



## **Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition** *Defending Women Defending Rights*

### **Government of Bangladesh must act to protect Women Human Rights Defenders in Chittagong Hill Tracts**

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) condemns the violent attack on woman human rights defender Hana Shams Ahmed allegedly by the Bangalee Somo Odhikar Andolon (BSOA) group and is alarmed by the failure of police to provide protection despite known, repeated threats.

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Hana Shams Ahmed, a vocal advocate for women's human rights and Coordinator of the International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (CHTC), arrived with a female friend on a personal visit in Bandarban. At around 6:30 pm when they were returning to their hotel from Shailopropat Tourist Spot in a shared taxi, 8-10 people, led by BSOA leader HM Samrat, seized the taxi, pulled out two other passengers and physically assaulted Hana and her friend, striking their faces and backs. According to Hana, the Detective Branch police who were ordered to provide her security were accompanying her all day; however, they disappeared during the time of the violent attack. The attackers stopped and left the two women after the group leader saw a local motorcyclist who recognised them.

Hana Shams Ahmed has been an important voice bringing attention to the situation of indigenous peoples, especially women. The CHTC recently published a report on violence against indigenous women and girls in Chittagong Hill Tracts that found that impunity has been the single most important factor contributing to increased incidents of sexual and gender based violence in the CHT. Hana has also been active in the campaign for Kalpana Chakma, an indigenous women's rights activist who was abducted from her home in CHT in June 1996, allegedly by members of the Bangladesh Army.

The Coalition notes with concern that this violent attack is part of a trend of increasing attacks on WHRDs due to the failure of authorities to take effective legal actions to protect human rights activists. CHTC members have been repeatedly targeted with intimidation and violence for carrying out their human rights work. Last month, human rights defenders conducting a fact-finding mission on behalf of the CHTC were also attacked. See more at:

<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/26527#sthash.HdrLjiv7.dpuf>

We call on the Government of Bangladesh to:

1. Conduct an immediate and transparent investigation into the attack on Hana Shams Ahmed and bring all those responsible to justice;
2. Ensure the physical and psychological protection of the staff of CHTC and provide security to ensure they can continue their human rights work without constraint; and
3. Respect and protect human rights defenders and ensure they are able to conduct their legitimate work without fear of physical and psychological violence throughout Bangladesh.

**For more information**

<http://www.chtcommission.org/index.php>

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2014/aug/26/cht-commission-official-injured-attack>

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/law-rights/2014/aug/28/chtc-demands-probe-attack-official>

**Notes**

The Women Human Rights Defender International Coalition is a resource and advocacy network supporting women defenders worldwide. We have 29 members:

Amnesty International (AI)

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM ASIA)

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB)

Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR)

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)

Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights First

Information Monitor (INFORM)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP)

Isis International

ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS-WICCE)

Just Associates (JASS)

The Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM)

MADRE

Nazra for Feminist Studies

Peace Brigades International

Rainbow Rights Project (R-Rights), Inc.  
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF)  
Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML)  
Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights  
Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (WIGJ)  
Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)  
World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)