

PREFACE

“Human security, achieved through the establishment of law and order, enables people to exercise their choices safely and freely, and with the confidence that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow...Clear laws, enforced justly, transparently and efficiently, are necessary to create an enabling, predictable and secure living and working environment...This in turn requires: (a) that the laws are known, (b) that they are enforced in an equitable and timely manner; (c) that an independent and credible judiciary operates to resolve conflicts and make binding decisions; and (d) that laws can be revised if/when they cease to serve the purpose for which they were intended.”

UNDP’s 1996 Report on “Human Development in Bangladesh : A Pro-poor Agenda”

By the demanding standards of the above definition, Bangladesh today is weighed down by a significant level of **human insecurity**. Daily, the country’s numerous newspapers provide ample evidence of the disturbing crime situation and the troubling shortcomings of much legislation, the law enforcement apparatus, the court system and the prisons. However, there is a critical shortage of thorough and empirical studies that analyse these complex issues in a historical perspective and attempt to understand their deeper “structural” causes. It is UNDP’s hope that this report will serve in part to remedy this shortage, and that it will inspire others to pursue further empirical research on such fundamental issues.

In presenting this report to the wider public in Bangladesh, it is imperative for UNDP to stress the following salient points :

- Many of the facts and examples of human insecurity in the report are deeply disturbing and could easily, in the hands of irresponsible researchers, have turned into a scathing and one-sided indictment of particular political parties or groups in society. But the mature and professional approach of the authors lifts the report high above party-political polemics. The report shows -- e.g. by means of statistics going bck to the 1970s and in a few cases even to the 1930s -- that many of Bangladesh’s human insecurity problems go back a very long time and are the result of many idverse causes. It follows from this that anyone attempting to reduce Bangladesh’s deep-rooted human insecurity problems and the shortcomings of its criminal justice system to a party-political issue will be guilty of the gravest and most callous trivialisation of a highly complex phenomenon that deserves serious attention and serious remedies.

- It is an illusion to assume that the Government alone holds the key to the solution. Human insecurity is like a cancer -- no single group of people or factors have caused it, and it can only be effectively tackled, when all segments of society work closely together -- the Government, academia, political parties, civil society, local communities and the private sector. The report speaks eloquently to all these constituencies and offers them a wealth of constructive recommendations on how Bangladesh as a nation can move forward in its continuous search for justice and dignity for all.

The report was first produced in 1997-98 as a working document to guide UNDP's future involvement in the area of democratic governance in Bangladesh. It was subsequently expanded during the first half of 2002 as part of a broader assessment as to how UNDP could best fulfil the objective of "promoting respect for human rights" which featured explicitly as one of the areas to be addressed through UNDP's 2001-2005 assistance programme for Bangladesh.

UNDP is very pleased to be able to table this important report "in the court of public opinion" in Bangladesh. In so doing, we wish to thank especially all the experts who carried out the initial background research and gathered a wealth of previous unavailable primary data by means of surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and analyses of official records. Their names and designations are given honourable mention on the inside cover of the report and in Annex 1. Special thanks are also due to the team leader and coordinator for their additional work during the first half of 2002 in expanding the original manuscript by a final chapter reflecting recent changes in legislation, other new human security issues and some new and additional statistics covering the years since 1998.

In producing this report, the research team has been given extensive support by a number of key Government institutions, particularly the law enforcement authorities, as well as by numerous NGOs, donor agencies, educational institutions, and civil society representatives. We wish to thank them for the time and effort they invested in this and see their support as a clear indication that people from all walks of life welcome this report as a constructive contribution to their own ongoing endeavours to bring about increased human security in Bangladesh.

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