



Home Office

# **Country Information and Guidance**

## **Bangladesh: Minority religious groups**

**Version 1.0**

**March 2016**

# Preface

This document provides country of origin information (COI) and guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

## Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, [Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please [e-mail us](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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# Guidance

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by either the state authorities or non state agents, on account of the person's religious affiliation or belief.
- 1.1.2 For the purposes of this guidance, 'minority religious group' means Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and the Ahmadiyya.

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## 2. Consideration of Issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### 2.2 Assessment of risk: treatment by the state

- 2.2.1 Bangladesh is a secular, pluralistic parliamentary democracy; the constitution and other laws protect religious freedom and ensure equal status and equal rights in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions. This is generally respected by the government and there is no indication that the state actively engages in persecuting people on account of their religion. However, political parties do use religiously divisive language and, on occasion, act in ways that exacerbate rather than diminish religious and communal tensions. Violent assaults on religious minority communities are often not investigated or prosecuted (see [Legal position](#)). See also [Avenues of redress and protection](#).

### 2.3 Assessment of risk: Societal treatment

- 2.3.1 Instances of societal discrimination, harassment, intimidation and occasional violence against religious minority communities persist although many government and civil society leaders claim these acts have political or economic motivations and should not be attributed wholly to religious beliefs or affiliations (see [Legal position](#)).
- 2.3.2 Persons entering into inter-religious marriages may be subject to discrimination, social exclusion, or family or communal violence.

- 2.3.3 Some people – for instance, converts, agnostics, atheists and others – may face further difficulty and discrimination as a result of not being adequately catered for under the system of religion-based personal status laws (see [Interfaith marriages](#)).
- 2.3.4 There are reports of incidences of societal abuse, intimidation, harassment and discrimination, attacks on sites of worship and communal violence on account of religious affiliation, sometimes resulting in deaths, injury, rape and forced displacement, and alleged forced conversion to Islam (see [Religiously motivated violence and discrimination](#), and [Religious conversion](#)). However, religious minorities are to be found throughout the country and the evidence does not support a finding that in general there is a real risk of persecution, serious harm, or other breach of fundamental human rights to members of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Ahmadiyya minorities. However, each case must be assessed on its individual merits.
- 2.3.5 For further information and guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 Whilst there is a functioning criminal justice system, the effectiveness and conduct of the police varies (see Rule of law and the judiciary in the [Country Information and Guidance Bangladesh: Background, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)).
- 2.4.2 In some instances local police and enforcement agencies have failed to effectively protect religious minorities from communal violence. Whilst legal protections for religious freedom are generally enforced, prosecutions are brought for violations of religious freedom, and legal protections exist to address discrimination or persecution by private individuals, authorities implemented some restrictive laws and did not always efficiently or effectively prosecute those who attacked religious minorities (see [Avenues of redress and protection](#)).
- 2.4.3 Effective state protection is in general available for members of religious minority groups. However decision makers must assess whether effective protection is available in relation to the particular circumstances and profile of the person. Any past persecution and past lack of effective protection may indicate that effective protection would not be available in the future for that individual in that particular locality.
- 2.4.4 For further information and guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, except for the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) and Cox's Bazar, and these rights are generally respected in practice. Although there were no special controls with regards to the movement of women, their ability to move freely is often

restricted for cultural reasons (see [Country Information and Guidance Bangladesh: Background, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)).

- 2.5.2 Relocation to another area of Bangladesh is likely to be viable depending on the nature of the threat from non state agents and the individual circumstances of the person, as long as it would not be unduly harsh to expect them to do so.
- 2.5.3 For further information on considering internal relocation and the factors to be taken into account, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.6.2 For further information on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#).

## 3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 In general religious minorities are able to practise their faith freely, attend places of worship and participate in religious activities.
- 3.1.2 The state does not appear to engage in, or sanction a policy of persecution in regard to religious minorities, although individuals affiliated with political parties, ruling and opposition alike, sometimes instigated violence against members of religious minorities for political purposes.
- 3.1.3 There have been instances of societal abuse, intimidation, harassment, discrimination, attacks on individuals, their shops, sites of worship and communal violence, sometimes resulting in deaths, injury, rape, forced displacement, against religious minorities, and alleged forced conversions which may amount to persecution in individual cases, but this is not at a level to pose a general risk of persecution.
- 3.1.4 Persons entering into inter-religious marriages may be subject to discrimination, social exclusion or family or communal violence, including honour crimes.
- 3.1.5 Effective protection is generally provided by the authorities. However, this may be limited due to a poorly resourced, overburdened, inefficient police force and endemic corruption. Some members of the security forces reportedly commit serious abuses against religious minorities, with impunity.
- 3.1.6 Internal relocation to another area of Bangladesh is likely to be an option, but will depend on the nature and origin of the threat as well as the personal circumstances of the person, and providing that it would not be unduly harsh to expect them to do so.

