

# URGENT ACTION

## WORKERS AND ACTIVISTS AT RISK IN BANGLADESH

**In recent weeks, police have detained at least 21 garment factory employees and labour rights activists following violent street protests in and around the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. They are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Some workers and activists have gone into hiding. Several others have said that they or their relatives have received death threats from security forces.**

At least six female garment workers detained in early August, including a pregnant woman, have been beaten by police officers during interrogation. One is reportedly badly injured but has not received medical attention. Montu Ghose, a lawyer who advises the Garment Workers' Trade Union Centre, was detained in late July. Sources in Bangladesh say that he has been ill-treated in police custody, including by being deprived of sleep for long periods. He requires specialist medical care after suffering a stroke several months ago, but is reportedly not receiving medical treatment.

Some of the workers and activists are currently in hiding. Several others have told journalists that they or their relatives have received telephone calls from members of the security forces, threatening to kill them.

Police have said they are preparing to charge "several thousand" people for vandalism, arson and looting during the street protests. The total number of those detained following the protests is believed to be much higher than the 21 people the police say they have in custody.

### **PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language, urging the authorities in Bangladesh to:**

- ensure that all those detained after street protests by garment workers in recent weeks are protected from torture or other ill-treatment;
- protect garment factory employees, labour rights activists and their relatives, following reports that some have been threatened by security forces ;
- provide all detainees with access to their families, lawyers of their choice, and to adequate medical care;
- ensure a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into reports of the torture of individuals in custody and of the harassment and intimidation of individuals and their families, with those found responsible brought to justice;
- uphold and protect individuals' peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of assembly and association, and immediately release the individuals detained in connection with recent demonstrations unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried in accordance with international standards .

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 04 OCTOBER 2010 TO:**

Minister for Home Affairs

Shahara Khatun  
The Government of the Peoples  
Republic of Bangladesh  
The Bangladesh Secretariat  
Dhaka-1000, BANGLADESH  
**Fax: +880 2 7160405, +880 2  
7164788**

**Email [minister@mha.gov.bd](mailto:minister@mha.gov.bd)**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Inspector General of Police (IGP)

Bangladesh Police  
Police Headquarters  
Fulbaria, Dhaka-1000  
BANGLADESH  
**Fax: +880 2 9563362 or 9563363**  
**Salutation: Dear Inspector  
General**

**And copies to:**

Chairperson, National Human Rights  
Commission

Dr Mizanur Rahman  
National Human Rights Commission  
**Email: [elcop71@gmail.com](mailto:elcop71@gmail.com)**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In recent months garment factory employees demanding labour rights and wage increases have been demonstrating in the streets of Dhaka and surrounding areas. These demonstrations have at times been violent. Protests by thousands of workers in late June led to the temporary closure of about 700 garment factories. Labour rights leaders had been calling for an increase in minimum monthly wages of 5,000 taka (about US\$71) to meet living costs.

In late July the government announced that from November 2010, the monthly minimum wage for readymade garment workers would increase from 1662.50 taka (US \$24) to 3000 taka (US \$43). Garment workers said the increase was too low and took to the streets again. The garment industry earns nearly 80% of Bangladesh's export income and employs up to 40% of the country's workforce. Labour leaders say the government is intent on blocking the protests under the pretext of containing violence. Violence erupted during these protests as workers blockaded a major highway, vandalised vehicles and businesses, and fought with the police. Scores of demonstrators and policemen sustained injuries during the protests, and it has been alleged that police may have used excessive force to contain them.

Amnesty International reminds the authorities that Bangladesh has international treaty obligations to protect the right to life. International law places severe restrictions on the use of force by law enforcement officers. At the heart of these restrictions lies the state's duty to respect the right to life and freedom from torture and other ill treatment. Both these rights are provided in international human rights law and standards, including in treaties binding on Bangladesh, and in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Under international law and standards, police may use force only when strictly necessary and only to the extent required for the performance of their duty and must, as far as possible, apply nonviolent means before resorting to the use of force. If force cannot be avoided, police officials must exercise restraint in such use and, act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved.

Amnesty International does not condone the violence that occurred during the protests, but urges the government to ensure that no one is tortured or ill-treated in custody, and no one is held in custody without a recognizably criminal charge against them.

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