

HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM BANGLADESH (HRFB)

Press Statement

HRFB expresses concerns about Government's Responses in supporting important UPR recommendations and calls for public dialogue and an action plan for effective UPR implementation

[25 March 2024, Dhaka]. The Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) has urged the Government of Bangladesh to engage in dialogue with stakeholders and develop an action plan for timely implementation of the accepted recommendations received during the 4th cycle of UPR, along with preparing grounds for considering noted recommendations in the next UPR cycle.

The Bangladesh Government has again taken a defensive stance in supporting recommendations received during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to improve the country's human rights situation. Out of the 301 recommendations received from 110 UN member states, the Government has accepted 211 recommendations on 25 March 2024. Among the accepted 211 recommendations, the following are noteworthy: incorporating international human rights legal provisions into national legal frameworks; training the police for the protection of human rights defenders and ensuring thorough investigation, prosecution, accountability, and appropriate compensation for incidents of human rights violations and torture by members of the security forces. The Government has also accepted several recommendations related to freedom of expression and media, such as ensuring the protection of civil society activists and the right to freedom of assembly and association and not taking any legal action against labour rights defenders and other rights workers and dissidents for engaging in rights discussions. The Government has also accepted several recommendations on empowering the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in light of the Paris Principles, ensuring its independence and effectiveness, maintaining the independence of the judiciary and keeping it strong. At the same time, Bangladesh has supported recommendations for the swift adoption of anti-discrimination laws, eliminating all forms of discrimination and providing appropriate compensation to victims. The Government accepted one recommendation with comments regarding the prevention of incidents of disappearance and torture. It stated that domestic criminal laws include provisions on 'abduction or kidnapping,' which applies to all individuals, including law enforcement agencies. However, 90 recommendations covering crucial human rights issues and their solutions have been noted by the Government. Among others, the Government did not accept recommendations regarding the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, the establishment of independent monitoring and investigation mechanisms for allegations of human rights violations by members of the police and military personnel, health insurance coverage to all, ratification of ILO Convention no 189 on domestic workers, the amendment of special provision of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, implementation

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of a national comprehensive plan on child protection, the legal recognition of marital rape, and withdrawal of reservations to Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) of the CEDAW, amendment of the Cyber Security Act.

The Forum expresses disappointment, stressing the importance of identifying and acknowledging issues affecting human rights and taking urgent steps towards their resolution. HRFB urges the Government to promptly adopt an action plan for the timely implementation of recommendations, ensuring coordination with various ministries and stakeholders, and establishing an inter-ministerial coordination committee, including civil society representation, for tracking and monitoring implementation.

Notably, following previous UPR cycles (2009, 2013, and 2018), the Government did not implement most recommendations, resulting in other member states of the UN repeating these recommendations in subsequent cycles. Observations reveal a visible lack of effective planning, coordination, and regular dialogue with stakeholders from the Government's side. There was also limited attempt to conduct dialogue or consultation with the National Human Rights Commission or other stakeholders before making a final decision on recommendations in the fourth phase.

The HRFB urges the Government to take practical measures to realize its commitments made during the UPR process instead of treating it as an event for simply submitting reports and participating in reviews. The Forum calls on the Government to hold an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations of human rights violations identified during the UPR, punish those responsible for such violations and provide reparations for the concerned victims and survivors. The HRFB further demands that the Government ensure necessary legal and policy reforms, effectively enforce existing laws and policies, and ensure relevant institutions' independence, integrity, and efficiency.

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