



JOINT STATEMENT

CONDEMNING POLITICALLY MOTIVATED EXCLUSION, INTIMIDATION, AND INTERFERENCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN BANGLADESH

Paris | Brussels | The Hague | Berlin | Geneva | Rome | Bordeaux | Canberra | Vilnius | Varanasi | Astana | 7 July 2026

We, the undersigned sixteen international human rights organisations, bar associations, and law societies from across the globe, express our profound concern and unequivocally condemn the widespread obstruction, intimidation, and politically motivated exclusion of lawyers identified as supporters of the Awami League or as independent candidates from participating in bar association elections throughout Bangladesh since the formation of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led Government under the leadership of Tarique Rahman on 17 February 2026.

According to reports published in numerous national newspapers and independently verified by JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France (JMBF), more than 300 lawyers have been prevented from contesting elections in at least twenty-three bar associations across Bangladesh.¹ These include the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association and the bar associations of Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Khulna, Gazipur, Barishal, Cumilla, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Dinajpur, Naogaon, Jhalokathi, Panchagarh, Chandpur, Shariatpur, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Tangail, Meherpur, Patuakhali, and Thakurgaon.

The reported violations include the refusal by election commissions to issue nomination papers, obstruction of lawyers from collecting or submitting nomination forms, arbitrary rejection of nominations, physical intimidation, threats, violence, police harassment, coercion, and the deliberate creation of an atmosphere of fear intended to prevent lawyers from

¹ https://www.jmbf.org/2026/05/silencing-legal-profession-escalating_0222753530.html

exercising their democratic right to participate in the governance of their professional associations.

We are particularly alarmed by reports that the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association cancelled the nominations of forty-two lawyers after branding them as "collaborators of fascism." Likewise, the Mymensingh District Bar Association reportedly cancelled the candidacies of sixteen lawyers, while the Munshiganj District Bar Association cancelled the candidacies of eleven lawyers.

Equally troubling are reports that during the elections for twenty-three executive posts in the Dhaka Bar Association, twenty-one posts in the Chattogram Bar Association, and fifteen posts in the bar associations of Shariatpur, Barishal, and Jamalpur, not a single Awami League-supported or independent lawyer was even permitted to collect nomination papers.

In Gazipur, thirty-nine lawyers reportedly sought nomination papers for sixteen executive posts but were denied nomination forms by the Chief Election Commissioner. In Chattogram, lawyers attempting to collect nomination papers for twenty-one executive positions were allegedly obstructed by politically affiliated groups, prompting the Chief Election Commissioner to reportedly close the doors of his office.

We are deeply disturbed by allegations that, in Thakurgaon, police officers visited the residence of a presidential candidate late at night before the election and pressured him to withdraw his candidacy. Reports from Shariatpur further indicate that one lawyer was physically assaulted while attempting to collect nomination papers. In Cumilla, although nomination papers were eventually submitted through the intervention of a local Member of Parliament, election campaigning was reportedly obstructed by politically aligned lawyers.

Furthermore, reports from Rajshahi, Khulna, Naogaon, Jhalokathi, Manikganj, Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Sherpur, Tangail, Meherpur, Patuakhali, and Chandpur describe a persistent climate of fear characterised by arbitrary arrests, threats of criminal prosecution, threats of mob violence, and other forms of intimidation that prevented both Awami League-affiliated and independent lawyers from freely participating in bar association elections.

We are also deeply alarmed by the decision of the authorities on 30 June 2026 to constitute a fifteen-member ad hoc committee, composed exclusively of pro-BNP and Jamaat-backed lawyers, to administer the Bangladesh Bar Council—the statutory body responsible for regulating the country's legal profession—for the period from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027.² This decision flagrantly violates the democratic principles governing professional bodies, undermines the independence and representative character of the legal profession, and perpetuates the same undemocratic practices adopted by the previous interim government.

Taken together, these actions amount to far more than administrative irregularities or political disputes. They constitute a systematic assault on the independence of the legal profession, the rule of law, freedom of association, and the constitutional principles upon which a democratic society depends.

Bar associations are independent professional institutions and must remain free from political interference. A lawyer's political opinion, affiliation, or perceived political identity can never lawfully justify exclusion from participation in professional institutions. The systematic

² <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/crime-justice/news/govt-forms-ad-hoc-committee-run-bangladesh-bar-council-4212406>

exclusion of lawyers on political grounds fundamentally undermines the independence of the legal profession, weakens the administration of justice, and erodes public confidence in the justice system.

We are particularly concerned by attempts to justify these discriminatory practices by portraying lawyers holding differing political views as undeserving of equal rights and professional participation. Such practices are wholly incompatible with democratic governance, constitutional principles, and Bangladesh's obligations under international human rights law, including the rights to equality before the law, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and participation in public affairs without discrimination.

