

# **Bangladesh (Statement): Free Shahidul Alam and All Detained Protestors: Stop Violence against Students and Journalists Immediately**

The Teachers Against Abuse and Torture & The Transnational Friends of Bangladesh's Joint Statement

Sunday 30 September 2018, by [TTAA](#), [TTFB](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2018).

Over the past few weeks Bangladesh has witnessed a new social phenomenon, a social movement spear-headed by a generation of students who may be called "the generation of the 2000s". School children and university students in Bangladesh have come together to demand road safety, rule of law and justice. Students have carried innovative placards and festoons, written all by themselves and performed protest songs on the streets of Dhaka, day in and day out. They chanted slogans, such as, We Want Justice. While this was all going on very well, we note in horror that after the sixth day of continual protest, a spate of violent activities took hold of the streets of Dhaka, perpetrated by a number of different groups claiming association with the government. Their protests have been opposed, harshly, by the police, members of the Chatro League and security agencies. In deep shock we note how a peaceful social movement by the school and college students is being vilified and demonized, as alleged, by different functionaries affiliated to the ruling party. The political hooligans had, as reported, chased students, violently attacked on peaceful gatherings, molested female students and journalists, locked up students in different buildings, and also had physically assaulted students in broad day light and in front of police. On several occasions police had, as evident in the published reports, tear gassed students, shot rubber bullets and used water cannons to disperse processions and gatherings.

This is all that an internationally acclaimed photographer, an activist and a writer in Bangladesh, Dr Shahidul Alam, was documenting, using his veteran lens. He was doing what he does best, and what a veteran photographer should be doing in times of crisis. His lens was speaking truth to power. As an independent journalist and photographer, he was simply on duty, filming the machete wielding goons chasing down the unarmed students. At some point his camera was broken by goons who didn't want to be filmed. A number of the other photo-journalists were reportedly attacked on August 4 and 5 in different parts of the city. Around midday on August 5, Dr Alam was interviewed online by Al Jazeera English where he provided his observation and analysis of the current situation in Dhaka. Within hours of airing the live report, late in the evening on the same day, he was forcibly abducted by 20-30 men from his house in Dhanmondi.

At the outset, it was unclear as to where he was taken to and who his abductors were. According to the security guards of the building, the intruders claimed to be from the Detective Branch (DB). They had, as reported, forcefully taken away the CCTV camera footage, and put scotch-tape on the CCTV camera. Dr Alam was allegedly forcefully put into a Hi-Ace microbus. Late in the night, the Additional Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Abdul Baten has admitted to UNB (United News of Bangladesh) that a team from the Detective Branch of police has detained Dr Alam from his Dhanmondi residence for interrogation over his Facebook posts on the ongoing student protests. The family members of Dr Alam waited throughout that night in front of the DB office in Dhaka. It was only in the morning on August 6 that they were informed about his whereabouts. Later

in the day he was produced to the Court and shown as arrested in a case filed by the Police under Section 57 of Bangladesh's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act.

In a recent press conference held that morning by Dr Alam's wife, who is also an anthropologist and a columnist, Rahnuma Ahmed asked: "...Is the law enforcement force supposed to abduct him like this? It is the goons who abduct, we all know that. If the law enforcement force continues to pick up people from their houses forcibly, we have to re-think about the meaning of the term 'Law Enforcement Force' once again."

Shahidul Alam's lawyer, Barrister Sara Hossain, said that: "According to Section 33 of our [Bangladesh] constitution, if someone gets arrested it is customary for the force to provide information about the arrested person's whereabouts, as soon as possible. Under Section 43, a person's house cannot be entered illegally or forcibly. The state is supposed to protect the communication and correspondence of every citizen. In this case, the state has violated both the sections."

**Echoing Rahnuma Ahmed**, we condemn, unequivocally, the circumstances in which Dr Alam was (as alleged) abducted. This incident begs fundamental questions on citizenship rights and the rule of law. The incident shows how state institutions are engaging in victim-blaming and "violating law". Is there any law? If not then how are they called law "enforcing agencies"? As citizens and transnational friends of Bangladesh, we deserve to know if it is the government's responsibility to provide explanation to the citizens of Bangladesh. We ask the government why law enforcement forces are acting as goons. Why are the citizens being targeted and attacked one after another? Why are citizens being whisked away and made to disappear?

