



Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 31 July 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Modvig

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention *(continued)*

Initial report of Bangladesh (continued) (document without a symbol in English only)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bangladesh took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Huq** (Bangladesh) said that democracy had been restored to Bangladesh in 1996 following a series of autocratic governments that had been in power since the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. The new Government had ratified several human rights instruments. Unfortunately, progress had stalled after 2001 and it was only in 2009 that reforms had been launched to comply with the country's international obligations, including the enactment of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act of 2013. The situation in Bangladesh must be seen in that context, which also explained the delay in reporting to the Committee. The report had been prepared in consultation with the National Human Rights Commission and all relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
3. The constitutional prohibition of torture did not affect the operation of any existing law which prescribed any punishment or trial procedure, but was intended to permit proceedings that fell outside the ordinary judicial procedure, such as courts martial. It was compatible with article 1 of the Convention, which provided that torture did not include suffering arising from lawful sanctions. There was no restriction on civil suits in connection with crimes, including torture, committed within Bangladesh or that were transnational in nature as long as the court could establish its jurisdiction in line with the Code of Criminal Procedure.
4. The Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure provided that an arrested or detained person had the right to consult and be defended by a lawyer of his or her own choice. The Government was bound to provide a lawyer free of charge to the accused if the alleged offences were punishable with life imprisonment or the death penalty. That provision had even been applied in the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The Government had provided legal aid to more than 100,000 persons and encouraged the work of NGOs that provided legal aid for victims. Applicants could receive legal aid as long as they fulfilled the eligibility criteria. It could take time to collect the relevant documents but that did not disrupt the provision of legal aid.
5. Incommunicado detention was not legal as the Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure provided that arrested persons must be informed of the reasons for arrest without delay. The Special Powers Act, which provided for preventive detention allowing a person to be detained without charge for up to 90 days, had been widely used after 1975 but had not been used at all in the previous 10 years.
6. The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act provided that when a complaint of torture was made in court, the court would record the statement and order a medical examination of the victim by a registered doctor, who would be female if the victim was a woman. The medical report produced must record the date and time of the injury and contain a description thereof; it must be submitted to the court within 24 hours, with a copy to the victim. If necessary, the court could order that the victim be admitted to hospital. It would then direct the appropriate senior police officer to register a complaint of torture.
7. To prevent excessive use of force, police regulations stipulated a fully independent executive inquiry whenever officers used firearms.
8. With regard to pretrial detention, if the alleged offence was not punishable by death or imprisonment exceeding 10 years, the accused person could be released on bail if the investigation was not completed within 120 days of the date of the allegation or court order for investigation. Courts could also allow bail for children under 16 years of age, women and sick or infirm persons accused of non-bailable offences. If a trial could not be conducted within the specified time, which was 180 days from the registration of the

complaint under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, the accused could be released on bail. A backlog of cases meant that the requirement of 180 days was not always met, but new courts were being established and judges recruited to address that problem.

9. The Government had taken various initiatives to reduce overcrowding in prisons, including the Improvement of the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons Project, undertaken with the technical assistance of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. New prisons were being built and it was planned to construct more. Dhaka Central Jail had been moved from the old town to a larger suburban area. All the new prisons complied with international standards, which included medical facilities and special arrangements for women prisoners. If inmates died, an autopsy and inquest were performed before issuance of the death certificate.

10. Mandatory prison labour, which was recognized in international human rights instruments, could be ordered on the basis of age, gender and physical condition. A new law would be promulgated to replace the colonial-era Prisons Act, which would be called the Prisons and Correctional Services Act to emphasize the correctional function of modern prisons. The Government was currently undertaking a judicial audit to discover which areas of the legal system required improvement and which were satisfactory. For example, the audit had shown that the conviction rate was only 3 per cent.

11. The work of the International Crimes Tribunal could not be compared to general judicial processes. It had been able to conduct trials speedily because it had been established pursuant to a special law and was not governed by the provisions of the Evidence Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure. It had been inspired by the Nuremberg Tribunal, except that the accused had the usual constitutional rights of defence. The Government had made every effort to expedite the Tribunal's proceedings because the country had already waited for more than 38 years, until 2009, to see the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity brought to justice. The Government would also endeavour to try cases of torture promptly in the future, in line with its domestic obligations under the Constitution and its international obligations as a State party to the Convention.