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## 4. Demography

4.1.1 A July 2015 estimate put the total population of Bangladesh at 168,957,745.<sup>1</sup>

4.1.2 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report 2014 published on the 14 October 2014 (USSD IRF 2014 report), noted that:

'According to the 2011 census, Sunni Muslims constitute 90 percent and Hindus make up 9.5 percent of the total population (about 95 percent of the religious minority population). The remainder of the population is predominantly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. There also are small numbers of Shia Muslims, Bahais, animists, and Ahmadiyya Muslims. Estimates vary from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents in each group.'<sup>2</sup>

4.1.3 The USSD IRF 2014 report went on to note that;

'Ethnic and religious minority groups often overlap, and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and northern districts. Buddhists are predominantly found among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the CHT. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians live in communities across the country, with relatively high concentrations in Barisal City, Gournadi in Barisal district, Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara and Christianpara in Dhaka, Nagori in Gazipur, and Khulna City.

'The largest noncitizen population, the Rohingya, practices Islam. There are approximately 32,000 registered Rohingya refugees from Burma and between 200,000 and 500,000 unregistered Rohingya from Burma practicing Islam in the southeast around Cox's Bazar.'<sup>3</sup>

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## 5. Legal position

### 5.1 Constitution

5.1.1 According to the USSD IRF 2014 report, published 14 October 2015, the Bangladesh constitution designates Islam as the state religion, but states that the nation is a secular state and that it "shall ensure equal status and equal rights in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Factbook, Bangladesh, updated 28 October 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>, (People and society), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>2</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section 1), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>3</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section 1), Date accessed 04 November 2015



religions.” However, government officials, including police, were sometimes slow to protect individuals, including members of minority religious groups, from violence and often reluctant to investigate violent incidents.

‘Government officials stated that resource and capacity constraints sometimes limited their ability to take proactive efforts to extend greater religious freedom protections or to counter societal actors. [...] According to human rights organizations, violence against members of minority religious groups often included additional factors and could not be attributed solely to religious affiliation. According to religious minority leaders, individuals affiliated with political parties, ruling and opposition alike, sometimes instigated violence against members of religious minorities for political purposes.’<sup>4</sup>

5.1.2 Irin news noted in a report dated 31 January 2014 that:

‘Although the Bangladesh constitution gives every citizen equal treatment before the law and its protection under [Article 27](#), and the country is also party to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which ensures freedom of religion, violent assaults on religious minority communities are often not investigated or prosecuted.’<sup>5</sup>

## 5.2 Legislation

5.2.1 The US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report 2014, published 14 October 2015, noted that:

‘According to the constitution, “the state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.” The constitution also provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate all religions, subject to law, public order, and morality. While Islam is the state religion, the constitution states that the country is a secular one, and religious communities or denominations have the right to establish, maintain, and manage their religious institutions. [...] Under the penal code, statements or acts made with a “deliberate and malicious” intent to insult religious sentiments are subject to fines or up to two years in prison.’<sup>6</sup>

5.2.2 The same report continued ‘Islamic law may play a role in civil matters pertaining to the Muslim community. [...] There is no formal implementation of Islamic law, however, and it may not be imposed on non-Muslims.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Executive summary), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>5</sup> IRIN News, Minorities targeted in Bangladesh political violence, 31 January 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99565/minorities-targeted-in-bangladesh-political-violence>, Date accessed 31 January 2016

<sup>6</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>7</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 29 January 2016



### 5.3 Family law

#### 5.3.1 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report 2014, published 14 October 2015, continued:

'Family law has separate provisions for Muslims, Hindus and Christians. Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differ depending on the religious beliefs of the people involved. Muslim and Hindu family laws are codified in the legal system.'<sup>8</sup>

#### 5.3.2 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its Preliminary findings of a Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 09 September 2015, further noted that:

'Whereas most aspects of the law in Bangladesh are secular, personal status issues – such as marriage, family life, divorce, custody of children, maintenance, inheritance etc. – remain governed by religious laws. Depending on the religious backgrounds of the concerned individuals, provisions of Islamic law, Hindu law or Canon law etc. apply. The Buddhists do not have their own personal status law in Bangladesh, but fall under the Hindu law. Projects supported by the Government to design a specific personal status law for the Buddhist community so far seem to have failed. The Baha'is reported that they apply their own family laws, which are recognized by the Government.'<sup>9</sup>

#### 5.3.3 Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a report, "Will I Get My Dues ... Before I Die?", September 2012, noted that:

'Since its independence in 1971, the bulk of Bangladesh's laws are applicable to all citizens without discrimination based on sex or religious belief, with one major anomaly: its personal laws. Some reforms, especially laws against domestic violence and acid attacks, have addressed family issues and apply across the religious spectrum. But personal laws on marriage, separation, and divorce, some dating to the 19th century, have remained largely frozen in time. [...]

'All three sets of personal laws [Muslims, Hindus, and Christians] discriminate against women with respect to marriage, divorce, separation, and maintenance, as explained below. They also fail to recognize marital property and its division on an equal basis after divorce or upon separation.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>9</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Will I Get My Dues ... Before I Die?" Harm to Women from Bangladesh's Discriminatory Laws on Marriage, Separation, and Divorce, September 2012,

- 5.3.4 A report by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, published on 9 October 2013, noted that:

‘The Director of Research Initiatives Bangladesh noted that Hindu personal laws do not grant women a right to inheritance, so Manipuri women "will face problems in having a good resource base independently". Other sources corroborate that Hindu personal laws in Bangladesh discriminate against women, and many women who separate face poverty due to a lack of legal recourse. [...]

‘The Professor at BRAC University said, "Hindu Manipuri women are triple minorities - religion, ethnicity and gender all make them incredibly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation". She expressed certainty that "accessing housing, employment or services from the police will be enormously, triply difficult for a Hindu Manipuri woman"'.<sup>11</sup>

- 5.3.5 The requirements of minority religious observance is catered for within the law. For example the USSD IRF 2014 report, published 14 October 2015, noted that while:

‘Religious studies are compulsory and part of the curriculum in all government schools. Students attend classes in which their own religious beliefs are taught. Schools with few students from minority religious groups are generally allowed to make arrangements with local churches or temples to hold religious studies classes outside of school hours [and] the jail code makes allowances for the observance of religious festivals by prisoners, including access to extra food for feast days or permission for religious fasting.’<sup>12</sup>

## 5.4 Religious conversion

- 5.4.1 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its Preliminary findings of a Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 09 September 2015, stated that:

‘One particularly atrocious crime is the abduction of people, mostly girls, with the purpose of forcing them to convert to another religion, while at the same time forcing them into an unwanted marriage, potentially even ‘marrying’ them with their abductor. In addition to other elements of a brutal violation of human dignity, these crimes amount to rape or similar cruel abuses. Such incidents linger long in the memory of the affect families and communities

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<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/17/will-i-get-my-dues-i-die/harm-women-bangladeshs-discriminatory-laws-marriage> , Date accessed 29 January 2016

<sup>11</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Bangladesh: Situation and treatment of Hindu Manipuri ethnic minority, including women; ability of women, particularly Manipuri women, to relocate and access housing and employment within Bangladesh (2006-October 2013), 9 October 2013, BGD104622.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/542a83614.html>, Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>12</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 04 November 2015

instilling in them yet another dimension of fear that they will in the long run lose out in the country.’<sup>13</sup>

5.4.2 In evidence presented to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Canadian Parliament, dated 24 February 2015, Mr. Kirit Sinha Roy (President, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council stated that:

‘Finally, I would like to inform you about the unique problem of abduction and rape, leading to forced conversions and forced marriages. Minority women and girls are the most vulnerable of all because they enjoy greater freedom of movement. Sexual assault and rape are still considered very shameful in South Asia among all communities, and victims get little comfort by going to the police. The police are corrupt and untrustworthy and likely to mistreat the victim.

‘Abductions of women and underage teens often end in forced conversions and marriages. There are no specific laws banning forced marriages.