These interferences with bar association elections must also be viewed within the broader context of a systematic crackdown on the legal profession in Bangladesh. Between August 2024 and September 2025, JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France documented 268 incidents of repression affecting 849 lawyers, including arbitrary arrests, politically motivated prosecutions, harassment, intimidation, and other reprisals, in direct violation of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.³

We therefore call upon the Government of Bangladesh, the legal profession, and the international community to:

1. **Immediately revoke** the order constituting the ad hoc committee of the Bangladesh Bar Council and **annul** the committees of the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association and all District Bar Associations elected through seriously flawed, irregular, and discriminatory electoral processes.
2. **Immediately ensure** that free, fair, transparent, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and democratic elections to the Bangladesh Bar Council, the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association, and all District Bar Associations are conducted in accordance with the Bangladesh Bar Council Order, 1972, the respective constitutions and statutes of the Bar Associations, and the **United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers**.
3. **Restore** all unlawfully cancelled candidacies and guarantee every eligible lawyer equal access to nomination procedures and participation in bar association elections, irrespective of political opinion, affiliation, or perceived political identity.
4. **Cease immediately** all forms of intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, politically motivated prosecution, surveillance, coercion, and violence against lawyers, and ensure that all members of the legal profession are able to carry out their professional activities and exercise their democratic rights freely and without fear of reprisals.
5. **Conduct prompt, independent, impartial, and effective investigations** into all allegations of intimidation, violence, arbitrary exclusion, and other electoral irregularities associated with bar association elections, and hold those responsible accountable in accordance with the law.
6. **Respect and guarantee** the independence, autonomy, and self-governance of the legal profession by refraining from any political interference in the administration, governance, or electoral processes of the Bangladesh Bar Council, the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association, and all District Bar Associations.

³ <https://www.jmbf.org/2025/10/jmbf-report-2025-crackdown-against.html>

7. **Call upon** national and international bar associations, law societies, and legal institutions to closely monitor developments concerning the independence of the legal profession in Bangladesh and to express solidarity with lawyers whose professional rights are being violated.
8. **Urge** the international community, including the United Nations human rights mechanisms, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and other regional and international legal organisations, to engage constructively and urgently with the Government of Bangladesh to ensure full compliance with international standards safeguarding the independence of the legal profession.

The independence of the legal profession is one of the fundamental pillars of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. Attempts to silence, intimidate, exclude, or politically discriminate against lawyers threaten not only the rights and safety of individual practitioners but also the integrity, impartiality, and credibility of the justice system itself.

Lawyers must be able to participate freely and equally in the governance of their professional institutions without fear of political retaliation, intimidation, discrimination, or arbitrary exclusion. Any attempt to politicise bar associations or interfere with their democratic functioning weakens the administration of justice and undermines public confidence in the legal system.

We reaffirm our solidarity with all lawyers in Bangladesh who continue to defend the rule of law, uphold the independence of the legal profession, and exercise their professional and democratic rights peacefully, courageously, and without discrimination.

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Signed by

1. **The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)**, Brussels, Belgium; Website: www.ccbe.eu
2. **The JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France (JMBF)**, Paris, France; Website: www.jmbf.org
3. **The International Observatory of Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)**, Paris, France; Website: www.protect-lawyers.org
4. **The French National Bar Council (CNB)**, Paris, France; Website: www.avocat.fr
5. **The German Federal Bar (BRAK)**, Berlin, Germany; Website: www.brak.de
6. **The Italian National Bar Council (CNF)**, Rome, Italy; Website: www.consiglionazionaleforense.it
7. **The Foundation Day of the Endangered Lawyer**, The Hague, Netherlands; Website: www.dayoftheendangeredlawyer.eu
8. **The Geneva Bar Association**, Geneva, Switzerland; Website: www.odage.ch

9. **The German Bar Association (DAV)**, Brussels, Belgium;
Website: www.anwaltverein.de
10. **The Paris Bar**, Paris, France; Website: www.avocatparis.org
11. **The International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)**, Bordeaux, France;
Website: www.defendlawyers.wordpress.com
12. **The International League Against Arbitrary Detention (ILAAD)**, Paris, France;
Website: www.ilaad.org
13. **The Law Association for Asia and the Pacific (LAWASIA)**, Canberra, Australia;
Website: www.lawasia.asn.au
14. **The People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR)**, Varanasi, India;
Website: www.pvchr.asia
15. **The Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers**, Vilnius, Lithuania;
Website: www.bahrl.org
16. **The Public Association "Dignity"**, Astana, Kazakhstan;
Website: www.humanrightsfocus.kz

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