



9 July 2014 – for immediate release

Draft Bangladesh Law Allows Government Control Over NGO Funds

The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) have sent a letter to Bangladesh's Prime Minister, the Honourable Sheikh Hasina, urging her government to reconsider passage of the proposed *Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2014* (the Bill). The Bill would grant the NGO Affairs Bureau, a department under the Prime Minister's Office, extensive powers over NGOs, including a veto over their ability to receive foreign contributions of any kind. The law would also put in place an onerous registration system and given the NGO Affairs Bureau the power to forcibly dissolve non-compliant NGOs.

"The Bill signally fails to respect international standards on freedom of association," said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *"Its substantive provisions cannot be justified and it fails to respect the need to provide for independent oversight. We urge the government of Bangladesh to fundamentally reconsider its approach to this issue."*

International human rights norms relating to freedom of association include the right to seek and secure funding internationally. Moreover, where there is a need for regulatory functions to be done, they should be carried out by an independent body rather than one which operates under the Prime Minister's Office. The proposed law was approved by Cabinet on 2 June 2014 and is currently before Parliament.

You can read the letter, and an English version of the Bill, at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/live/draft-bangladesh-law-allows-government-control-over-ngo-funds/>.

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