

# Statement of Solidarity on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Internet Users in Bangladesh

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*This is a statement on the violent attack on blogger Asif Mohiuddin by the participants to the Third South Asian Meeting on the Internet and Freedom of Expression that took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on January 14-15, 2013.*

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Bangladeshi blogger Asif Mohiuddin was brutally attacked in a stabbing last evening. His condition is currently said to be critical. Violent attacks on media-persons have led to at least four deaths in the past year. This trend is now extending to those writing online.

It is the duty of societies at large to ensure that principles we universally consider sacrosanct, such as the right to life and liberty and of freedom of expression are in fact ideas, and of the government to actively protect the rights guaranteed under the Constitution of Bangladesh and to ensure they are not just words on paper.

Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh—and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—guarantee both the freedom of thought and conscience, as well as the right of every citizen of freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of the press.

Article 32 of the Constitution of Bangladesh—and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—guarantee that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except by law.

The attack on Asif Mohiuddin constitutes a violation these fundamental principle by criminals, and we request the government to act decisively to show it will not tolerate such violations.

Reporters Without Borders note that "the ability of those in the media to work freely has deteriorated alarmingly in Bangladesh, which is now ranked 129th of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 World Press Freedom Index".

In general, the situation of those working as non-professional 'citizen journalists' is even worse. In a 2010 report, the UN Special Rapporteur wrote:

"Citizen journalists are by nature more isolated, they are more vulnerable to attack than professional journalists. However, citizen journalists enjoy less protection than their counterparts in traditional media, as they do not have the support of media organizations and networks, in particular the organizational resources, including lawyers and financial resources, which can help shield them from harassment."

This reality of greater vulnerability is equally applicable to those who do not self-identify as 'citizen journalists', but use social media to express unpopular opinions.

Keeping this in mind, we call upon the government on Bangladesh to carry out swift investigations into this particular incident and bring the perpetrators to justice, and to grant greater legal support to citizen journalists and ensure better protections for all those who use the Internet as a means of expression.