

URGENT ACTION

MINISTER MUST PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Bangladesh's State Minister for Women's and Children's Affairs has told Amnesty International that police are investigating threats against woman human rights defender Shampa Goswami. While Shampa Goswami remains at risk, Amnesty International is calling on the minister to ensure her safety.

Shampa Goswami is a teacher and human rights defender who works for Odhikar, a well-known Bangladeshi human rights organization. She was threatened by a group of men after encouraging a woman who complained to her that she had been raped to go to the police. On 26 October, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action calling on the Bangladeshi authorities to ensure that Shampa Goswami was protected, and the threats she had received were investigated. Shortly afterwards, Bangladesh's State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs, Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, responded to an appeal from a member of the Urgent Action network. In her response, Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said that her office had taken up the case with local police in Satkhira town, south western Bangladesh, where Shampa Goswami lives. Dr Chaudhury also stated that police in Satkhira are investigating the threats against Shampa Goswami.

Though Amnesty International welcomes the minister's response, Shampa Goswami remains at risk unless she is immediately provided with protection. Such protection, however, must be provided in consultation with Shampa Goswami and fully respect her wishes.

Please write immediately in Bangla, English or your own language:

- Welcoming the response from Bangladesh's State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs, Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury;
- Calling on Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to ensure that Shampa Goswami receives protection from further harassment whilst fully respecting her wishes;
- Urging Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to ensure that a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the harassment of Shampa Goswami is launched immediately and those found responsible are brought to justice in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards;
- Calling on Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to ensure that human rights defenders in Bangladesh, including those supporting survivors of sexual violence, are able to conduct their legitimate human rights work without fear of reprisals or harassment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 DECEMBER 2011 TO:

State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs

Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka
BANGLADESH
Fax: 011 8802 7162892
Email: sminmowca@gmail.com
or lamisa@bol-online.com
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Akramul Qader
Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive NW, Washington DC 20008
Tel: 202 244 0183 or 202 244 7248 or 202 244 7216 or 202 244 3571
Fax: 1 202 244 2771

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In May, Shampa Goswami, a 32-year-old teacher and human rights defender working for Odhikar, a well-known Bangladeshi human rights organization, learnt of the gang rape of an elderly woman. She visited her in hospital several times to check on her and she also advised the woman to go to the police, but she refused.

Police eventually came to know about the incident and arrested four men on suspicion of participating in gang rape. Following the arrests Shampa Goswami received a number of threats over the phone and in person, which escalated on 23 October when she and a close family friend were harassed by a group of 10-12 men who took them to the roof of a nearby building, forced them to sit together and took pictures of them on a cell phone, whilst verbally intimidating them and making suggestive sexual remarks. The men tried to blackmail Shampa Goswami for money, threatening to send the pictures to the press. Eventually, a stranger who had been passing came up to the roof and managed to convince the men to let them go. Shampa Goswami informed Odhikar of the incident the next morning and reported it to the police on 25 October.

Name(s): Shampa Goswami (f)

Issue(s): Intimidation, Harassment, Fear for safety

Further information on UA: 316/11 (26 October 2011)

Issue Date: 02 November 2011

Country: Bangladesh