‘Abductions are usually not taken seriously by the local police. There are often notices in the vernacular press saying, “I AB of XY and daughter of CD have converted from Hinduism to Islam. My new name is EF. I am now the wife of GH.” This is a sure sign that this is a case of forced conversion and marriage. Unfortunately, there are no statistics about forced conversions and marriages.’<sup>14</sup>

5.4.3 The OHCHR report of 09 September 2015 continued:

‘Religious conversions are generally rare and, if occurring, mostly take place in the context of interreligious marriages. However, conversions have also occurred outside interreligious marriages, in particular from Buddhism to Christianity or from various religions to Islam. Occasionally Muslims have also converted to Christianity or Baha’ism. Within the indigenous people of the Mro, who traditionally practise Buddhists, some tens of thousands turned to a newly founded religion named ‘Krama’.

‘Those having converted to another religion – including sometimes even their offspring after generations – typically face social ostracism in their social environment based on the ascription that the conversion had allegedly not been genuine and instead been motivated by the expectation of material benefits or other non-religious incentives. Some converts actually had to go into hiding or have concealed their newly adopted faith for fear of social stigmatization.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>14</sup> Parliament of Canada, Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 24 February 24, 2015, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=7854627&Language=E&Mode=1>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>15</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015,

5.4.4 UCA News, an Asian Catholic News Service, reported on 5 February 2015 that:

On November 9 last year [2014], the pastors were arrested while holding a secret mass conversion. “They attempted to convert a group of 40 Muslim villagers secretly and it made other villagers angry,” said Mahfuzur Rahman, officer in-charge at Banbhasa police station in Lalmonirhat district. Police say unless there is violence over conversions there is nothing to worry about. [...] Sayedul Islam, imam of a local mosque, said area Muslims have no problem with conversion as it is almost always temporary. “We have seen for years that most Muslims convert back to Islam soon after. Those who don’t come back we declare them ‘outcast’ from society, but their number is very few,” he said.<sup>16</sup>

5.4.5 There are instances of forced conversion of religious minorities to Islam, mainly Hindu but also Christian and others. The USSD IRF 2014 report for example noted that:

‘Local inhabitants reported that in May a group of Muslim men in Lalmonirhat abducted, forcibly converted, illegally married, and raped a 12-year-old Hindu girl. A Hindu community leader stated police refused to investigate the incident and pressured the victim’s family to drop the case. He stated another girl was abducted from her village in a similar manner in April. A journalist said the girl was being held by her abductors in Dhaka, but police refused to intervene.’<sup>17</sup>

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## 5.5 Inter-faith marriages

5.5.1 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its Preliminary findings of a Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 09 September 2015, further noted that:

‘[...] Even though the structure is to a certain degree pluralistic in acknowledgment of diverse religious-normative traditions, the system does not easily, if at all, accommodate certain constellations of interreligious partnership. Moreover, some people – for instance, converts, agnostics, atheists and others – may face even greater difficulties to fit into the limited options provided by a religion-based structure of personal status laws.’<sup>18</sup>

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<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>16</sup> UCA News, Christian proselytizing raises tensions in Bangladesh, 5 February 2015, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-proselytizing-raises-tensions-in-bangladesh/72930>, Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>17</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>18</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 30 January 2016

5.5.2 An Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal, Bangladesh, enquiry, dated 2008, discussed the situation in general terms thus:

‘There is no legal barrier to inter-religious marriages, and such marriages are reportedly becoming more common in the larger cities of Bangladesh. However, couples in inter-religious marriages still experience problems, ranging from family pressure to physical attacks. The sources suggest that the more extreme instances of violence occur in rural areas. Inter-religious marriages are reportedly recognised under the Special Marriages Act of 1872. Information indicates that a non-Muslim woman wishing to marry a Muslim man is required to convert to Islam. However, if she refused to convert to Islam, and the family accepted this decision, the marriage may be reportedly solemnised under the Special Marriages Act. [...]. If a Muslim boy marries a Christian or Jewish girl conversion is essential. If they are not converted, neither the family members, nor the society nor even the civil court accept this marriage. As a result the couples concerned face immeasurable harassment and there are certain cases where they are kidnapped and killed.’<sup>19</sup>

