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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

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Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 16/4.

In this connection, I would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning the escalating violence on news outlets and media professionals, and particularly concerning the attacks on 18 journalists, namely Messrs. **Zakaria Biblop, Masudur Rahman, Kafi Kamal, Rashed Nizam, Abdus Salam, Sheikh Tofazzal Hossain, Abu Habib, Rasel Ahmed, Riaz Hossain, G.M Shahid, Imdadul Haque Dulal, Luftar Rahman Mithu, Badrul Islam, Nasir Uddin Tota, Abul Hasnat, Mohammad Farid Uddin, Labual Haq Ripon, and Sakirul Kabir Riton.**

According to the information received:

Between 24 and 25 October 2013, a series of violent attacks against media and journalists took place in Bangladesh, allegedly due to their reporting on recent violent political confrontations taking place in the country.

On 24 October 2013, unidentified individuals reportedly detonated bombs at the main gate of four private TV channel offices: *Ekattor TV, My TV, Desh TV* and *ATN Bangla*, in the capital Dhaka.

On 25 October 2013, attacks continued during a 60-hour "hartal", a strike, called by opposition sectors to press demands for a neutral government for a period of 90 days, during which schools, shopping centres and public transportation system were shut down. It is reported that on the same day, attacks with home-made bombs were detonated in the offices of *Channel 71, Mohona TV, Desh TV* and *My TV* and the offices of the newspapers *Bohrer Kagoj* and *BDnews24*.

The journalists under attacks are reported as below:

- Mr. **Zakaria Biblop**: newsroom editor at *Channel 71*, reportedly taken to a military hospital in a critical condition;
- Mr. **Masudur Rahman**: cameraman with privately-owned *Channel-i*, reportedly injured by bullet fragments when police opened fire in Dhaka in an attempt to disperse a protest by Jubo Dal, a group that supports the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP);
- Mr. **Kafi Kamal**, journalist at *Manabzamin*, reportedly injured when a bomb went off outside BNP headquarters;
- Mr. **Rashed Nizam**, journalists at *Channel 24*, attacked at Moghbazar Wireless Gate in Dhaka. On 28 October 2013, a group of picketers threw bombs at a vehicle belonging to Channel 24;
- Mr. **Abdus Salam** of *Shomoy TV* and Mr. **Sheikh Tofazzal Hossain** of *RTV* were the victims of similar attacks in the western city of Rajshahi. Mr. Hossain was rushed to hospital in a critical condition after he was beaten with clubs;
- Mr. **Abu Habib** of the daily *Dainik Janmabhumi*, was attacked by Jamaat-e-Islami activists on 29 October 2013, as he was covering vandalism in the village of Kaliganj. It is reported that he was clubbed; his camera and mobile phone were stolen. He was rushed to Sathkira Sadar Hospital and from there to a specialist hospital.

It is also alleged that journalists were also targeted in attacks outside the capital.

In the town of Narayanganj, four reporters were injured when individuals allegedly suspected of BNP members threw homemade bombs at their vehicles, which were marked “Press”. The victims reported as below:

- Mr. **Rasel Ahmed** of *Kaler Kantho*,
- Mr. **Riaz Hossain** of *Ajkaler Khabor*,
- Mr. **G.M Shahid** of *Shakaler Khabor*,
- Mr. **Imdadul Haque Dulal** of *Arthoniti Protidin*

It is also reported that in the northwestern district of Thakurgaon, *NTV* reporter Mr. **Luftar Rahman Mithu** was injured while covering clashes between BNP activists and members of the ruling Awami League. It is further reported that a motorcycle owned by Mr. **Badrul Isalm**, a journalist at *Maasranga TV*, was set on fire during these clashes.

In the southeastern city of Chittagong, the journalists Mr. **Nasir Uddin Tota** of *Bangla Vision TV* and Mr. **Abul Hasnat** of *ATN News* were reportedly injured in attacks. Mr. **Mohammad Farid Uddin**, an *ATN* cameraman, was also attacked.

In the southwestern city of Jessore, activists attacked Mr. **Labual Haq Ripon** of the daily *Dainik Samajer Katha* while a bomb was thrown at Mr. **Sakirul Kabir Riton**, the secretary-general of the Jessore Union of Journalists and a reporter for *Boishaki Television*.

Grave concerns are expressed at the on-going attacks on media outlets and journalists in Bangladesh. Further concerns are expressed at the undue exposure of journalists exercising their legitimate right to freedom of opinion and expression to heavy violence and that their safety is not ensured during political unrest.

While I do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, I wish to appeal to your Excellency's Government to take all necessary steps to secure the right to freedom of opinion and expression in accordance with fundamental principles as set forth in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that Bangladesh acceded to on 6 September 2000, which provides that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."

I would further like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 21/12 on safety of journalists adopted on 27 September 2012, which "condemns in the strongest term all attacks and violence against journalists, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment;" and "calls upon States to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy and effective investigations into such acts falling within their jurisdiction, and to bring to justice those responsible and to ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies."

In view of the urgency of the matter, I would appreciate a response on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the above-mentioned persons in compliance with the above international instruments.

Moreover, it is my responsibility under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention. Since I am expected to report on these cases to the Human Rights Council, I would be grateful for your cooperation and your observations on the following matters, when relevant to the case under consideration:

1. Are the facts alleged in the above summary of the case accurate?
2. Has a complaint been lodged by or on behalf of the alleged victims?
3. Please provide the details, and where available the results, of any judicial investigation, or any criminal charges, and other inquiries carried out in relation to the above cases.

I undertake to ensure that your Excellency's Government's response to each of these questions is accurately reflected in the report I will submit to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

While waiting for your response, I urge your Excellency's Government to take all necessary measures to guarantee that the rights and freedoms of the above mentioned persons are respected and, in the event that your investigations support or suggest the above allegations to be correct, the accountability of any person

responsible of the alleged violations should be ensured. I also request that your Excellency's Government adopt effective measures to prevent the recurrence of these acts.

Given the seriousness and urgency of the allegations, I would like to inform your Excellency's Government that I am considering issuing a press release on the issues contained herein in the near future.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Frank La Rue
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of
opinion and expression