



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Bangladesh

Decision adopted by the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians at its 158th session (Geneva, 8 February 2019)



Leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Hasina Wajed (L) talks with reporters standing at the door of her house in Dhaka, 23 August 2004. FARJANA K. GODHULY / AFP

BGD-15 - Sheikh Hasina (Ms.)

Alleged human rights violations:

- ✓ Torture ill-treatment and other acts of violence

A. Summary of the case

Sheikh Hasina, leader of the then opposition Awami League, was the target of an attack on 21 August 2004 when grenades were thrown at her as she concluded a speech at a party rally in the centre of Dhaka. Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped and was left with a permanent hearing disability. The attack occurred in broad daylight in the presence of at least 380 policemen and scores of government intelligence and surveillance agents. Several people were killed and wounded. It was not the first attack on Sheikh Hasina. However, none of the previous 18 attacks had been properly investigated by the government of the then ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), according to the complainants.

Within 48 hours of the assassination attempt the student wing of the BNP made statements accusing Sheikh Hasina and her party of having organized the attack. As alleged by the complainants, their statements were quickly followed by public statements from ministers who declared that the opposition party had organized the attack to push the country towards anarchy.

An investigation was opened right away but it later proved to be the result of an effort to pervert the course of justice. The

Case BGD-15

Bangladesh: Parliament affiliated to the IPU

Victim: Female parliamentarian, leader of the opposition at the time of the attack (currently the Prime Minister of Bangladesh)

Complainant(s): Section I.1 (a) and (b) of the **Committee Procedure** (Annex 1)

Submission of complaint: October 2005 and July 2007

Recent IPU decision: April 2017

IPU Mission: - - -

Recent Committee hearing: Hearing with Bangladeshi delegation to the 136th Assembly (Dhaka, April 2017)

Recent follow-up

- Communication from the authorities: Reports providing updates about the case conveyed by the Deputy Secretary of the Bangladeshi Parliament Secretariat (October 2018);
- Communication from the complainant: (October 2018);
- Communication addressed to the authorities: Letter addressed to the Speaker of Parliament (December 2018);
- Communication addressed to the complainant: October 2018.

caretaker Government of October 2006 to December 2008 decided to give the case priority. Renewed investigations led to a charge sheet being drawn up against members of an Islamist militant group (Horkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami [Huji] movement), including its leader, Mufti Abdul Hannan, who was executed on 12 April 2017 in relation to a different case. Concerns related to testimonies extracted by torture and the politicization of the judicial proceedings were reported throughout the trial.

On 2 July 2011, a supplementary charge sheet was filed against 30 persons, who, in addition to the original suspects, included a number of BNP officials, including the former Prime Minister's Political Secretary, Mr. Harris Chowdhury, and the former Prime Minister's son, BNP senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman, both of whom are said to have gone abroad. The 2011 charge sheet considered that the members of the then ruling party accused in the previous charge sheet had acted at the behest of high-ranking party officials, in complicity with the authorities in charge of law and order in Bangladesh, and had relied on members of the Huji movement to carry out the attack.

On 10 October 2018, the Speedy Trial Court delivered its verdict in the case. Among the 48 accused, 19 people including two former ministers were sentenced to death; 17 accused were sentenced to life imprisonment while the remaining 12 accused were sentenced to prison sentences, ranging from four to five years. Nineteen of the 48 accused, including Mr. Tarique Rahman and Mr. Harris Chowdhury, have remained fugitive from justice.

B Decision

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

1. *Takes note* that in October 2018, more than 14 years after the attack against Sheikh Hasina, a verdict was finally delivered whereby the perpetrators and instigators were held accountable;
2. *Deeply regrets* the excessive delays that characterized the investigative and judicial proceedings and the fact that many of the accused were convicted in absentia; *recalls* its long-standing concerns about persistent allegations of political interference by both parties and suspicions of the politicization of the judicial process, as well as its preoccupations about the respect for due process and international fair trial guarantees, particularly in relation to testimonies allegedly extracted under torture, and the death penalty;
3. *Decides to close* the case pursuant to article 25(b) of its Procedure for the Examination and Treatment of Complaints, in the absence of any updated information provided by the complainant and in light of the conclusion of the judicial proceedings;
4. *Requests* the Secretary General to convey the decision to the relevant parliamentary authorities and to the complainant.