

## **THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH**

### **The situation of the media and political opposition one year from the general elections**

6 December 2022 10:00 - 11:30

European Parliament

Room ASP1E201

Bangladesh is the second largest economy in South Asia and the European Union is its first export market. However, institutional corruption in the country is a serious concern as also demonstrated by its positioning in the Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, where it ranks 147th out of 180 countries. Additionally, while Bangladesh is getting ready for general elections in 2023, opposition groups are reporting an escalation of repression and intimidations by authorities and attacks by ruling party supporters. The country struggles to maintain high standards of accountability for human rights violations as is well illustrated by the Aynaghar's scandal, a secret detention facility in Bangladesh where Bangladesh officials were holding and torturing victims of enforced disappearances.

While Bangladesh authorities should respect the rule of law and protect political opposition supporters' right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, mass arrests and police raids of opposition party members' homes raise serious concerns about violence and intimidation ahead of the upcoming general elections.

Despite Bangladesh's strategic importance at the crossroads between China, Burma and India, European politics seems to show little interest for what is happening in the country.

This event aims at shedding a light on the state of human rights of a country in a geopolitical strategic location, which is going through a severe economic crisis - Bangladesh is the third South Asian country to turn to the International Monetary Fund since the beginning of this year, after Sri Lanka and Pakistan - and where the freedom of journalists, human rights defenders and political dissidents is at risk.

#### **Chair**

Fabio Massimo Castaldo, MEP – member of Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) of the European Parliament

#### **Panel:**

##### **Michael Polak**

*Barrister, Church Court Chambers, lawyer for victims of enforced disappearances.*

Michael Polak, Director at Justice Abroad Ltd, is a barrister specialising in criminal, public, and human rights law with skills in the international aspects of these areas. Mr. Polak's recent work includes the representation of Ahmad Bin Quasem, a barrister and human rights activist in Bangladesh, who was unlawfully seized by law enforcement in 2016 and is still subject to arbitrary detention.

##### **Tasneem Khalil**

*Editor in Chief of Netra News, Sweden, former Prisoner of Conscience and torture survivor.*

Tasneem Khalil is an exiled journalist from Bangladesh, where he was detained in 2007. He is Editor in Chief of Netra News and he was previously a consultant for Human Rights Watch. Khalil currently lives in Sweden, where he is publisher and editor of Independent World Report, a world news magazine focused on human rights issues.

##### **Abbas Faiz**

*Human Rights Expert and former director of the Human rights Module at Essex University.*

Abbas Faiz, Special Envoy to the Government of Maldives, is Associate Supervisor at the University of Essex School of Law. As Human Rights Expert, Mr Faiz has over 30 years of experience of supporting human rights and democratic processes in South Asia. He was, formerly, Amnesty International's South Asia expert.

**Abderraouf El Ouazzani Taibi**

*President of AFD International.*

Abderraouf El Ouazzani Taibi holds several university degrees, including in the fields of Political Science and International Relations. He is a co-Founder and President of AFD International, a non-profit organization, headquartered in Brussels from 2006, committed to the defence and promotion of human rights worldwide.

**François Deroche** *Medical doctor, President of Justice et Droits Sans Frontières* François Deroche is a medical doctor, President of JDSF (Justice et Droits Sans Frontières), a French NGO committed to promoting human rights. JDSF seeks to achieve this goal through the prosecution of human rights violations before national and international courts, by providing assistance and legal representation to victims of violence and torture.