

URGENT ACTION

PROFESSOR TERMINATED FOR FACEBOOK POST

A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman, an assistant professor at Bangladesh's National University, was arbitrarily dismissed from service on 2 September 2020 on grounds of posting on Facebook "offensive" and "indecent" remarks about Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina and her family. The professor has been in self-exile since May 2016 in fear of persecution after Bangladesh's police filed a case against him under section 57 of the country's draconian Information and Communication Technology Act because of the Facebook post. If convicted, he could face seven years in jail.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid
President
People's Republic of Bangladesh
President's Office
Bangabhaban, Dhaka-1000
Fax: +88-02-9585502
Email: secretary@bangabhaban.gov.bd
js@bangabhaban.gov.bd

Your Excellency,

*I am concerned by the decision to dismiss **A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman**, an assistant professor of Geography at the National University, for a Facebook post about Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her family. In 2013, he was arrested and suspended from the university because of the Facebook post. On 3 March 2014, the police filed another defamation case against him under section 57 the country's draconian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act.*

Now, seven years later, the professor has been terminated from service on 2 September 2020. Not only has this decision denied A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman his right to freedom of expression, but it is in violation of the university's own service rules. As you may be aware, university authorities cannot terminate an employee on an issue that is pending trial at the court, and without allowing them the opportunity to defend themselves. Such an action by a state institution demonstrates lack of transparency and accountability and would also deny A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman from his right to a fair trial.

I find it worrying that this is not an isolated incident. Instead, it appears to be indicative of a dangerous pattern of repression of academics in Bangladesh. As you may be aware, Morshed Hasan Khan, another professor was recently dismissed from the University of Dhaka for publishing his opinion in a newspaper, while two other public university teachers are being accused under the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA) for sharing Facebook posts that were deemed critical of Awami League politicians.

I call on you to:

- 1. Immediately reverse A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman's termination and reinstate him to his position;***
- 2. Drop all charges against him and all those prosecuted solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;***
- 3. Repeal the Digital Security Act unless it can be promptly amended in compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party;***
- 4. Respect, protect, and fulfil the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 10 September 2020, A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman learnt for the first time that he was being dismissed from service after the Bangladesh's state-run National University issued a press release stating that he was being terminated for posting on Facebook remarks about the country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her family. The circular stated that the university's syndicate took this decision on 2 September on grounds of "negligence of duty", "misconduct", "absconding" and "fraud" under the discipline and appeal rules 4 of the Service Rules of National University.

"I was not aware that [the university authorities] framed this allegation against me and I did not get an opportunity to defend myself," said A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman.

His termination violates the university's service rules, which require the authorities to ensure his right to defend himself for the allegations under the discipline and appeal rule 8 of the Service Rules. The university's press release attributes his termination to a Facebook post for which he has been accused under section 57 of Bangladesh's draconian Information and Communication Technology Act. The authority's action further violates rule 16 of the discipline and appeals of Service Rules of the National University which stipulates a stay on any penalty of the university if the issue is pending trial at the court.

The university professor could face at least seven years in jail if he is convicted under the law. Its vaguely worded clauses empower the authorities to prosecute people "in the interest of sovereignty, integrity or security of Bangladesh" or if they are deemed to "prejudice the image of the State or person" or "hurt religious belief".

Currently in self-exile for fear of persecution, A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman told Amnesty International that he has not received any letter from the university to defend himself in either his present or permanent address in Bangladesh.

A.K.M Wahiduzzaman's termination demonstrates a worrying pattern of repression against teachers in public universities for exercising their right to freedom of expression. On 9 September, [Morshed Hasan Khan](#), a professor of the University of Dhaka, was terminated for writing an opinion piece in 2018 which, according to university authorities, "distorted liberation war history" and "disrespected the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman".

In June 2020, two other public university teachers, Kazi Jahidur Rahman of Rajshahi University and Sirajum Munira of Begum Rokeya University, have been accused under the draconian Digital Security Act for posting criticisms on Facebook about a senior politician of the ruling party Awami League, Mohammad Nasim, who passed away in the same month.

The Digital Security Act, which was introduced in October 2018 as a replacement to the ICT Act, expanded the earlier law into ways that not only curbs people's right to freedom of expression but also empowers the security apparatus to breach into people's right to privacy on digital platforms and social media.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English or Bangla]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [A.K.M. Wahiduzzaman] (he/him/his)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Professor Harun-or-Rashid
Vice Chancellor
National University
Gazipur-1704
Bangladesh
Email:
vc@nu.edu.bd
harun@du.ac.bd

And copies to:

Her Excellency Ms Saida Muna Tasneem
High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh
28 Queen's Gate London SW7 5JA
020 7584 0081
Fax 020 7581 7477
info@bhclondon.org.uk
www.bhclondon.org.uk