5.5.3 The OHCHR report of 09 September 2015 noted that:

‘Interreligious marriages, although slowly becoming more popular in urban areas, so far have been very rare in Bangladesh. The striking paucity of interreligious marriages in a country in which people of different religious orientations have always lived side by side is a surprising phenomenon. I would assume that difficulties arising from the existing structure of personal status laws are a main factor explaining that situation. While some interreligious constellations can be accommodated within the existing system, in accordance with the rules of the concerned religious communities, others cannot. For instance, a Muslim woman cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man.’<sup>20</sup>

5.5.4 The Chittagong University Journal of Law, Vol. XIII, 2008, in an article, Inter-religious Marriage in Bangladesh: An Analysis of the Existing Legal Framework noted that: ‘Although IRM [inter-religious marriage] is accepted in some social stratum in Bangladesh, it will not be correct to say that it is widely accepted in Bangladeshi society as a whole [...] If the IRM parties are not economically independent, their social lives may be particularly precarious. This social unacceptance has its roots again in the religious disapproval of such marriages.’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal, Bangladesh: 1. Please provide information about the societal attitudes (particularly among Muslims) to inter-religious and inter-racial de facto relationships in Bangladesh. [...], 12 February 2008, BGD32882, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f40f0072.html>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>20</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>21</sup> The Chittagong University Journal of Law, Vol. XIII, 2008 (page.121), Inter-religious Marriage in Bangladesh: An Analysis of the Existing Legal Framework, [http://www.culaw.ac.bd/files/jurnal-2008/Vol.%20XIII,%202008%20\(p.117-%20139\).pdf](http://www.culaw.ac.bd/files/jurnal-2008/Vol.%20XIII,%202008%20(p.117-%20139).pdf), Date accessed 04 November 2015



- 5.5.5 The Chittagong University Journal of Law, Vol. XIII, 2008 (p.117- 139), in an article, [Inter-religious Marriage in Bangladesh: An Analysis of the Existing Legal Framework](#)<sup>22</sup> and a further report [Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal report](#), Interfaith relationships – First Information Reports – police protection in Dhaka, dated 2010, provides further background.<sup>23</sup>

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## 6. Religiously motivated violence and discrimination

- 6.1.1 Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a national legal aid and human rights organisation, in a country report of 2015, Bangladesh: Failing to Fulfil its Commitments, dated 31 August 2015, stated that:

‘In 2014, there were several attacks on houses, shops, and livelihoods of religious minorities in different districts and also on temples and churches in Thakugaon, Netrokona, Sherpur, Mymensingh districts. In the context of the controversial election held on 5 January 2014 there were attacks on houses, businesses and temples at Jessore, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Luxmipur districts before and after the election date.

‘According to ASK Documentation, 628 houses, 192 business institutions and 63 temple idols were destroyed; 106 people were injured; and 2 people died out of fear, in attacks in January of 2014 alone. It has also been reported that victims of those attacks left the affected areas due to the apprehension of further attack and lack of adequate security measures. There have been many reports of Hindus having been evicted from their properties, and of Hindu girls being raped, but either the police have refused to investigate or the families of the victims were terrorised and they were forced to leave their village.’<sup>24</sup>

- 6.1.2 The same 2015 ASK report noted that:

‘In 2014 there were scores of violent incidents against religious minority communities; in particular, arson and looting of temples, homes, shops and business establishments of Hindu communities. After these atrocities, the police lodged a few ‘FIRs’ (First Information Reports) and ‘General Diary’ (GD) entries, with little or no subsequent progress in most cases. On 15 January 2014, the High Court Division issued a rule directing the Government to provide adequate security to minorities. In the absence of

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<sup>22</sup> The Chittagong University Journal of Law, Vol. XIII, 2008 (p.117- 139), Inter-religious Marriage in Bangladesh: An Analysis of the Existing Legal Framework, [http://www.culaw.ac.bd/files/jurnal-2008/Vol.%20XIII,%202008%20\(p.117-%20139\).pdf](http://www.culaw.ac.bd/files/jurnal-2008/Vol.%20XIII,%202008%20(p.117-%20139).pdf), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>23</sup> Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal, Country Advice: Bangladesh – BGD36801 – Interfaith relationships – First Information Reports – police protection in Dhaka, 9 July 2010, [https://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1930\\_1352465120\\_bgd36801.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1352465120_bgd36801.pdf), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>24</sup> Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh: Failing to Fulfil its Commitments, 31 August 2015, [http://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ANNI\\_Report\\_2015-Bangladesh.pdf](http://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ANNI_Report_2015-Bangladesh.pdf), (page 5) Date accessed 04 November 2015

any positive political and policy move and mere parliamentary debate on this issue, the minority communities are exposed to future victimisation.’<sup>25</sup>

