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Fear for Safety

BANGLADESH

Members of the Ahmadiyya community in Dhanikhola village, Dhaka province

An Islamist group has threatened to organise a rally in order to place a placard denouncing the Ahmadiyya religious community outside the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* mosque in Dhanikhola village, in Mymensingh, a district of Dhaka Province, on 10 February. This is the latest in a series of attempts by Islamist groups to prevent the Ahmadis from openly practising their beliefs. Amnesty International believes Ahmadis in the area may be at risk of violent attack.

The threat was allegedly made by local leaders of the Islamist group International Khatme Nabuwat Movement (IKNM) in recent weeks. At a meeting on 3 February, leaders of the Ahmadiyya religious community reportedly called on local police to prevent such a rally taking place on 10 February within a 10km radius of the Dhanikhola mosque. The leaders reportedly received assurances from the Mymensingh Police Superintendent that all precautions will be taken to prevent the rally. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge, there has been no official confirmation of these assurances. Meanwhile one leader of the IKNM has reportedly threatened violence if the rally is halted.

This threat is part of an ongoing campaign of threats, intimidation and hate speech by Islamist groups to pressure the government into declaring Ahmadis as non-Muslims by law. Ahmadis are considered heretical by some orthodox Muslims in Bangladesh but see themselves as Muslim. In the past two years Islamist groups have tried to shut down Ahmadiyya community centres, put up "hate signs" on their places of worship and confiscated their religious materials and prayer books. While some of these attacks have been foiled by local police and civil society groups, others have resulted in numerous injuries and the death of at least one Ahmadi.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

By targeting the Ahmadiyya community, Islamist groups are believed to be attempting to force the government to yield to their political demand for the introduction of more stringent Islamic law in Bangladesh. The groups are hoping to obtain mass support from poor and disenfranchised sections of society, whom they feel they could influence by appealing to their religious beliefs.

Although the local authorities have reportedly in the past taken measures to ensure the safety of the Ahmadis, the national government has yet to take the important step of publicly condemning this incitement of violence against the Ahmadiyya community.

Over the past two years Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns about the safety of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh following documented abuses by Islamist groups including the killing of an Ahmadi preacher, the illegal house arrest of Ahmadi villagers, street agitations against Ahmadis and the rising wave of "hate speech" and public rallies calling for the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims. The government initiated a ban on Ahmadiyya publications, which is currently suspended by the High Court.

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

- calling on the authorities to take immediate action to protect the Ahmadiyya community in Dhanikhola village, which may be at risk of violent attack on or around 10 February;
- calling on the authorities to publicly denounce this threat as well as previous threats and attacks against the Ahmadiyya community;
- calling on them to ensure that all members of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh are protected by the police and local authorities;
- urging the government to take strict measures to curb the use of hate speech and public rallies to incite violence against Ahmadis;
- urging the government to declare that no member of any group has the right to intimidate or persecute any members of the Ahmadiyya community, and to bring those responsible for such incidents to justice.

APPEALS TO:

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

Fax: + 880 2 8113244 / 8113243 / 8111015 / 8151490 / 8151157

Email: Please send appeals to one of the following email addresses:
pm@pmobd.org
psecretary@pmobd.org
presssecy@pmobd.org
pmo@pmobd.org

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

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

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

Fax: + 880 2 7168577 / 8618557

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.