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ARTICLE 19

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Bangladesh: ARTICLE 19 and Partners Urge the Government to Approve Strong Right to Information Ordinance

ARTICLE 19, Mass Line media Centre, Shuproshashoner Jonno Pracharivijan and Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication urge the government to release the final draft of the Right to Information Ordinance 2008.

It has been over three months since the Council of Advisers of the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh provisionally approved the Right to Information Ordinance 2008. Civil society organisations, coalitions of journalists and Right-to-Information campaigners have been eagerly waiting for the Information Ministry to give the draft to the cabinet for final approval and the completion of formalities.

“It is imperative that the authorities report to the stakeholders, and the public at large, on the current stage reached by the draft bill. The secrecy surrounding the drafting process and the final text is feeding unhealthy rumours and contradicts the spirit of a law meant to strengthen transparency and the free flow of information” said Dr. Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, on a recent programme mission in Bangladesh.

A number of final drafts have been circulated informally, which were weaker than the first draft in terms of protecting the right to information. ARTICLE 19 and its partners call on the Information Ministry to submit to the Cabinet for approval a strong draft, which meets international principles, and acts as a true and meaningful vehicle for governmental transparency.

“In particular, we call on the government to ensure that the concerns raised by ARTICLE 19, Journalists, the Manusher Jonno-led RTI coalition and others are fully addressed. Media workers all over the world are very important stakeholders and users of freedom of information bills and it is essential that the final draft reflects their views and concerns” said Tahmina Rahman, ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh country director.

The bill should meet key international principles required for an effective freedom of information bill, namely:

- Proactive and routine process of disclosure;
- Minimal number of limitations and exceptions;
- The application of openness principles should be opened to all bodies, including legislative, judicial and police institutions, and at all levels, including district and union parishad levels;

- The right of access should be open to all, whether they are citizens or not.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Tahmina Rahman, Bangladesh Country Director, tahmina@article19.org 0171 303 9669
- For ARTICLE 19 and partners' comments and recommendations on the draft ordinance, please click here: www.provoicebd.org
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.