

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**UA 364/93 Death threats**

**11 October 1993**

**BANGLADESH Taslima Nasrin (female), novelist**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned that the Government of Bangladesh is failing to provide protection for Taslima Nasrin, a Muslim woman novelist accused of blasphemy and condemned to death on 1 October 1993 by an Islamist group in Bangladesh. The group, the "Council of Soldiers of Islam", has called for her death for writing a novel about the situation of a Hindu family in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh has banned the book.

After a previous death threat issued against her in September by the same group, the authorities apparently failed to respond to Taslima Nasrin's appeal for protection. Amnesty International is urging the Government of Bangladesh now to ensure the safety of Taslima Nasrin as a matter of priority, and to bring to justice without delay those calling for her death.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

At a meeting in the north-western city of Sylhet on 1 October 1993, a Muslim fundamentalist group known as "Council of Soldiers of Islam", an off-shoot of Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh, ruled that Taslima Nasrin's best seller, *Lajja* (Shame), was blasphemous because it had "hurt the sentiments of people of different faiths". The group then called for her death, offering \$1,250 to anyone who kills her. The group had issued an earlier death threat against Taslima Nasrin on 23 September 1993.

Independent Muslim observers believe that the death call has nothing to do with blasphemy; they say it is in response to Taslima Nasrin's writings against Muslim fundamentalism and male chauvinism in Bangladesh. She has published 15 poetry books, as well as newspaper columns and novels. In her writings, which are all in Bengali, she has criticized Muslim fundamentalists for violating women's rights and the government's failure to stop them.

The novel *Lajja* is about a Hindu family attacked by Muslims after the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodha, India. In a statement obtained by Amnesty International, Taslima Nasrin says:

"I was pained to learn about the riot caused by the destruction of Babri mosque in India last year. Innocent people were killed in the name of religion. While Hindu families were killing innocent Muslims, Islamic fanatics were killing Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a human being I tried to show how a Hindu family was persecuted by Muslim fanatics in Bangladesh. .. In the book I said let's uphold humanism instead of using religion to kill each other."

Following the first death threat, Taslima Nasrin sought protection for the police in Dhaka and from the Home Secretary. Her appeal was apparently ignored. On 6 October 1993, she appealed to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate for police protection. The magistrate issued an order to that effect but the police ignored this order.

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

- expressing serious concern that the Government is failing to provide protection to Taslima Nasrin who has been threatened with death by the Islamist group, the "Council of Soldiers of Islam";
- urging the government to ensure her safety;
- urging the government to bring to justice those responsible for the death threat.

**APPEALS TO**

1) President

President Abdur Rahman Biswas  
 Presidential Secretariat  
 Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Telegrams: President Biswas, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**Faxes: +880 2 813 243**

**Salutation: Dear President**

2) Prime Minister

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia  
 Office of the Prime Minister  
 Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Telegrams: Prime Minister Zia, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**Faxes: +880 2 811 0115 (PM's residence)**

**+880 2 813 244 (PM's office)**

**+880 2 813 243 (PM's Press Secretary)**

**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

3) Minister of Home Affairs

Abdul Matin Chowdhury  
 Minister of Home Affairs  
 Bangladesh Secretariat  
 Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Telegrams: Minister Home Affairs, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**Faxes: +880 2 813 243**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS 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 22 November 1993