**We demand** immediate release of Dr Shahidul Alam. Dr Alam was, reportedly, tortured in the custody and has been made so frail that he is unable to stand on his feet. While his family is saying that he needs medical attention, he has been taken back to the DB office in the afternoon of August 8. As well a new campaign against Dr Alam and his family members and friends has been launched by pro-government groups on August 9, which has created fear of further custodial torture and judicial harassment. We are outraged by the maltreatment that an internationally renowned photographer, a cultural activist, a writer and a veteran archivist has been forced to undergo.

We are therefore calling on the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to ensure:

- 1. An independent inquiry into why the officials responsible destroyed property and threatened others.*
2. An urgent inquiry into why the security forces could not act within the bounds of the law.
3. Provide an explanation as to why a peaceful movement for road safety was met with violence?
4. Provide an explanation about why the university students (both public and private) are attacked by outside goons and why the goons were protected by the police? On August 7, 22 student protestors from different universities of Bangladesh have been remanded for 2 days in custody. According to confidential information, students are being harangued by the political party goons when taking shelter in private houses in some areas of the city. The figures in authority have stooped to talk down to children as if to threaten them into submission, showing how state institutions engaging in "victim-blaming". The pupils have been threatened by the schools' committees to be evicted from their schools.

**Echoing students, we demand an answer to and legal action for addressing all of the above.**

We call upon the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, to ensure justice for both students and journalists, and an immediate release of Shahidul Alam and all those detained protesters.

*Sincerely,*

*We, the undersigned:*

*(names are in alphabetic order of first names)*

A-Al Mamun, Associate Professor and Chairperson, Mass communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University, Rajshahi.

Abdur Razzaq Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Agnes Khoo, Ph.D. Independent Scholar, The Netherlands.

Ainoon Naher, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar.

Akhter Sobhan Khan, PhD. Sociologist and environmental activist, London, UK.

Alfredo Quarto, Director, Mangrove Action Project, USA.

Amena Mohsin, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

Anu Muhammad, Professor, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University. Savar.

Ariana Reines, Poet, Visiting Critic, Yale University, USA.

Arpita Roychoudhury, Fellow Writer, PEN Center Germany, & Editor Europe Chapter, Ongshumali, Berlin, Germany.

ATM Nurul Amin, Professor Emeritus, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand.

Atonu Rabbani, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka.

Asheek Mohammad Shimul, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka.

Azfar Hussain, Professor, Liberal Studies/Interdisciplinary Studies, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan, USA.

Chaumtoli Huq, The City University of New York School of Law and Editor, New York.

Dr Bina D'Costa, Associate Professor, International Relations, the Australian National University, Australia.

Dina Siddiqi, Professor, BRAC University, Dhaka.

Ekramul Kabir, Filmmaker, Cinematographer.

Elora Halim Chowdhury, Ph.D. Professor & Chair, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department, University of Massachusetts Boston, USA.

Fahima Al Farabi, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar.

Fahmidul Haq, Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Farjahan Rahman Shawon, Research Assistant, Department of Curriculum and Instructions University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho.

Farzana Boby, Independent film maker, Broadcast Journalist at Deepto TV, Dhaka.

Georgie Wemyss, Senior Lecturer, University of East London, London, UK.

Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Gita Sahgal, Director, Centre for Secular Space, London.

Hana Shams Ahmed, PhD Student, York University, Canada.

Hasan Jamil, PhD. University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho.

Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

Kaberi Gayen, Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Kazi Maruful Islam, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka.

Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Assistant Professor, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

Laura Wagner, PhD. Archivist, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA.

Mahmudul H Sumon, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar.

Maha Mirza, Researcher and environmental activist, Bangladesh.

Maidul Islam, Department of Sociology, Chittagong University, Chittagong.

Manosh Chowdhury, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University.

Masood Imran Mannu, Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology.

Maryam Namazie, Spokesperson, One Law for All and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.

Meher Nigar, Assistant Professor, Department of Bangla, University of Dhaka.

Dr Max Farrar, Sociologist and Emeritus Professor, Leeds Beckett University, UK.

Mirza Taslima Sultana, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University. Savar.

Miriam Rose, Co-Chair, Foil Vedanta, UK.

Munasir Kamal, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka

Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, PhD. Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

Moshahida Sultana, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka.