6.1.3 The US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report 2014, published 14 October 2014, noted that:

‘Violence directed against members of minority religious groups continued to result in the loss of lives and property. Religious freedom organizations said it was often difficult to determine to what extent the attacks were motivated by religious animosity or by criminal intent, personal conflict, property disputes, political concerns, or a combination of these factors. Members of minority religious groups often had the lowest socio-economic status and the least recourse to political means to redress wrongs done to them. The most common type of abuse was destruction and looting of religious sites and homes.’<sup>26</sup>

6.1.4 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom reported in its Annual Report 2015, covering 2014 events, that:

‘In 2014, societal discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and occasional violence against religious minority communities, especially the Hindu minority population, continued in Bangladesh. In addition, illegal land appropriations, commonly referred to as land-grabbing, and ownership disputes remain widespread, with a disproportionate number of religious minorities being targeted. Additionally, while the government has made some progress in complying with the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, the ruling Awami League and other political parties use religiously-divisive language and, on occasion, act in ways that exacerbate rather than diminish religious and communal tensions.’<sup>27</sup>

6.1.5 The report continued:

‘On January 5, 2014, Bangladesh held its parliamentary election, which was not free or fair, with more than half of the seats uncontested. The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and 18 other political parties boycotted the election. Post-election violence occurred in 16 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, with most attacks attributed to individuals and groups associated with the BNP and the main religious party Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat). The worst attacks occurred in minority-dominated villages. Dozens of Hindu properties were looted, vandalized, or set ablaze, and hundreds of Hindus fled their homes. Christian and Buddhist communities also were targeted. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made public statements in support of religious minority communities after the violence, but reports

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<sup>25</sup> Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh: Failing to Fulfil its Commitments, 31 August 2015, [http://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ANNI\\_Report\\_2015-Bangladesh.pdf](http://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ANNI_Report_2015-Bangladesh.pdf), (page 16) Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>26</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section III), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>27</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, (USCIRF), Annual Report 2015, Bangladesh, 30 Apr 2015, <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Bangladesh%202015.pdf>, Date accessed 04 November 2015



emerged that police and security forces dispatched by the government to affected areas did not actively stop the violence and, in some cases, participated in it.’<sup>28</sup>

- 6.1.6 Odhikar, a Human Rights NGO, in its Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, dated 17 August 2015, noted that:

‘The practice of attacking socially, economically and politically vulnerable groups belonging to Hindu, Christian or other religious and cultural minority communities by the local thugs associated with the ruling party, opposition and other power elites, during the pre and post-election period are extremely worrying. Some influential and vested interest groups attacked citizens belonging to the Hindu religion, taking the opportunity of violent political situations, and also vandalised and set fire to places of worship. Incidents of attacks on citizens belonging to the Hindu community occurred across the country during and after the 5 January elections. Houses, shops and business offices belonging to members of religious minority communities and places of worship were attacked during that time.’<sup>29</sup>

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## 6.2 Hindus

- 6.2.1 The Hindu American Foundation, in a report, [Diminishing Hindu Population in Bangladesh from the Perspective of Ethnic Cleansing: A Conscious Unawareness?](#), dated 16 January 2015, observed that:

‘Discrimination towards the Hindu community in Bangladesh is both visible and hidden. The state’s bias in the Constitution and its reluctance to address human rights violations against minorities makes this discrimination evident. Moreover, there has been a long history of violence and repression against Hindus in Bangladesh, which has led to the community’s dramatic decline. This infamous history consists of many barbaric episodes of violence against Hindus over the years, including attacks in the aftermath of the Babri Mosque incident in India in the 1990s, the 2001 post-election violence, and the vast appropriation of land under the Vested Property Act.’

