

U.N. Sec-General needs to defend his trafficking investigator in Bangladesh

Editorial



August 11, 2007

Sigma Huda, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially in Women and Children, was imprisoned in her native country of Bangladesh in July. She and her husband, a former government minister, have been charged along with hundreds of others of corruption in the wake of a military coup that took place in January. The coup preempted general elections and a state of emergency was declared.

Bangladesh is next to Pakistan.

Earlier, in June, Huda was prevented from leaving the country to attend a session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. She was scheduled to deliver a report on trafficking and make action recommendations to the Council.

The Bangladeshi government refused her exit at that time on the grounds that she presented a "security risk for Bangladesh as she may give statements detrimental to this Government," according to an official statement. Bangladesh has long been identified as a source country for women and girls sold into sex slavery.

Inexplicably, U.N. chief Ban ki-Moon has determined that Huda is not entitled to her diplomatic immunity. In an open letter, the Secretary-General stated that Huda's detention is not directly relevant to her work on behalf of the Human Rights Council.



Photo: freetochoosemedia.org
Bangladeshi women at a community meeting organized by an NGO.

As such, the Secretariat will not intercede in her case and she remains in prison. She has a heart condition and kidney disease.

Huda's family has asked for assistance in pressuring the U.N. authorities to reverse ki-Moon's decision. When a Bulgarian representative of the United Nations found himself in a similar situation some years ago, the Secretariat pursued the case all the way to the International Court of Justice and prevailed.

Please join *The City Edition* and the Association of Humanitarian Lawyers in contacting one or more of the following individuals and official agencies, asking for them to secure Huda's diplomatic immunity and therefore her release. (You can quote the passage above as evidence that her detention is related to her U.N. assignment.)

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Please Contact:

- ♦ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour;
- ♦ UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Mailing address:
UNOG-OHCHR
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Main telephone: 41 22 917 9000
Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org.

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- ♦ Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon
 - ♦ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
c/o Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Mailing address:
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2 United Nations Plaza,
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