12. It was planned to review the laws of Bangladesh in order to prohibit torture, including in preventive detention. Rapid Action Battalion officials had made a request to the Prime Minister to be excluded from the scope of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, as any government agency could do regarding legal provisions that affected them. However, no such amendment to the law had been or would be made. The Act was not limited to any particular agency but applied to any government officials who committed torture in their official capacity, which would include the personnel of the Prison Authority and the Anti-Corruption Commission.

13. The Code of Criminal Procedure provided that police officers must not make any inducement or threat during the interrogation procedure. All incidents involving the use of force or threats must be investigated. The Code provided for interrogative custody, or remand, during which suspects could be questioned without a lawyer being present. In terms of safeguards, forced confessions were prohibited under the Constitution and inadmissible in court under the Evidence Act. The Code of Criminal Procedure stipulated the procedure for a magistrate to record a confession. The form used required the magistrate to note whether the accused had any marks of injury and then to ask the person if he or she had been tortured and record the response. The magistrate must then ask the accused if the confession was voluntary or coerced. Only when the accused replied that it was voluntary could the confession be written down. If the reply indicated coercion, the confession was not admissible.

14. No guidelines existed on the circumstances in which detention in police custody, or remand, could be authorized; that shortcoming led to many deaths and incidents of torture. Furthermore, some provisions of section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure were unconstitutional and required amendment. After 15 days in police custody, detainees must be brought before a magistrate, who would verify that they were without physical injury. Magistrates were required to grant an accused person's request for a medical examination if they claimed to have suffered torture. Detained persons also underwent medical

examinations upon entry into prison. Police custody was an essential investigative tool that must not be abused.

15. Magistrates recorded statements and confessions in the language in which the accused was questioned, the language of the court or English. The record was shown to the accused or interpreted into a language that they understood, and they were able to expand or amend their answers. Magistrates must explain that the accused was not bound to make a confession and that any confession could be used as evidence against them. Confessions were only recorded if the magistrate believed that they were being made voluntarily, during court hours in a building ordinarily used as a courthouse. While recording a confession, the accused was left alone for a period of reflection. Women who alleged torture were examined by female doctors, and women detainees were searched only by female officers. Only female magistrates were permitted to record the statements of female and child victims of rape and sexual harassment.

16. There was zero tolerance of torture and criminal acts by law enforcement officials, who did not enjoy any form of immunity. In the Narayanganj murder case, 26 persons, including 16 members of the Rapid Action Battalion and the son-in-law of a cabinet minister, had been convicted of the murder of 7 men and sentenced to death.

17. To clear the backlog of court cases, the Government had embarked on a programme of extensions to court buildings, established a range of specialized courts and completed an audit of the justice system. The judiciary had been separated from executive control in 2007. Improvements to the rule of law had also enhanced the independence of the judiciary. An independent Judicial Service Commission had been established to recruit judicial officers, and judges received training through the Judicial Administration Training Institute and local and international partners. Bangladeshi judicial officers had travelled to Australia, China, India and Japan to receive training. The national Justice Coordination Committee and Judicial Strengthening Project had also assisted in reducing the backlog, with the latter increasing significantly the number of cases dealt with in a timely manner. The Government was also promoting alternative dispute resolution, having made the necessary amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure; in the first three months of 2018, almost 5,000 cases had been resolved in that way, thereby reducing the backlog and fulfilling the constitutional requirement to deal with cases in a timely manner.

18. The National Legal Aid Services Organization and District Legal Aid Committees provided access to justice for the vulnerable, and 28 April had been declared Legal Aid Day. Applications could be submitted at the legal aid offices recently opened in the lower courts, and steps had been taken to raise awareness of the system. More than 22,000 persons had received legal aid between January and March 2018.

