



“Bangladesh at the precipice”

- Joint Defence Statement -

The timing of the planned execution of Abdul Quader Mollah is a disgracefully cynical attempt to bury bad news as the international media concentrates on events in South Africa. The contrast between a man who stood for and dedicated his life to reconciliation and forgiveness with the behavior of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could not be greater.

The international community now stands united against this execution. The UN, EU, Britain, United States and Australian governments, to name a few, have in the past day called for a halt to this unwarranted sentence that serves no purpose, other than to divide Bangladesh and take the country a further step away from reconciliation and unity. Sheikh Hasina and her ruling party should know that they will lose all credibility amongst the international community if this sentence is carried out. The government and its leadership will become international pariahs.

We would also like to remind the Bangladeshi Prime Minister that any attempt to cling on to power that results in significant misery for her people would not be ignored. The International Criminal Court is already prosecuting one former state leader who attempted such a move in the Ivory Coast.

The sentence to death of an opposition leader is a cynical political move of the worst kind. With a UN deal on the table that could secure viable elections, ensuring UN and EU monitoring, this execution is a deliberate attempt to provoke a crisis, create a State of Emergency, and to prolong Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League's grip on power.

The analysis that Sheikh Hasina is a bulwark against the rise of Islamism in South East Asia is wholly misplaced. Her exclusion and demonisation of Islamic politicians, combined with the planned execution of their leaders in a deeply flawed judicial process, will only polarise Bangladesh further, and give rise to more extremist political factions. So far she is singularly responsible for a rapid partisan tension that may cause significant civil unrest, including many deaths and injuries.

The International Crimes Tribunal was set up to bring justice to the victims of the 1971 Independence War. However, it is now very clear the government hijacked the process so it could destabilise its opponents under the guise of “justice.” The government's hijacking of the most painful part of a nation's collective memory for its own political ends is deplorable. Their retroactive changing of the law in the Mollah case makes the re-

peated claims of the government, including senior cabinet members, that the Tribunal should be heralded as upholding international standards completely preposterous.

During the course of the trial and appeal process a number of disclosures have emerged that demonstrate the very serious failings in the judicial process and exposed direct governmental interference. Judges met with key prosecution witnesses. Judges were removed from trials at random. Severe restrictions were placed on the defence case. However, all of this pales in comparison to the disclosure that the very person who gave evidence at Mollah's trial and whose evidence has sent him to the gallows, may not even be the person named on the statement, but an impersonator fully prepared by the authorities to give false evidence.

The case of Abdul Quader Mollah is a gross miscarriage of justice. His case warrants a full international inquiry. To do otherwise makes a mockery of the international justice process. Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Balkan countries have been through a process of reconciliation in which both restorative and retributive justice played an important part. At the hands of a leadership intent only on personal gain, it is a tragedy Bangladesh has gone in the opposite direction. The work to halt the miscarriages of justice of the ICT and highlight its gross injustices will continue. Those standing up for justice and human rights in Bangladesh will not be swayed.

Finally, we urge all Bangladeshis, from across the political divide, to turn away from violence. While protests are inevitable and justified, we hope they are conducted in a peaceful manner. Furthermore, before the Government manipulates the protests to justify the status quo, they should remember it is their conduct that has directly resulted in the tensions witnessed on the streets of Bangladesh today.

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Signed:



Steven Kay QC
Nairobi, Kenya



John Cammegh
London, UK



Toby M. Cadman
Washington DC, USA

Contact:

9 BEDFORD ROW INTERNATIONAL

Chambers of Anthony Berry QC, 9 Bedford Row. London, WC1R 4AZ

T +44 20 7489 2727 F +44 20 7489 2828 E clerks@9bedfordrow.co.uk