Nasrin Khandokar, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University.

Nira Yuval-Davis, Professor of Sociology, University of East London, London.

Md. Nur Khan, Human rights activist, Dhaka.

Parvin Jolly, Associate Professor, Department of History, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka.

Parsa S. Sajid, Writer, Editor and Researcher.

Piya Mayenin, Solicitor, London.

Paul Dudman, Archivist and Civic-Engagement Lead, Refugee Council Archive, University of East London, London.

Peter Marshall, Photographer, London , UK.

Peter Redfield, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, President, Society for Cultural Anthropology, USA.

Qazi Arka Rahman, Assistant Professor (on leave), Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka.

Qazi Mamun Haider, Department of Journalism, Rajshahi University, Rajshahi.

Rafida Ahmed Bonya, Bangladeshi-American author, humanist activist and blogger, USA.

Rahila Gupta, Author, activist and journalist, London.

Rayhan Rhyne, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Jahangirnagar University.

Rezwana Karim Snigdha, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar.

Reetu Sattar, Artist, Britto Arts Trust, Prachyanat.

Rezaur Rahman Lenin, Academic Activist, Eastern University of Bangladesh & Committee for the Protection of Fundamental Rights, Dhaka.

Ridwanul Hoque PhD, Professor of Law, Department of Law, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

Robayet Ferdous, Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

Roger Moody, Mines and Communities, UK.

Rumana Hashem, Political Sociologist, Educator and Spokesperson, Community Women Against Abuse, London.

Rushad Faridi, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Sadaf Noor E Islam, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Chittagong University, Chittagong.

Barrister Sadia Arman, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Safia Azim, Photographer and Psychologist, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Salim Reza Newton, Professor, Mass communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University.

Samina Luthfa, Theater Activist and Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

Samarendra Das, Environmental Activist and Chair, Foil Vedanta, London, UK.

Shapan Adnan , PhD. Former Teacher of National University of Singapore, Singapore.

Soumya Sarker, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka  
Sayeed Ferdous, Professor Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University  
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Dr. Saydia Gulrukh, Journalist and Researcher, Dhaka.  
Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Forum, Dhaka.  
Seema Amin, Lecturer, BRAC University, Dhaka.  
Seuty Sabur, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, BRAC University, Dhaka.  
Shaswati Mazumder Lecture, Fine Arts, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar.  
Shahana Hanif, Community Organizer, Co-Founder of the Bangladeshi Feminist Collective, New York City, New York.  
Shusmita Chakravarti, Professor, Department of Folklore, Rajshahi University, Rajshahi.  
Spyros Themelis, Senior Lecturer and Sociologist, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Colchester, UK.  
Stephan Vince, Artist, photographer and filmmaker, Norwich, UK.  
Thahitun Mariam, Bangladeshi-American Writer, Community Organizer and Activist. New York City, USA.  
Tapan Bose, Filmmaker & human Rights defender, New Delhi.  
Taslima Akhter, Photographer and Documentary Filmmaker, Dhaka.  
Tahmina Khannam, Assistant Professor, Department of Management, University of Dhaka.  
Tasneem Siraj Mahboob, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka.  
Tomas Munita, Independent Photographer and New York Times contributor, New York.  
Tsitsi Jaji, Associate Professor, English and African & African American Studies, Duke University, USA.  
Vanessa Lye, Practitioner and Researchers, London.  
Veronica Saba. PhD researcher and women's rights activist , Trieste, Italy.  
Vishnu laalitha Surapaneni, Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Minnesota, USA.  
Yasmin Rehman, Women's rights campaigner, Centre for Secular Space, London.  
Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh, artist, president of the Arab Image Foundation.  
Ziaur Rahman, Advocate, CEO and Legal Adviser, International Institute of Technology and Management, Dhaka.  
Zobaen Sondhi, Fellow Writer in Exile, PEN Centre Germany, Berlin.  
Zobaida Nasreen, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Dhaka

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## **P.S.**

- COMMUNITY WOMEN AGAINST ABUSE, Free Shahidul Alam and All Detained Protestors: Stop Violence against Students and Journalists Immediately

August 10, 2018 by Community Women's blog:

<https://communitywomenblog.wordpress.com/2018/08/10/free-shahidul-alam-and-all-detained-protestors-stop-violence-against-students-and-journalists-immediately/>