19. The Government had appointed Surendra Kumar Sinha to the post of Chief Justice despite allegations of corruption in relation to his tenure as a judge of the High Court Division. He, along with four other judges, had ruled against a constitutional amendment that would have permitted Parliament to remove Supreme Court judges, by means of a more transparent mechanism than under the current system, where that power lay with the Supreme Judicial Council, comprising the Chief Justice and Supreme Court judges. None of the other judges involved had left the judiciary, and Mr. Sinha had not, in fact, been removed, but had resigned after five judges of the Appellate Division had refused to sit with him on the bench after finding the accusations of corruption against him to be well founded.

20. **Mr. Alam** (Bangladesh) said that under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance, anyone using the defence of “good faith” must prove that their actions were without criminal intent; it did not automatically absolve defendants of criminal liability. Training manuals for law enforcement officials reflected recent international developments, and training institutes would be encouraged to adhere to the provisions of the Istanbul Protocol. International partners provided assistance in improving the capacities of training institutes.

21. Although the Government promoted the gradual replacement of the death penalty by other forms of punishment, it had not taken any steps to abolish it. A death sentence must pass through several levels of safeguards before it was carried out, including confirmation

by the High Court Division; only a minority of death sentences were confirmed, and between 2013 and 2017 just 17 had been carried out.

22. The Government took the opinions and religious beliefs of the majority into account when addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues. Laws in that area had been inherited from the colonial legal system. Nevertheless, the Constitution provided for protection from torture for all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Charges had been brought against eight individuals in the case of the murders of activists Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy, and the trial was under way.

23. **Mr. Huq** (Bangladesh) said that all authorities, including law enforcement agencies, were committed to the safety and rights of minorities and adopted a zero-tolerance approach to violence against them. The Government's initiatives to ensure freedom of religion included the reinstatement of secularism in the country's Constitution, the Vested Property Return Act, the introduction of a secular education policy, the investigation of the violence against minority communities committed by members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party following the 2001 elections and prosecution of the perpetrators, and measures to ensure the equitable representation of minorities in key decision-making positions. Violence against minorities was sporadic and did not involve State agents.

24. The claims made by Priya Saha regarding the number of members of minority communities who had left the State party had been refuted even by the author of the report that she had cited. The charges of sedition brought against her had been dismissed because her actions had not constituted sedition as defined in the Penal Code. Furthermore, the Prime Minister had expressly prohibited the harassment of Ms. Saha and the bringing of charges against her, on any grounds. The Government would also ensure that she, her family and persons of all faiths could practise their religion without fear. An investigation into the alleged land grabs suffered by Ms. Saha and her family had been launched.

25. The Children Act of 2013, which was undergoing revision, provided for the punishment of violence against children, including abuse and child labour. Exploitation of a child by the person entrusted with his or her care was also a punishable offence. The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2013–2025 was focused on protection, prevention and rehabilitation services, legal arrangements and facilities and socioeconomic advancement. A free-of-charge helpline for children had been introduced, which had responded to more than 240,000 calls since 2015. Other facilities included one-stop crisis centres, a national trauma counselling centre, shelters that provided reintegration services to child victims of sexual exploitation, and safe houses to support children and women who were victims of crime. Two recent cases of child abuse had been investigated and prosecuted promptly, and the perpetrators punished.

26. His Government had pledged to eliminate child marriage by 2041. A special provision in the Children Marriage Restraint Act allowed girls to marry below the prescribed age of marriage, subject to a decision of the court and with the consent of their parents or guardian. The special provision had never been invoked, however.

27. The National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh had been established in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles) and the Government was investing the resources required to ensure its operation and independence. The Commission's funding and staff numbers had been substantially increased and its funds were paid directly to the Commission's account. The Government played no part in determining how the funds were spent or in recruitment. The Commission received complaints of human rights abuses, including torture, and could investigate allegations of torture following a complaint, or on its own initiative. Prison officials usually cooperated with the Commission during its visits to prisons. Isolated failures to cooperate were likely due to a communication problem. Diplomats were permitted to carry out consular visits to prisons.

