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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

October 27, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Mnuchin:

We write to express our serious concern about the ongoing human rights violations reportedly perpetrated by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) of the Bangladesh Police. Since 2015, the RAB has reportedly extrajudicially killed more than 400 people, and the RAB has been credibly implicated in many cases of enforced disappearances and torture. These violations appear to be part of a broader crackdown on dissent by the ruling Awami League, and the RAB has not been held to account. We urge you to impose targeted sanctions on senior RAB commanders responsible for these gross human rights violations under all applicable authorities, including the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Section 7031(c) of the FY 2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act.

Extrajudicial killings by the RAB have reportedly spiked since the Government of Bangladesh began its ‘war on drugs’ in the months ahead of the December 2018 elections. In a June 2018 communication to the Government of Bangladesh, UN experts including the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary execution wrote that the ‘war on drugs’ “appears to be a deliberate policy of extrajudicial killings” and urged the Government to end it and respect the rule of law and human rights.¹ However, the Government has failed to end these abuses and the RAB continues to commit extrajudicial killings with impunity.

In nearly all cases, the RAB claims that such extrajudicial killings result from “gunfights” or “crossfire,” but documentation from reputable human rights organizations demonstrates that victims were often in RAB custody when they were killed, and many of their bodies show signs of death by execution, rather than a “gunfight.” Amnesty International has also documented alleged witnesses to RAB “gunfights” saying they did not witness any such thing and that they were coerced into providing fabricated statements.² In one well-known case, an audio recording of the killing of municipal councilor Ekramul Haque reveals RAB officers giving directions to stage a “gunfight” after they executed him. Directions from RAB officers included planting

¹ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UA BGD 5/2018, June 6, 2018, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=23888>.

² Amnesty International, *Killed in “Crossfire”: Allegations of Extrajudicial Killings in Bangladesh in the Guise of a War on Drugs*, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1312652019ENGLISH.pdf>.

drugs and bullets in Mr. Haque’s pockets, untying his hands, scattering empty bullet shells around the scene, and shooting at a nearby vehicle.

In addition to extrajudicial killings, UN experts, journalists, and human rights groups have documented cases of the RAB committing enforced disappearances and widespread torture, including the 2019 abduction and suspected torture by the RAB of three men whose employer had a dispute with a high-ranking Government of Bangladesh official. One of those men is believed to have died of wounds incurred during the RAB torture.³ Many victims of extrajudicial killing are also forcibly disappeared for days or months prior to being extrajudicially killed in “gunfights.”

These cases illustrate a pattern of gross human rights violations for which the Rapid Action Battalion and its senior leadership have faced no consequences. U.S. law requires action in the face of gross violations of human rights. We urge you to respond strongly to the RAB’s ongoing violations by using all applicable authorities to impose targeted sanctions on senior RAB commanders, including Global Magnitsky and Section 7031(c) sanctions.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member



Todd Young
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

³ David Bergman, “Employee of UK-based Bangladeshi businessman dies in custody,” *Al Jazeera*, Nov 22, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/employee-uk-based-bangladeshi-businessman-dies-custody-191122110819149.html>.



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator