



Bangladesh

# MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

15 September, 2002

Human Security in Bangladesh

## UNDP report analyses barriers to human security and presents solutions

DHAKA: The UN Development Programme (UNDP) today released a report containing previously unpublished information to assist Government, law enforcement agencies, judiciary and civil society identify and implement urgently needed reforms to the criminal justice system.

“Bangladesh today is weighed down by a significant level of human insecurity and until now there has been a critical lack of studies that analyse these complex issues and attempt to understand their deeper structural causes,” UNDP Representative Jorgen Lissner said.

The Report, entitled *‘Human Security in Bangladesh: In Search of Justice and Dignity’*, was compiled by a group of leading Bangladeshi experts over a period of several years and examines the nation’s legislation, law enforcement apparatus, court system and prisons. One of the key findings reveals that in Bangladesh – where more than 77.8 percent of the population earns less than two dollars per day – many laws and practices of the criminal justice system disadvantage the poor. In addition, the cost of going to court, added to frequent delays and lack of access to legal aid, results in most people simply being “priced out of the justice system”.

As a result, people prefer the non-formal courts and an estimated 60 to 70 percent of local disputes are resolved through the shalish or traditional courts. The Report recommends numerous measures including the setting of time limits to speed up trials, improved training for judicial officials and easier access to legal aid.

The poor were also shown at a disadvantage when dealing with police who, according to the Report, were most responsive to influential members of the community. On the whole, the effectiveness of the police was hindered by lack of training, large numbers of false cases, insufficient monitoring and evaluation, poor motivation, budgetary constraints and understaffing. In response the Report recommends improved monitoring of the police services, training that is more orientated towards the poor and disadvantaged, also a focus on community policing.

Another key finding reveals that despite constitutional guarantees and legislative safeguards, violence against women in Bangladesh, which includes acid throwing, murder, rape and trafficking, is a serious problem. A number of recommendations were made to ensure that the issue receives adequate attention, including, the setting up of a help line, increasing the number of women officials and launching a systematic campaign to raise awareness about violence against women.

Awareness among the general population of laws and rights related to human security overall was low, according to the Report. For example, 40 percent of the people surveyed thought that police could torture detainees and 10 percent of interviewees thought that police could hold a person in custody for as long as they wished. A national awareness campaign was recommended to dispel current myths.

The Report also calls for a review of some legislation and practices including the Special Powers Act, arrest without warrant and preventive detention, as they are often misused. Data in the Report shows that between Independence and 1995, almost 90 percent of preventive detention cases to come before the High Court were made either 'illegally', or without any 'lawful authority'.

"Human insecurity is like a cancer – no single group of people or causes can be blamed for it, and it can only be tackled by all segments of society working closely together – the Government, academia, political parties, civil society, local communities and the private sector," the UNDP Representative, Jorgen Lissner said.

ENDS.....

*Word Count (approx): 560*

**About this Report:** This report was commissioned by UNDP and prepared by an eminent team of Bangladeshi experts. It was initially produced in 1998-99 as an in-house document to guide UNDP's future involvement in the area of democratic Governance in Bangladesh. Recently it was updated and expanded so that the findings and recommendations could be shared publicly.

**About UNDP:** UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own development solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop their local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

*For further information please contact, Ms. Lisa Hiller, UNDP Communications Officer via email: [lisa.hiller@undp.org](mailto:lisa.hiller@undp.org), ph: 811 8600, ext. 2043, mob: 011812042, or, Mr. Binoy Khisha, UNDP Communications Assistant via email: [binoy.khisha@undp.org](mailto:binoy.khisha@undp.org), ph: 8118600, ext. 2431.*