

Professor Muhammad Yunus  
Chief Adviser  
Interim Government of Bangladesh

*Sent via email*

Dear Professor Yunus,

Thank you for meeting with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) — an independent non-governmental organization advocating for press freedom worldwide — and other international human rights groups during the 2024 United Nations General Assembly Session in New York. I was gratified to hear from you personally about your commitment to respecting press freedom and freedom of expression as chief adviser to the interim government of Bangladesh.

I am writing to respectfully urge your leadership to ensure that Bangladesh takes action to protect these fundamental rights, which are explicitly enshrined in the country's constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party.

To that end, CPJ is calling upon the interim government, within the scope of its constitutional powers, to take the following steps:

1. **Impose an immediate moratorium on repressive laws** that undermine Bangladesh's constitutional obligation to protect freedom of expression and press freedom — including [criminal defamation](#) under the Penal Code and the colonial-era [Official Secrets Act, 1923](#) — pending their repeal or amendment in line with international human rights standards.

We welcome the interim government's recent [announcement](#) that the [Cyber Security Act 2023](#) will be repealed. CPJ has [documented](#) the extensive use of the Cyber Security Act's predecessor, the [Digital Security Act, 2018](#), as well as the criminal defamation law and the Official Secrets Act, to subject the independent media to arrest and prolonged harassment.

2. **Facilitate the withdrawal or dismissal of hundreds of criminal cases lodged against journalists in retaliation for their work.** This includes cases under the now-repealed Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 — cited in the ongoing judicial harassment of photojournalist and CPJ's 2020 International Press Freedom Award winner [Shahidul Alam](#), as well as reporter [Palash Kumar Dey](#) (also known as Pranto Palash) — in addition to the Digital Security Act, which has been used to target the staff of [Prothom Alo newspaper](#). Journalists were the second worst victims

of the Digital Security Act, under which over 400 cases were filed against members of the press, according to the Dhaka-based think tank [Centre for Governance Studies](#).

3. **Ensure that authorities respect the procedural rights of the [four incarcerated pro-Awami League journalists](#): Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Mozammel Babu, and Shyamal Dutta, including their right to a free trial.**
4. **Ensure prompt, independent, and transparent investigations into recent attacks and violence against the press.** At a minimum, this includes investigations into:
  - **[Dozens of attacks](#) on journalists and media offices during the recent unrest in Bangladesh**, including the fatal shootings of on-duty reporters [Hasan Mehedi](#) and [Abu Taher Md Turab](#) in July 2024.
  - **Fatal attacks marked by longstanding impunity**, including the 2012 double killing of journalist couple [Golam Mustofa Sarowar](#) (also known as Sagar Sarowar) and [Meherun Runi](#), as well as the 2023 murder of [Golam Rabbani Nadim](#). At least [14 journalists and media workers](#) were killed in direct relation to their work during the Awami League government's tenure from 2009 to 2024, while the motive remains unconfirmed behind at least [eight other fatal attacks](#) on members of the press during this period.
  - **Reports of custodial violence against journalists** under the Awami League government, including the alleged torture of photojournalist [Shahidul Alam](#) in 2018, cartoonist [Kabir Kishore](#) in 2020, and reporter [Raghunath Kha](#) in 2023. Authorities should launch a fresh probe into the 2021 death of writer and commentator [Mushtaq Ahmed](#) in jail following alleged custodial torture and hold any perpetrators accountable.
  - **Other attacks on the media**, including the suspected enforced disappearance, alleged torture, and subsequent jailing of photographer and editor [Shafiqul Islam Kajol](#) in 2020; [abductions of journalists](#), including [Golam Sarwar](#); and [numerous assaults](#) on reporters by the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League.
  - **Incidents of [transnational repression](#)** targeting family members of [foreign-based Bangladeshi reporters](#), including the 2023 beating of Mahinur Khan, brother of exiled journalist [Zulkarnain Saer Khan](#).

5. **Ensure that law enforcement agencies end the undue surveillance and harassment of journalists**, particularly those covering high-security areas, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Authorities should also take steps to **ensure the safety of [journalists in district and rural areas](#), as well as [those covering the Rohingya crisis](#)**, particularly ethnic Rohingya, who have long been subjected to threats and intimidation by Bangladeshi authorities and actors within refugee camps.
6. **In consultation with the media and civil society, enact a comprehensive journalist protection law** to safeguard the right of the press to report freely and securely. The law should ensure that journalists may report without fear that they will face arrest or criminal charges for their work.
7. **Reform the Bangladesh Press Council** into an independent, self-regulatory body that will uphold media freedom and adjudicate matters of journalistic ethics without criminalizing reporters or placing undue restrictions on their work.
8. **Implement a streamlined press accreditation and renewal process** that does not place undue restrictions on the media, particularly on freelance journalists.
9. **Maintain unrestricted visa access for [foreign journalists](#)**, who faced undue consular delays and obstacles while attempting to report from Bangladesh under the previous government.
10. **Maintain unrestricted and unimpeded access to media outlets, as well as internet and telecommunication services**. The previous government [repeatedly blocked](#) internet and mobile services during the recent unrest, severely impairing the ability of the media to do its job effectively.

The interim government, created under your leadership, offers opportunities for accountability and reforms that center the rights of all Bangladeshis. I urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure that the next government inherits a legal and constitutional framework and state agencies that respect press freedom and the public's right to information at this critical juncture in the country's history.

Sincerely,

Jodie Ginsberg, CEO

Committee to Protect Journalists