

Statement

Two weeks ago in Bangladesh, high school students came out in the streets to register their spontaneous protest about the death of two school-going students caused by speeding buses. They demanded their right to road safety, rule of law and justice. Credible reports in the global print and electronic media reported that these young protesters as well as journalists and photographers covering these protests, were attacked in the presence of the police, by members of the student and youth wings of the ruling party. It is also reported that when the university students came out after a few days to express their support to the demands of high school students, they were arrested connecting them with various cases which might involve prison sentences and subjected them to police remand (i.e. interrogation in police custody, without presence of or access to a lawyer) which is associated with torture and indignities.

In the late evening of Sunday 5 August 2018, Dr Shahidul Alam, an internationally decorated photographer who is the spirit behind the development of journalistic photography movement in Bangladesh, an academic and human rights activist, was unlawfully abducted from his home, by law enforcement personnel, without an arrest warrant. Last week, he was produced before the Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, where the Detective Branch of Police submitted a prayer for ten days' remand (i.e. interrogation in police custody, without presence of or access to a lawyer). The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate granted seven days' remand in a case filed against him under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006, which is widely accepted as a draconian law and one that even the Government admits requires reform. As he was being carried into the court room, according to press reports he said to journalists present, "I was hit. They washed my blood-stained clothes and then made me wear them again. I was not given access to any lawyer during detention." His alleged crime was taking photographs of the brutal attacks on peacefully protesting students and exercising his freedom of opinion in an interview to an international television channel. Dr Shahidul Alam has been sent to prison on 12 August 2018, on the order issued by Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate on the 7th day of his detention, abruptly and without presence of his lawyer.

It has been further reported widely in the media that numerous innocent students are being subjected to torture in police custody while on remand as well as various forms of harassment and intimidation whereas those allegedly responsible for imposing violence upon a peaceful movement of the young students are enjoying impunity.

We the undersigned raise our joint voice against arbitrary police remand under the draconian ICT Act against Dr Shahidul Alam. We urge that the Government investigate allegations of unlawful arrest immediately and unconditionally release Dr Shahidul Alam.

We also urge that the government immediately release all students who have been arrested after the protest and take every step to ensure human rights of all citizens, including freedom of speech, freedom of media and freedom of association for all.

Sincerely yours,

1. Archbishop Desmond Tutu
1984 Nobel Peace Laureate
2. Tawakkol Karman
2011 Nobel Peace Laureate
3. Máiread Maguire
1976 Nobel Peace Laureate
4. Betty Williams
1976 Nobel Peace Laureate
5. Oscar Arias
1987 Nobel Peace Laureate
6. Sir Richard J. Roberts
1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine
7. José Ramos-Horta
1996 Nobel Peace Laureate
8. Jody Williams
1997 Nobel Peace Laureate
9. Shirin Ebadi
2003 Nobel Peace Laureate
10. Professor Muhammad Yunus
2006 Nobel Peace Laureate
11. Leymah Gbowee
2011 Nobel Peace Laureate
12. Shabana Azmi
Actor and Activist
13. Sir Richard Branson
Business Leader and Philanthropist
14. Gro Harlem Brundtland
Former Prime Minister of Norway
15. Richard Curtis
Film Director, SDG Advocate
16. Arianna Huffington
Author and SDG Advocate
17. Anne Hidalgo
Mayor of Paris
18. Mo Ibrahim
Entrepreneur and Philanthropist
19. Jerome Jarre
Entrepreneur and Internet Activist
20. David Jones
Global Social Activist
21. Kerry Kennedy
Human Rights Activist
22. Marina Mahathir
Writer and Human Rights Activist
23. Alaa Murabit
Physician and SDG Advocate
24. Paul Polman
Business Leader, SDG Advocate
25. Ella Robertson
Global Youth Movement Leader
26. Kate Robertson
Global Social Activist
27. Sharon Stone
Actor, Human Rights Activist
28. Jimmy Wales
Internet Entrepreneur