28. His Government maintained a policy of zero tolerance of any form of violence against religious and ethnic minorities, and took legal action to bring to justice the perpetrators of such violence. Following violence at the Rangpur Sugar Mill, when officials and workers had attempted to evict persons from a tract of land, the local ethnic community

had lodged a case with the Gobindaganj police station and 25 persons had been arrested. The case was currently under investigation by the Police Bureau of Investigation.

29. A zero-tolerance policy was maintained with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh was a member of the circle of leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations and the United Nations voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse had been endorsed by his Government. Allegations against Bangladeshi peacekeepers were investigated jointly with the United Nations. Disciplinary action had been taken against the Bangladeshi officers serving in Haiti accused of sexual exploitation and abuse; one person had been dismissed, while the other had lodged an appeal against the disciplinary action imposed.

30. His Government had ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and was in the process of ratifying the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Trafficking in persons was prohibited by the Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act of 2012. From 2013 to 2017 more than 7,500 persons had been victims of trafficking, approximately 6,000 victims had been rescued and trafficking charges had been filed against 14,500 persons. The Bangladesh Coast Guard inspected vessels to prevent trafficking in persons and the Border Guard of Bangladesh had established border outposts in Cox's Bazar to prevent human trafficking by sea. In 2018, 502 persons had been trafficked, 355 of whom had been rehabilitated, while 1,310 traffickers had been arrested. Four trials had led to convictions, with the punishment of eight perpetrators. Brokers plotting to traffic Rohingya refugees had been arrested and individuals had been returned to their families. His Government was working with the United Nations and NGOs to develop a human trafficking awareness programme.

31. The current Government had never detained anyone under the Special Powers Act of 1974. There were no plans to repeal the Act because it could be used to address the adulteration of food, smuggling and counterfeiting.

32. Allegations of torture were initially investigated under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, but incidents found to have involved a higher degree of criminal intent were tried under criminal law, which provided for stricter punishment. The trial of the case involving Intiaz Hossain, for which the charge sheet had been submitted in 2015, had been postponed by order of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, but had later resumed and was ongoing in the Court of Sessions. The alleged sexual assault of the Marma sisters, referred to in para. 26 of [CAT/C/SR.1769](#), had been investigated by an inquiry team that had included a magistrate and superintendent of police; the team had found the allegation to be baseless. No evidence of rape had been uncovered by a medical board, independent investigations by military and civil authorities, or an inquiry by the National Human Rights Commission. The sisters and their family were being rehabilitated under police protection, by order of the High Court.

33. There were 140 medical doctor posts in prisons. The district civil surgeon assigned doctors at government medical institutions in his or her district to provide medical services in prisons on a roster basis, with one doctor assigned on a permanent basis. Those doctors also responded to emergency calls. The Ministry of Home Affairs had been instructed to ensure medical care for prisoners and was establishing a dedicated team for that purpose.

34. While the use of firearms during regular law enforcement operations was regulated by law and permitted only as a last resort, casualties could occur. Each incidence of the use of force or exchange of fire by the police was investigated in accordance with the law, including regulation 157 of the Police Regulations of Bengal. Where appropriate, law enforcement agents were subject to legal action before the courts, as in the case of the murder of seven persons in Narayanganj. The number of casualties of law enforcement operations had fallen over the years, although a disproportionate rise in numbers had been observed in 2018 due to an anti-drug operation.

35. With regard to the allegations of torture broadcast by Radio Sweden, the Rapid Action Battalion had been formed in 2004 to combat terrorist activity in a context of crisis.

Members of the Battalion were bound by the law and were accountable to the courts while performing their duties. No member of the Battalion had ever been acquitted of a proven allegation. While it was difficult to draw conclusions from the content of the radio programme, it was presumed that the person interviewed was not a member of the Rapid Action Battalion. If Radio Sweden would provide the rank, name and current work station of the interviewee, the individual would be brought to justice.

