

PUBLIC

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Health concern

BANGLADESH

Sigma Huda (f)

A UN special rapporteur on people-trafficking, Sigma Huda, was arrested on 5 July in connection with a case of alleged extortion. She reportedly has potentially life-threatening heart and kidney conditions, and is not getting adequate treatment in prison.

Sigma Huda is a prominent lawyer, head of the human rights group Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, and the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children.

According to a senior consultant in cardiology, she is suffering from coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus and a chronic renal (kidney) failure. It is also known that Sigma Huda has diabetes, for which she is receiving long-term treatment.

She was under treatment and observation when she was taken into custody. She was taken to court in an ambulance, and to the courtroom on a stretcher, to hear the charges against her. She was then sent to jail custody on 5 July.

Her family are concerned that she is in poor health and at risk of developing further medical complications due to lack of specialist medical attention. She has not even been transferred to the jail hospital, and the prison authorities have ignored her family's urgent requests to visit her.

There are serious concerns that her health may deteriorate further if she does not receive adequate medical attention. According to a report from a senior consultant in cardiology, who treated Sigma Huda before her arrest: "It may be stressed that her conditions will deteriorate significantly and may be life-threatening if she is not kept under constant medical observation and treatment at a specialised cardiac care unit."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A state of emergency was declared in Bangladesh on 11 January 2007 under which the government has initiated action to control criminal activity and address corruption. According to local newspaper reports, over 100,000 people accused of threatening law and order through either involvement in criminal activity or possession of illegal firearms, or corruption, have been arrested. Amnesty International has received allegations of torture or ill-treatment following such arrests. The detainees include over 150 politicians, businessmen and others accused of involvement in extortion and other acts of corruption. According to reports in the Bangladeshi media, the authorities have admitted that some of the detainees are in poor health.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern that Sigma Huda is not receiving the urgent medical treatment she needs;
- urging the authorities to provide her with adequate, specialist medical treatment for her conditions;
- urging the authorities to allow her visits by her family.

APPEALS TO:

Equivalent to prime minister, in caretaker government

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed

Chief Adviser

Office of the Chief Adviser

Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 8113243

Email: info@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Chief Adviser

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 August 2007.