

**Ms. Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban, Old Sangsad
Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka
Bangladesh**

Re: Concerns regarding the situation of human rights lawyer Mr Shahanur Islam

Your Excellency

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it has also observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concerns over the situation of Mr Shahanur Islam, a lawyer and general secretary of the Bangladesh Institute for Human Rights (BIHR), who has received death threats in Bangladesh.

The CCBE is informed that on 9 January 2011 Mr Islam undertook a fact-finding mission on the violation of minorities' rights in the Bania/Jhargaon area of Thakurgaon district. During this mission Mr Islam and his two fact-finding officers were physically attacked, threatened with arms and all their belongings were looted, namely mobile phones, video cameras, a laptop computer, documents and cash.

In February 2011, one of the perpetrators of the January attacks, Mr Hamidur Islam, was arrested and imprisoned, but he was released on bail from custody after five months. On July 24 2011, Mr Shahanur Islam received a phone call from Mr Hamidur Islam, identifying himself and threatening death if he did not withdraw his police complaint. Mr Shahanur Islam informed the police about the stated threats, however no action was undertaken to ensure his safety or to start an investigation on the mentioned death threats.

The CCBE is informed that throughout the procedure, Mr Shahanur Islam has encountered countless difficulties in obtaining support and assistance from the police. When he tried to file a complaint for the aggression, Mr Shahanur Islam faced the refusal of a police officer. We believe that there has been an overall failure of the police and governmental authorities to ensure Mr Shahanur Islam's safety and physical integrity. There are suspicions of political interferences in Mr Shahanur Islam's case.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take immediate and effective steps to ensure the physical and psychological safety of Mr Shahanur Islam, in order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice, and guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Bangladesh are able to conduct their professional duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dal', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Georges-Albert Dal

President