36. **Ms. Gaer** (Country Rapporteur) said that, while she welcomed the information provided by the State party, a number of her questions had not been answered in full. It was not clear whether article 35 (6) of the Constitution permitted the use of punishments that amounted to torture, like whipping and the use of fetters, or whether the State party was taking action to eliminate all punishments considered to amount to torture or ill-treatment. She asked whether the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act provided for the liability of officers in command for knowingly failing to prevent their subordinates from committing acts of torture or ill-treatment, and if so, whether the delegation was aware of any cases in which superior officers had been held accountable for the failure to act. More details should be provided on the punishment of members of the Rapid Action Battalion in connection with the killing of seven persons in Narayanganj. Information should be provided on the composition of the Internal Inquiry Cell of the Rapid Action Battalion, and whether the authors of complaints that the Cell had decided were false enjoyed the right to appeal that decision.

37. She would appreciate a list of the civil society organizations that were represented in the meeting room, and expressed concern at reports received by the Committee of widespread harassment of individuals who had criticized the Government, its performance or institutions. She asked the delegation to confirm that the persons and organizations who had shared information with the Committee to assist its review of the State party's initial report would suffer no reprisals or threats to their safety as a result, and that individuals whose cases had been mentioned by the Committee would similarly suffer no reprisals.

38. Given alternative information before the Committee attesting to disappearances, it was unclear how the delegation could state that there had been no such cases in the past 10 years. She asked whether the authorities recognized that Ekramul Haque had been in the unacknowledged custody of the Rapid Action Battalion at the time of his death; details should be provided of the investigation into his death. In the case of Sheikh Mokhlesur Rahman, she asked whether any measures were being taken to charge the police officers responsible for his disappearance. The delegation should comment on whether investigations into disappearances were independent, particularly when the case involved the Rapid Action Battalion, and describe efforts to ensure the independence of the judiciary.

39. It would be useful to know whether any civil lawsuits had been initiated alleging torture committed outside the State party's territory. The delegation should indicate whether it was made clear to the law enforcement authorities and bodies concerned that it was not appropriate to request exclusion from the scope of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, since the only explanation for that request was a desire to commit illegal acts. She wished to know whether the obligations of the State party under the Convention were considered by the Government to relate to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

40. **The Chair** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know whether the rights of detainees to have their relatives informed of their detention and to request a medical examination had been enshrined in law. He would appreciate replies to the questions he had asked at the previous meeting with the State party ([CAT/C/SR.1769](#)) concerning the implementation of fundamental legal safeguards in practice, whether the State party kept a national record of all detained persons and the outcome of the investigation into the use of force by police officers. He would welcome a response to his concerns that police oversight did not comply with international standards.

41. He would appreciate confirmation as to whether the State party intended to review the National Human Rights Commission Act of 2009 to bring the Commission into line

with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles). He wondered whether he was correct in his understanding that the Commission did not conduct regular preventive inspections of places of detention. If in fact it did, he wished to know how many such inspections had been carried out in recent years. While the Government's projects to improve prison conditions were commendable, it would be useful to have a timeline for bringing prison conditions into line with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) and other international standards. It would be helpful if the delegation could confirm whether autopsies and inquests were carried out in all cases of death in custody.

42. **Mr. Rodríguez-Pinzón** said that he would be grateful for responses to his questions regarding changes to the amount of compensation for torture victims, the possibility for victims to claim compensation through the civil courts after exoneration of the perpetrator by the criminal courts and the State party's intention, if any, to withdraw its reservation to article 14 of the Convention.

43. **Ms. Belmir** said that she wished to know who had the authority to appoint judicial officers and what the procedure was for doing so. She would be interested to hear what topics were covered by the training programmes for members of the judiciary. She was concerned about the ongoing torture and ill-treatment of detainees by police officers, which was tolerated and even defended by members of the Government.

44. **Mr. Hani** said that he had not received answers to his questions regarding psychiatric institutions, the detention of persons with intellectual disabilities, parole for prisoners serving life sentences, the signing of new extradition treaties and the non-refoulement of Rohingya refugees. He asked what percentage of the total prison population had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

45. **Ms. Gaer** said that she would welcome a response to her requests for information regarding the cases of Shahidul Alam, Parvez, Bashir Uddin and Michael Chakma. She would also appreciate answers to her questions on cooperation with the International Criminal Court and on the investigations carried out into the complaints of violence lodged by children. Since it was not clear whether the member of the Rapid Action Battalion who had made comments on Swedish national radio concerning techniques of torture and ill-treatment had come under investigation, she asked whether the Government was considering opening an independent inquiry into the performance of the Battalion or whether the Internal Inquiry Cell alone was competent to look into such matters.

