

Urgent Action In Focus

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Human Rights Defender Under Attack in Bangladesh

Sumi Khan: "My power is in my honesty and commitment"

On 8 March, Bangladeshi journalist Sumi Khan visited AI UK to talk about her experiences as a campaigning journalist and human rights defender. Soon after her return to Bangladesh, she received a written death threat, purportedly from local Islamist groups, saying that her home and office would be attacked with grenades if she reported on their activities again (see UA 51/05, ASA 13/003/2005, 14 March 2005).

Sumi Khan has worked to expose those responsible for crimes such as child- and arms-trafficking in her role as a reporter for the magazine *Weekly 2000* in the port city of Chittagong in southern Bangladesh. Her work was given international recognition on 1 March, when she received the Index on Censorship award for "outstanding commitment to journalistic integrity in defence of freedom of expression".

This commitment almost cost her life last year. On 27 April 2004, as she was on the way to the courier office to send a report to her editor, a three-wheeled taxi pulled up and three men got out and began to beat her and stab her hands and face. Though Sumi fought back, she was beaten unconscious. Her attackers shouted at her that she would be killed if she continued writing. They deliberately harmed her hands so that she would not be able to write.

The scars on her hands were still visible when she visited AI UK after collecting her award, and spoke of her determination to continue exposing corruption and human rights abuses.



Sumi Khan, ©AI

The prospect of further attacks does not scare her: "Who is the criminal?" she says. "If I was a criminal, I would be afraid. My power is in my honesty and commitment".

Even though at least four journalists have been killed in the past year in Bangladesh, Sumi Khan is optimistic that the pressure put on the authorities by AI and other organizations will give journalists and human rights defenders the courage to continue their work:

"The support of AI is a big support to us to carry on this job... to establish what criminals are doing. The peaceful way is the only way we can stop them. What we are doing is too tough without the cooperation of Amnesty International".

She thanked all those who wrote letters on her behalf for inspiring her and other human rights defenders to carry on, saying, "Please carry on and don't give up. All over the world you have friends in people like us!"

