

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/016/2004

25 August 2004

UA 254/04

Fear for safety

BANGLADESH

Ahmadiyya community headquarters

Islamist leaders have threatened to attack the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* religious community's headquarters in the capital, Dhaka. They say they will "lay siege to" the community's headquarters in Dhaka on 27 August unless the government declares the sect to be "non-Muslim". This is the latest of a series of similar attempts by Islamist groups to prevent the Ahmadis from openly practising their beliefs, and have led to incidents of the Islamist groups trying to shut down community centres, putting up hate signs on their places of worship and confiscating their religious materials and prayer books. Amnesty International believes they are at risk of violent attack.

News reports from 21 August state that the Islamist groups organised a procession through Dhaka, saying once again that on 27 August they would surround the Ahmadiyya headquarters, prevent anyone from entering or leaving, stop all worship there and confiscate Ahmadi prayer books. Marchers are said to have clashed with the police as they attempted to attack an Ahmadi complex in the Bakshibazar area of the city.

Human rights activists are said to be planning to form a human chain around the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* Headquarters to prevent the Islamist groups from "laying siege" to the building.

The government has not said it will protect the rights of the Ahmadis to freedom of religion, or condemned the incitement to violence against them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Islamist groups are believed to be targeting the Ahmadiyya community in an attempt to force the government to declare them "non-Muslims", which will assist them in their drive toward the introduction of *sharia* (Islamic law) in Bangladesh. They are hoping to obtain mass support from poor and disenfranchised sections of society, who feel marginalised by the government and can be influenced by appealing to their religious beliefs to gain support for an Islamic state.

In the past year, Amnesty International has documented abuses by anti-Ahmadi groups including the killing of an Ahmadi preacher, the "excommunication" and illegal house arrest of Ahmadi villagers, a ban on Ahmadiyya publications, street processions against Ahmadis and the rising wave of hate speech in public rallies which incite acts of violence against the Ahmadis. While the government has acted to prevent the mobs supporting the Islamist groups from entering Ahmadi mosques, it has failed to bring to justice those committing human rights abuses against Ahmadis.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the Ahmadiyya community, particularly those in their headquarters in Dhaka, whom Islamist groups have threatened to attack on 27 August;
- calling on the government to give effective protection to the entire Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh, particularly their headquarters, and to human rights defenders seeking to support their rights;
- urging the government to declare publicly that the Ahmadiyya community have the right to practice their religion without fear of persecution;
- urging the authorities to bring those responsible for attacking the Ahmadis, and inciting violence against them, to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister
Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 8113244 / 8113243 / 9133722
Telex: 672802 PSEC BJ / 632220 RAPA BJ / 672803 PM SEC BJ
Email: pm@pmobd.org
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

State Minister for Home Affairs
Md. Lutfuzzaman Babar
State Minister for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 8619667
Salutation: Dear Minister of State

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Barrister Moudud Ahmed
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 7168577
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES 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 27 August 2004.