

## **Dr. Richard L. Benkin**

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November 17, 2020

The Honorable Earl R. Miller  
Ambassador of the United States of America to the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Madani Avenue  
Baridhara, Dhaka -1212, Bangladesh

### **RE: BEATING OF HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY RABINDRA GHOSH**

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals—scholars, religious and secular leaders, human rights advocates, and practitioners—who respectfully ask you to speak out for Rabindra Ghosh, founder of Bangladesh Minority Watch, a prominent human rights attorney, and major source of first-hand evidence of government tolerated or sponsored human rights abuses.

On October 16, 2020, Ghosh and two other human rights attorneys were brutally attacked in the Paragram Police Station in Nabobganj. They were in Nabobganj at the request of a local Hindu woman who has faced ongoing crimes from kidnapping and physical attacks to seizure of her home and attempts at forced conversion. Complicit in these crimes, police and have refused to stop them. Thus after her son was abducted by police and beaten in their custody, she asked Ghosh for legal representation and to verify her allegations, which he did. Ghosh and the others then went to the local police station, having informed police earlier of their presence and that Ghosh had been retained as the victim's counsel.

On arriving at the station at about 3:45PM, they noticed several men intermixed with police, armed with lathis: long, heavy bamboo sticks; favored weapons in police charges and in attacks on minorities. When Ghosh addressed the ranking officer present, the armed men attacked the attorneys, vandalized their vehicle: and seized their mobile phones, which had records of local and other contacts, personal, and professional data, placing everyone identified there in further danger. Later, Ghosh filed a "First Information Report" to start a case, but police refused to act on it. Media and human rights groups also confirmed the attack.

This was not the first attack on Ghosh and likely not the last. Some examples:

- July 1, 2002: Attorneys for Bangladesh's ruling party assaulted Ghosh and seized his property seized at a Bar Association meeting, warning him to stop his human rights work or face a capital treason charge. Lawyers Rights Watch Canada asked the Bangladeshi government "to demonstrate commitment to implementing the

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- laws of Bangladesh,” and on July 23, Amnesty International issued an “urgent appeal” after the Bangladeshi government took no action in this case.
- August 5, 2005: Per Human Rights Watch, Ghosh and another rights activist were “attacked in public” by members of Bangladesh’s ruling party after investigating the beating of an Ahmadiyya Muslim.
  - April 29, 2012: Ghosh visited his elderly mother in Chittagong who was attacked and blocked from initiating a case. The same attackers then beat Ghosh who alerted nearby police. They arrived three and a half hours later, then claimed they could do nothing because the attackers fled.
  - November 24, 2012: Defense counsel Ghosh and an associate were reviewing human rights cases with Perojpur Police Superintendent Akhtaruzzaman, when Akhtaruzzaman called in officers who dragged the men into separate rooms and brutalized them. They were treated at Perojpur Sadar Hospital where Ghosh’s associate remained in serious condition.
  - July 27, 2013: Ghosh and a colleague were on a train from Khulna where they had taken up the case of a poor Hindu whose land was illegally seized and occupied. Attackers released a poisonous substance in the air, and they were rushed to the local hospital. Doctors revived Ghosh after 28 hours of unconsciousness but could not revive his associate who was transferred to Rajshahi Medical College for more intensive treatment.
  - November 25, 2013: While acting as counsel for 12 Hindus falsely accused of murder, Ghosh was beaten inside the Gopalganj District Court, in the presence of the magistrate. Swiss-based International Commission of Jurists protested the attack, noting “Lawyers play a crucial role in ensuring that people whose rights have been violated can demand their right to a remedy. When lawyers themselves become victims simply for carrying out their work, it signals a serious problem for the legal system.”
  - December 29, 2015: Ghosh was attacked in the Bakergonj police station while investigating a religiously motivated sexual assault and other attacks on Hindus. When associates photographed the Officer-in-Charge, he violently seized the camera and had Ghosh beaten.
  - July 15, 2016: Police from Nabobganj where Ghosh was recently attacked beat him brutally during a fact finding mission undertaken at the request of local Dalits, who claimed ongoing victimization and police siding with the perpetrators.
  - March 25, 2018: Fifty to 60 attackers destroyed Ghosh’s home under construction. He was away on legal business, so his wife filed a case naming

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specific criminals. Police later claimed to arrest “one attacker” and took no further action on the case. Ghosh named two government cabinet ministers behind the attack.

All cases were substantiated by third parties, many carried by media, and in most cases, Ghosh made government cabinet ministers aware of the incidents, but they never prosecuted the crimes.

Attacks on human rights activists and lawyers in Bangladesh continue with impunity. Awami League control has not brought hoped for rule of law or an end to the ethnic cleansing of minorities. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina refuses to allow any discussion of these matters, even according to members of her own party. Her critics and their families face violent reprisals. Human rights and religious freedom activists and attorneys are unable to operate, despite paper guarantees that exist only in their abrogation. The World Justice Project ranks Bangladesh 115 out of 128 countries in adherence to the rule of law, lower than Iran and Myanmar among others.

Without international support for human rights in Bangladesh, the situation for religious minorities will continue to deteriorate, and the next attack on Rabindra Ghosh could be fatal. Bangladesh considers itself an ally of the United States while violating our cherished values and its own Constitution.

Considering that Bangladesh’s economy is dependent on American citizens, the top customer for Bangladeshi exports and the top funders of UN peacekeeping; we ask that the United States government forcefully advocate for the immediate protection of Rabindra Ghosh and other human rights activists and attorneys. No government can protect all its citizens against all attacks, but they can protect them against attacks by the government or in which governments are complicit. The Bangladeshi government must provide equal protection under the law for all its citizens and punish according to law, those police and other officials who engaged in or allowed these attacks on Rabindra Ghosh and other attorneys and activists for religious freedom. Failure to do so would give the Bangladeshi government license to proceed with its attack on religious freedom and its advocates.

Cc: The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State  
The Honorable Jim Risch, Chair Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
The Honorable Bob Menendez, Ranking Member Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
The Honorable Eliot Engel, Chair House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
The Honorable Michael McCaul, Ranking Member House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Signed,

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