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ASADUZZAMAN KHAN

Minister
Ministry of Home Affairs
Government of Bangladesh
by email: minister@mha.gov.bd
Cc: secretary@mhapsd.gov.bd

SUBJECT: END REPRISALS AGAINST JOURNALIST ROZINA ISLAM

Dear Mr. Khan,

I write to seek your intervention in ending the reprisals against Rozina Islam, an award-winning journalist who has produced critical reports about irregularities in Bangladesh's health sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One year after Rozina Islam was accused of stealing confidential documents under the Official Secrets Act and Penal Code, the authorities have failed to present any evidence to substantiate the charges. She could face up to 14 years in prison or even death, if convicted. According to [local media reports](#) and the case documents that Amnesty International has had access to, the allegations against her about stealing confidential non-disclosure agreements for Covid-19 vaccines among the items mentioned in the seizure list prepared by the authorities are unfounded.

Rozina Islam was held in pretrial detention for seven days since 17 May 2021. While she was granted an interim bail a week later, it was only after widespread outcry about her detention. Bail was conditional upon the surrender of her passport, imposing an effective travel ban that has affected her work as a journalist. In January 2022, a Dhaka court allowed her to travel abroad on a temporary basis for a period of six months. She had to return her passport to the authorities on 13 June 2022, in compliance with the court order. We note with concern that there is no provision for conditional bail in the Code of Criminal Procedure in Bangladesh and since there is no legal basis, the measure is arbitrary.

Since her conditional release, Rozina Islam is being routinely called for court appearances multiple times in a month for hearing of her case that has not made any progress as the authorities have failed to complete their investigation in more than a year and the trial has not started. The constant rescheduling of court dates without justification adds to her harassment and may infringe upon her right to a fair trial.

We would like to reiterate that information about how Covid-19 vaccines is procured and negotiated for is in the public interest and should be publicly available. The prolonged investigation against Rozina Islam under a national security law, in addition to restrictions on her freedom of movement and the constant requests to appear in court despite not being charged with any recognizable criminal offence and the unjustified delays in the trial point towards an intention to use the justice system to target and harass journalists who dare to expose wrongdoing.

As enshrined in article 14(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to be tried without undue delay. As the authorities have failed to provide concrete evidence pointing to a recognizable criminal offence in more than a year, we urge your immediate intervention to ensure that Rozina Islam is not subjected to further harassment and that the charges against her are dropped unless she can be promptly charged with an internationally recognizable offence and tried without any more delay.

Yours sincerely,



Yamini Mishra
South Asia Director