

To,
Madam Sheikh Hasina Wazed,
Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh,
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh.
Fax: +880-2-9143377 email: psecy@pmo.gov.bd

Date: August 9, 2018

RE: Call for the immediate release of photojournalist Shahidul Alam

Dear Madam Sheikh Hasina,

The International Federation of Journalists, the world's largest journalists' association, and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN), representing the undersigned organizations, write to you to raise serious concerns over the abduction, detention, custodial assault and subsequent arrest of photojournalist Dr Shahidul Alam. We also condemn an alarming escalation of violence toward journalists covering demonstrations in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The disturbing circumstances of the arrest and detention of Alam has generated considerable outrage and can only be regarded as an authoritarian attempt to suppress an important critical voice in Bangladesh. Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, under which he was charged, has long been a draconian and oppressive legal provision too often used against journalists and others to muzzle press freedom and freedom of expression. Alam, 63, is the founder of award-winning Drik photo agency, Pathshala - the school of photography, and Chhobi Mela - the international photo exhibition.

Alam was forcibly abducted from his house in Dhanmondi, Dhaka after 10pm on Sunday, Aug 5. According to apartment security guards and other eyewitness reports, there were roughly 30 to 35 men, in plain clothes, who claimed to be from the Detective Branch (DB), who went upstairs, brought down Alam, who was screaming as he was forcibly pushed into the waiting vehicle, a HiAce, with the words Popular Life Insurance, written on the outside. They taped up the CCTV camera and took away the CCTV camera footage. The guards were manhandled and locked up. His partner Rahnuma Ahmed, was in a neighbouring flat, raced downstairs on hearing the scream, only to see the car carrying him and two other cars speed away.

This abduction took place after Alam did a live Facebook post narrating an attack against protesters on the streets of Dhaka. The same day, Alam appeared on Al Jazeera TV, criticizing the state's heavy-handed response to the protests. He was produced before the judge on August 6th, where he gave a detailed account of his torture at the hands of the police. On August 7th, he was taken to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital for care following an order to police from the High Court a day earlier to allow his treatment. He is currently remanded for 7 days.

The IFJ and SAMSAN remain gravely concerned by the attacks on the journalists and photojournalists covering the students' demonstrations by masked men on the streets of Dhaka. The journalists had a rightful duty to report in the public interest as thousands of students called

for safer roads after an accident that killed two of their peers. Incidents of targeted attacks on media and journalists by unidentified men in helmets carrying sticks and metal rods have been specifically documented from August 4 onwards. Those attacked include Associated Press photojournalist AM Ahad, freelance photojournalist Rahat Karim, Palash of Daily *Bonik Barta*, Ibnul Asad Zawad of *The Daily Janakantha*, Rimon of US-based *Zuma Press*, Ahmed Deepto of Bangla daily *Prothom Alo*, *Nagorik TV* reporter Abdullah Shafi and Kamrul Hassan, *Sara Bangla* reporter Golam Samdani, *Prothom Alo* photojournalist Shajid Hossain, *bdmorning's* Abu Shufian Jewel, *Naya Diganta's* Sharif Hossain, freelance photographers Marjuk Hasan, Hasan Jubayer and N Kayer Hasim.

We reiterate that these are serious attacks on Bangladesh's media. The inability of the authorities in Bangladesh to stop such attacks raises serious concerns about your government's commitment to democracy, human rights and rule of law. In reference to the current situation in Bangladesh, we urge you to urgently take following actions:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release photojournalist Shahidul Alam;
2. Mobilize and adequately brief security agencies to ensure safety and security to protect media, journalists, photojournalists and media staff covering demonstrations;
3. Urgently investigate and arrest those responsible for attacks on journalists and photojournalists

Most critical now, is the release of Shahidul Alam at the behest of journalists in South Asia as well as globally.

Kind Regards,



Anthony Bellanger
General Secretary
International Federation of Journalists

Signatures

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and members of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN):
Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)
Nepal Press Union (NPU)
Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF)
National Union of Journalists (India)
Afghanistan Journalists Center
National Union of Journalists - Nepal
Federation of Media Employees Trade Union in Sri Lanka

Maldives Journalists Association
Media Development Foundation - Maldives
Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ),
Pakistan
Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)
South Asian Women in Media- Sri Lanka
Punjab Union of Journalists, Pakistan
All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Confederation
Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists, Pakistan