

Human Rights Council: FORM for Submitting an NGO written statements

NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC (General, Special or Roster status) may submit written statements to the Human Rights Council (HRC).

The written statement is formatted and issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting NGO. English, Spanish and French versions can be published at this time.

In order for your statement to be published before the session, the deadline for submission is exactly two weeks prior to the start of a session. See the deadline on the web site. All submissions are final.

Please fill out **this** FORM and CHECKLIST to submit your statement and send it to the address indicated below. Your information goes after each arrow.

1. Please indicate the contact information for representative submitting written statement (i.e. name, mobile, email) here: ➡ **Ulrich Delius, 0049-16095671403, asien@gfbv.de**

2. Indicate the Standing Agenda item number (1-10) of statement here: ➡ **Item 4, Segment: General Debate**

3.a) If this is an individual statement, indicate here your organization's name as in the ECOSOC NGO database and indicate its consultative status in brackets (i.e. General, Special, or Roster).

➡ **Society for Threatened Peoples (Special Consultative Status)**

or,

3.b) If this is a joint statement, list here the co-sponsoring ECOSOC NGO as they appear in the ECOSOC database and status (in brackets): Group all General NGOs first, group the Special second and group the Roster third. ➡

4. Indicate here any non-ECOSOC NGO(s) supporting this statement (they will appear as a footnote to the statement title): ➡

5. Indicate the exact TITLE for this statement here: ➡ **Religious freedom and protection of religious minorities in Bangladesh**

Please make sure that:

- This statement is in MS WORD document format (Font Times New Roman 10; no bold; no underline; no italics).
- Check word count: (Go to Tools, Word count, # of words) Indicate the length of text (including footnotes/endnotes) here: ➡ **703**
 - NGOs in general consultative status are allowed 2,000 words
 - NGOs in special consultative status and on the roster are allowed 1,500 words
- Please use the Spell/grammar check on your text. (Go to Tools, Spelling & Grammar)
- Different language versions of one statement should be sent in the same email, but using **a separate form** for each.
- Email this document to: **hrcngo@ohchr.org**

PLEASE PASTE THE FINAL TEXT BELOW: ⬇

Amid rising political conflicts, violence against religious minorities sensibly has increased in Bangladesh in the year 2013. The Hindu and Buddhist communities became victims of a political conflict on the question of impunity for war crimes which have been committed in the independence struggle in 1971. Since February 5 the radical Islamist movement Hefajat-e-Islam and Bangladesh's largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami whose leaders were on trial for war crimes have been launching public protests against the special tribunal.

Hundreds of thousands of supporters joined the protests calling for the implementation of a plan of 13 demands to achieve the Islamization of Bangladesh. But many demands were contrary to the constitution of the country. They called for a new blasphemy law, imposing death penalty for anyone guilty for blasphemy. Furthermore they wanted to restrict access for women to public life and prohibiting them from working with men. Islamic education should be imposed and all cultural activities should be banned which could hurt the religious feelings of Muslims. Christians, Hindus and Buddhists felt deeply troubled by the perspectives of even more restrictions of religious freedom. Therefore the religious minorities have called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to impose no new legislation on blasphemy.

We are delighted that the Prime Minister has refused on April 8 to promote a new blasphemy law. But despite her public commitment that everybody has "the right to practise his religion freely" and "to try to protect every religious sentiment" the situation of religious minorities and press freedom in regard to religion sharply has worsened in the last 12 years since the Prime Minister came to power. Immediately after the elections in 2001, there were massive, concerted attacks on Hindus by supporters of the new coalition government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its fundamentalist allies. Hundreds of Hindus died, were raped or forcibly converted to Islam. Thousands have fled to neighbouring India.

Even today the harassment of independent Bloggers and religious minority people continues despite the call for religious freedom by the Prime Minister. In February 2013 blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider was killed outside his home after he had called for the execution of Islamist leaders for war crimes. In April four bloggers were arrested for harming religious sentiment, one of the four has been attacked in January 2013. The arrests prompted eight blog operators to black out their websites in protests against the deliberate restrictions of press freedom.

The wave of violence escalated after the Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Saveedi has been sentenced by a special war crimes tribunal on February 28, 2013, to be hanged for crimes during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Though there was no obvious link between the trial and the religious minority, Hindus immediately after the verdict have been attacked across the whole country by radical Islamists. Scores of shops and houses belonging to the Hindu community have been burned down, leaving hundreds of people homeless. The attacks on temples, houses and shops were well planned. It is shocking that they have been targeted simply for their religion and with the purpose to create conflicts with India and further communal clashes in neighbouring countries. At least 50 temples, 1500 houses and 300 businesses have been damaged.

Buddhist communities also became victims of large scale violence. Statues of Buddha and Buddhist temples were vandalized. This is not the first times that radical Islamists have been trying to provoke clashes between Buddhists and Muslims. After clashes in June/July 2012 in neighbouring Myanmar radical Islamist organized revenge attacks on Buddhist temples and institutions in Chittagong region in Summer 2012. This wave of well planned attacks has led to more violence against Muslims in Myanmar in autumn 2012.

Despite several arrests of radical Islamists there is a widespread feeling among minority people to lack protection by the authorities. Many Christians, Hindus and Buddhists feel unsafe in Bangladesh and are preparing to flee the country.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge Bangladesh:

- to ensure religious freedom for anybody and protection for religious minorities,
- to end impunity for violence against religious minorities,
- to guarantee press freedom in regard to religion,
- to ensure the freedom on Internet and the press freedom of bloggers.