



The National Human Rights Commission Bill, 2026: A Setback for Human Rights Protection and Institutional Independence in Bangladesh

A Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Association for the Prevention of Torture, Capital Punishment Justice Project, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights, Odhikar, Omega Research Foundation, Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center, REDRESS and World Organisation Against Torture on the draft NHRC Bill of Bangladesh

Bangkok/ Dhaka/ Geneva/ Johannesburg/ Kuala Lumpur/ London/ Manchester/ Manila/ Melbourne/ New York/ Paris/ Washington, D.C.; 22 June 2026: We, the undersigned organizations, strongly urge the Government of Bangladesh to revise the proposed National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Bill, 2026 to ensure it adheres to international standards and institutionalizes a robust and independent Commission. The NHRC Bill represents a worrying regression from the protections and safeguards contained in the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance, 2025, which the government scrapped in April 2026, bringing an end to the newly revitalized Commission. Rather than strengthening the independence, effectiveness, and credibility of the Commission, the proposed bill weakens the institution's mandate from the 2025 ordinance, limits its ability to investigate serious human rights violations, and expands executive influence over its functioning.

At this critical time, when Bangladesh requires stronger oversight mechanisms to end entrenched practices of enforced disappearances, torture, custodial deaths, extrajudicial killings, restrictions on civic space, and attacks on human rights defenders, the proposed bill moves in the opposite direction. If enacted in its current form, it risks rendering the Commission a largely symbolic body with limited authority and little capacity to hold state institutions accountable.

Undermining the Independence of the Commission

The Paris Principles—the internationally recognized standards governing National Human Rights Institutions—require that such institutions be independent in law and in practice. However, the proposed bill weakens the Commission's independence at multiple levels.

The structure of the selection committee, which would be dominated by government officials, significantly increases political influence over appointments. The inclusion of independent figures in the selection committee under the 2025 ordinance, including representatives of the media and ethnic minority communities, has been removed, while senior government officials, including the ministers of law and home affairs, have been incorporated into the appointment process. This creates a serious conflict of interest, as government representatives would play a central role in selecting commissioners responsible for investigating government conduct.

The bill also removes key safeguards from the 2025 ordinance that protected the Commission from executive interference. The absence of an explicit prohibition on ministerial control, the transfer of regulatory authority to the government, and the removal of constitutional protections relating to commissioners' remuneration place the institution under direct executive influence. An institution dependent on the government for its budget, operational procedures, and internal regulations cannot effectively serve as an independent watchdog.

Shielding Security Forces from Accountability

A particularly alarming aspect of the bill is its treatment of complaints involving law enforcement and security agencies. In Bangladesh, many of the most serious human rights violations reported over the past decades—including enforced disappearances, torture, custodial deaths, and extrajudicial killings—have involved allegations against members of security forces. Yet the proposed Bill establishes a procedure under which these institutions would effectively investigate themselves.

Instead of empowering the Commission to conduct independent investigations, the bill requires the NHRC to rely on reports prepared by “the chief of the force concerned” accused of committing violations or reports submitted by the government. The Commission would have no meaningful authority to compel testimony, inspect premises, seize documents, or independently verify facts in such cases.

This framework fundamentally undermines accountability and violates the core principles of impartial investigation. Victims and their families would be deprived of an independent forum capable of examining allegations against powerful state actors. The result would enable institutionalized impunity for the very violations that most urgently require independent scrutiny.

Erosion of Representation and Pluralism

The bill further weakens safeguards designed to ensure pluralistic representation within the Commission.

Mandatory provisions in the 2025 ordinance, requiring representation among commissioners of women and members of ethnic or disadvantaged communities, have been replaced by discretionary language. As a consequence, there is no longer any guarantee that the Commission will reflect the diversity of Bangladeshi society or adequately represent communities that are often most vulnerable to human rights violations.

The removal of independent representatives from the appointment process, and the dilution of representation requirements, risk creating a Commission that is less inclusive, less representative, and less responsive to the concerns of marginalized populations.

Narrowing the Human Rights Mandate

A national human rights institution is not merely a complaint-handling body. Under the Paris Principles, it must actively promote and protect human rights through research, education, monitoring, policy engagement, and cooperation with civil society. The proposed bill substantially narrows the Commission’s mandate by eliminating numerous functions previously assigned to the NHRC. Among the functions removed or weakened are:

- Protection of human rights defenders from harassment;
- Monitoring the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities;
- Engagement with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations;
- Advising the Government on international human rights treaties;
- Reviewing draft legislation for compatibility with international human rights obligations;
- Public awareness, dissemination, and human rights education initiatives.

The cumulative effect is a transformation of the NHRC from a broad-based human rights institution into a quasi-judicial complaint-resolution mechanism with a significantly reduced role in promoting and protecting human rights.

Consequences for Bangladesh’s International Standing

The proposed bill raises serious concerns regarding Bangladesh’s compliance with the Paris Principles, which form the basis for accreditation by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). Compliance with these principles is essential for obtaining and maintaining “A Status” accreditation, which enables meaningful participation in international human rights mechanisms.

A Commission lacking independence, investigative authority, pluralism, and a broad human rights mandate is unlikely to satisfy international accreditation standards. Enactment of the Bill in its current form would therefore undermine Bangladesh’s credibility and commitment to strengthening democratic institutions and protecting human rights.

Call for Reform

The Government should reconsider the proposed NHRC Bill, 2026 and, following meaningful and inclusive public consultations, ensure that any new legislation strengthens rather than weakens the Commission relative to the 2025 ordinance. A credible National Human Rights Commission must be able to investigate all state actors, protect vulnerable communities, and act independently of political influence. The proposed NHRC Bill, 2026 fails to meet these standards. Unless substantially amended, it risks creating an institution that retains the appearance of a human rights commission while lacking the powers and independence necessary to fulfil its purpose. The government of Bangladesh should take steps to ensure the Bill:

- Restores safeguards guaranteeing the Commission’s operational, regulatory, and financial independence;
- Establishes an independent investigative mechanism with authority over all alleged perpetrators, including members of security forces;
- Ensures meaningful representation of women, ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities;
- Reinstates the Commission’s mandate to protect human rights defenders and engage with civil society;
- Restores the Commission’s role in legislative review, treaty engagement, monitoring, education, and awareness-raising;
- Aligns all provisions with the Paris Principles and international best practices governing national human rights institutions.

Signed by:

Amnesty International
Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP)
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Human Rights Watch
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Omega Research Foundation
Odhikar
Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center
REDRESS
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