

To:
The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Subject: Bangladesh — Rule of Law, Judicial Independence, Human Rights and the Treatment of Political Opposition

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as a group of British-Bangladeshi barristers, solicitors and advocates practising and residing in the United Kingdom. We have a professional and personal interest in the protection of the rule of law, judicial independence, human rights and democratic institutions in Bangladesh.

We respectfully ask His Majesty's Government to give urgent attention to continuing concerns about the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in Bangladesh, particularly the treatment of members and supporters of the Bangladesh Awami League and the conduct of criminal and judicial proceedings involving political figures.

We recognise that the serious allegations arising from the 2024 protests require proper investigation and, where supported by credible evidence, prosecution. Those responsible for serious crimes should be held accountable. Such accountability must, however, be pursued through independent and fair proceedings that respect judicial independence, equality before the law, the presumption of innocence, adequate legal representation, sufficient time to prepare a defence, the right to challenge evidence and witnesses, a fair hearing and meaningful rights of appeal.

We are particularly concerned about proceedings before Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal. Human Rights Watch reported in July 2026 that its monitoring of cases before the Tribunal had identified significant due-process concerns, including trials in absentia without adequate safeguards, restrictions on defence lawyers' ability to cross-examine witnesses, limited preparation time, detention without adequate procedural safeguards and restrictions on appeal. Human Rights Watch has also raised concerns about the evidential basis of some prosecutions.

These concerns are especially serious where the potential or actual sentence is death. On 15 September 2026, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 sentenced seven senior figures associated with the Awami League and affiliated organisations to death in a case concerning alleged crimes against humanity during the July-August 2024 uprising. Given the seriousness of the allegations and the sentences imposed, it is essential that such proceedings meet the highest standards of judicial independence, impartiality, fair trial and due process.

We are also concerned about the restrictions placed on the Bangladesh Awami League as a political organisation. In May 2025, the Bangladeshi authorities banned the party's activities and the Election Commission suspended its registration. Amnesty International raised concerns that the blanket ban may affect freedom of association and expression and questioned its compatibility with international human-rights standards.

Human Rights Watch has also reported concerns regarding the treatment of political opponents and prolonged pre-trial detention of people associated with the former Awami League government.

The principle is straightforward: criminal responsibility should be determined by an individual's conduct and the evidence against them. Political affiliation or peaceful political association should not, by itself, determine whether a person is detained, prosecuted or deprived of political rights.

We therefore respectfully ask His Majesty's Government to:

1. Raise with the Government of Bangladesh concerns regarding judicial independence, fair-trial guarantees and the treatment of political opponents.
2. Urge full compliance with internationally recognised human-rights and fair-trial standards in proceedings before the International Crimes Tribunal.
3. Urge the authorities to ensure that no person is detained or prosecuted solely because of political affiliation or peaceful political association.
4. Encourage a review of the restrictions on the Awami League in light of the rights to freedom of association, expression and political participation.
5. Urge that the highest standards of due process be applied in every case involving the death penalty and encourage serious consideration of its abolition.
6. Support an inclusive democratic process in Bangladesh in which alleged crimes are investigated and prosecuted independently, while peaceful political participation and legitimate political opposition remain protected.

We make this representation in our professional capacity as lawyers and not on behalf of any political party. We do not seek to determine the guilt or innocence of any individual. Our concern is that the legal principles of fairness, due process and equal protection should apply to everyone, regardless of political affiliation.

We respectfully ask whether His Majesty's Government intends to raise these matters with the Government of Bangladesh and whether the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is monitoring the fair-trial and human-rights concerns surrounding the current proceedings.

We would be grateful for a response setting out what steps the Government intends to take in response to these concerns.

Yours faithfully,

British-Bangladeshi Barristers, Solicitors and Advocates
United Kingdom