

Following the adoption of new laws in Bangladesh providing greater opportunities for women to stand as candidates in local elections, women in 1997 took over 13,000 seats in the Union Parishad, the lowest in the hierarchy of elected bodies in the country. Their election has created a backlash from conservative elements within the council. Dozens of elected women have taken a critical stand against the corrupt practices of council chairmen and the misappropriation of funds, food and healthcare supplies intended for the community. Several women, particularly those from poor backgrounds, have been raped but have not taken the case to court for fear of reprisal. Rowshan Ara is the only woman councillor who has filed a case against her rapists.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in or your own language:**

\*\*In all your appeals please write the case reference number: Case Number: Nari O Shishu Nirjatan, Mumla, 107/99, Kishorgonj.

- urging the authorities to take appropriate measures to prevent the threats to Rowshan Ara, her lawyers, family and prosecution witnesses;
- urging them to bring to justice those issuing such threats.

**APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

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Dhaka

Bangladesh

**Telegrams Prime Minister Hasina, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**Fax: +880 2 811 3243**

**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

Mr Nurul Huda

Inspector-General of Police

Police Headquarter, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Telegrams: Inspector-General Huda, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax:+ 880 2 956 3362

Salutation: Dear Sir

**COPIES TO:**

to diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 August 2000.