

Ellis, Alex

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From: Ellis, Alex
Sent: Tuesday, May 25, 2021 11:42 AM
To: Kenneth.Roth@hrw.org; Siftonj@hrw.org
Subject: Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

Dear Mr. Roth and Mr. Sifton,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

Human Rights Watch's article, "[Bangladesh: Arrest of Journalist Investigating Corruption](#)" mischaracterizes the arrest of Rozina Islam and misstates Bangladesh's attitude toward the press.

Freedom of speech is a constitutionally guaranteed right in Bangladesh. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has rededicated itself to supporting a free and independent media. The reason: Journalists have provided vital information to the public as well as accountability reporting.

Unfortunately, this increased reliance on the press has occasionally been abused. Legal authorities have no choice but to arrest people who appear to have run afoul of the law as was the case with Rozina Islam. Stealing, concealing, removing or mutilating government documents is a crime in countries ranging from the [United States](#) to China. Law enforcement authorities say that Islam attempted to do just that and was arrested.

Rozina Islam's arrest had nothing to do with her prior reporting. Bangladesh welcomes robust criticism from the media and agrees with Human Rights Watch's assertion that "encouraging a free press should be central to the government's strategy to strengthen health services in combatting the pandemic." In this case, however, Rozina Islam was not exercising her rights as a member of the press. Rather, Rozina Islam was found in possession of confidential and sensitive government documents, including illegally-photographed images of materials she found in a government office. After Islam was appropriately arrested, she was not abused or mistreated in any way. She was cared for by female officials who looked after her well-being.

To ensure that the investigation about her actions is fair and independent, the Bangladesh government has formed a three-member committee to look into the incident. The government is not persecuting a journalist but rather is upholding the rule of law in this case.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar
Deputy Chief of Mission
Embassy of Bangladesh
Washington, D.C.

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