The meeting was suspended at 12.25 p.m. and resumed at 12.35 p.m.

46. **Mr. Huq** (Bangladesh) said that enforced disappearances were not a frequent occurrence in Bangladesh and cases of possible abduction were often reported as enforced disappearance. Abduction was classified as a cognizable offence under the Code of Criminal Procedure, meaning that the police were required to open investigations into all reports. The Government remained committed to ensuring that all persons who had been reported missing were found. There had long been a tendency to label all cases involving missing persons as acts of enforced disappearance, with the clear intention of undermining the Government. In many instances, alleged victims had reappeared, as in the case of Hummam Quader Chowdhury.

47. Shahidul Alam had been arrested on 5 August 2018 for incitement to violence and his claims of torture in police custody had been found to be entirely false. By order of the court, he had been taken to hospital for a medical examination, where doctors had found no injuries or signs of torture. The international media had spoken directly to hospital staff to confirm the doctors' conclusions. Judicial inquiries had been conducted into allegations of extrajudicial killings and disappearance. The High Court Division of the Supreme Court had given orders for the Michael Chakma case to be expedited. In April 2019, a judicial inquiry ordered by the Court into the Palash Kumar Roy case had found that he had committed suicide. He had no specific information on the Parvez or Bashir Uddin cases. The Government was holding consultations with the relevant stakeholders with a view to enacting a law on the protection of victims and witnesses.

48. The Government was taking action to protect Rohingya people and, despite not being party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Bangladesh continued to provide shelter to displaced persons. There was no legal provision in place that justified incommunicado detention. A report by the former Chair of the National Human Rights Commission, which had claimed that torture was a frequent occurrence in police custody and pretrial detention, had not been confirmed and its claims were under investigation. The fact that the Commission had published such reports was a testament to its independence.

49. Information contained in registers of detainees was shared upon request by any citizen in accordance with the Right to Information Act. Mahmudur Rahman had not been detained illegally, as he had been convicted for contempt of court. He had also been sentenced to 3 years in prison in a separate case brought by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Psychological support services were not widely available in Bangladesh but his Government had made some progress in improving the provision of such services. His Government had made a commitment to introduce sign language interpretation in courts.

50. The Government did not interfere in judicial affairs in any way. In order to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, the salaries of judges had been increased to ensure that they did not face financial constraints in discharging their duties, and the Government was in the process of drafting legislation on the appointment of judges. The fines that were applicable in respect of certain crimes could be paid to victims of torture on request and the Government would consider increasing the amount of compensation awarded. The rural justice system had jurisdiction to try only petty offences that carried prison sentences of less than 6 months and their judgments were subject to appeal before the higher courts. Homeless persons were not held in detention centres and there were six shelters available for such persons, where they were provided with food and shelter.

51. There were no plans at present to withdraw the reservation to article 14 of the Convention; however, he would encourage the Government to look into the matter. Bangladesh had not accepted the recommendation made during the universal periodic review to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and his country was instead focusing on strengthening its national preventive mechanism.

52. The dialogue with the Committee had proved to be a fruitful experience and the Government would act on the Committee's recommendations. In a densely populated country with limited resources, public officials often discharged their duties under trying circumstances. The aberrant behaviour of a few individuals should not be allowed to undermine the integrity and reputation of the professionals who served in the country's public services. It was ironic that Bangladesh should attract more international scrutiny than other States, many of which were closing their borders to outsiders, in the light of its humanitarian decision to welcome over 1 million Rohingya refugees. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, his Government would not waver in fulfilling its commitment to peace and security, development and human rights.

53. **The Chair** said that he wished to remind the State party that it could provide any outstanding replies to the Committee in writing and that it could opt for the simplified reporting procedure. With a view to enhancing the constructive dialogue, the State party was invited to submit, in addition to a report within one year on urgent issues identified by the Committee for follow-up, an implementation plan for the remaining recommendations contained in the concluding observations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.