‘[...] The authors argue that these incidents indicate a discriminatory social policy towards the Hindu community in Bangladesh, which aims at and results in the unwilling departure of Hindus from their motherland.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, (USCIRF), Annual Report 2015, Bangladesh, 30 Apr 2015, <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Bangladesh%202015.pdf>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>29</sup> Odhikar, Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, 17 August 2015, [http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_2014\\_Eng.pdf](http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual_Human_Rights_Report_2014_Eng.pdf), (page 39) Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>30</sup> Hindu American Foundation, [Diminishing Hindu Population in Bangladesh from the Perspective of Ethnic Cleansing: A Conscious Unawareness?](#), 16 January 2015, [http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing\\_Hindu\\_Population\\_Bangladesh\\_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf](http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing_Hindu_Population_Bangladesh_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf), Date accessed 04 November 2015

6.2.2 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its Preliminary findings of a Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 09 September 2015, stated that:

'[...] at the time of Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the percentage of the Hindu population amounted to approximately 23 percent of the country's entire population, current estimates see the Hindus near 8 percent. Apparently, this drastic decline has much to do with contested property issues, which the Government has been trying to resolve as well the experience of general vulnerability through harassment and at times even physical attacks.'<sup>31</sup>

6.2.3 The report also noted that:

'Unsettled property disputes constitute challenges in many societies, including in Bangladesh. In various ways, they are closely linked with problems concerning freedom of religion or belief. One link is the salient decline of the Hindu population in Bangladesh, which has shrunk to much less than half of the share they had around the time of independence. As a result of the 1965 'Enemy Property Act', enacted in the still united Pakistan as a result of ongoing conflicts with India, many Hindu properties, mainly real estate, were confiscated. Even after independence, this practice continued in the name of the 'Vested Property Act', which caused many Hindu families to emigrate to India and other countries. In reality much of the confiscations carried out amounted to sheer land grabbing. The Government has tried to combat this phenomenon through the 2001 'Vested Property Return Act' which, as indicated in the title, should also restitute Hindus in their lost properties.

'However, the implementation of this Act seems to be faced with enormous problems, and compensation of lost properties has reportedly been inadequate in numerous cases. At the same time, incidents of land grabbing at the expense of Hindus continue [...].'<sup>32</sup>

6.2.4 The 2015 annual report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, published on 30 April 2015, noted that:

'Land-grabbing affects all communities, although religious minorities, particularly Hindus, appear disproportionately targeted for displacement from land they have claimed for generations. Reportedly, local police and political leaders, including some members of the national parliament, are

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<sup>31</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>32</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

occasionally involved in land-grabbing and/or shielding politically-influential individuals from prosecution.<sup>33</sup>

6.2.5 Freedom House noted in their 2015 report, published 31 March 2015, that:

'In the run-up to the 2014 elections, more than two dozen members of the Hindu minority were killed and many more injured in what officials described as a coordinated campaign by the JI. In the days after the election, several thousand Hindus were displaced following violent attacks on numerous villages across the country, and hundreds of their homes and businesses were looted or destroyed. In May, a Hindu community was attacked when a mob of more than 3,000 people ransacked a village, destroying homes and a local temple. An investigation revealed the attack was planned after two teens from the village allegedly insulted the prophet Mohammed on Facebook. In November, five Hindu temples were vandalized and the home of a Hindu man was attacked after he allegedly posted song lyrics online defaming Mohammed.'<sup>34</sup>

6.2.6 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report 2014 noted that:

'Minority groups, especially Hindus, were victims of attacks and looting of religious sites and private homes, particularly in the period surrounding the January national election. According to human rights organizations, violence against members of minority religious groups often included additional factors and could not be attributed solely to religious affiliation. According to religious minority leaders, individuals affiliated with political parties, ruling and opposition alike, sometimes instigated violence against members of religious minorities for political purposes. For example, suspects arrested for the gang rape of two Hindu women said they acted in retaliation for how the women's community voted in the January 5 parliamentary elections. In a separate case, a mob attacked Hindus in Malopara village after Hindus voted despite intimidation.'<sup>35</sup>

6.2.7 The USSD IRF 2014 report went on to note that:

'Attacks against Hindus, in particular, continued throughout the year. According to the human rights organization Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), one person was killed; 255 persons were injured; 247 statues, monasteries, or temples were destroyed; and 761 homes and 193 businesses were vandalized in violence targeting Hindus.'<sup>36</sup> See also [Religious conversion](#).

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<sup>33</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, (USCIRF), Annual Report 2015, Bangladesh, 30 Apr 2015, <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Bangladesh%202015.pdf>, (page 194) Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>34</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2015 - Bangladesh, 31 March 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5523d2d015.html> Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>35</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section: Executive Summary), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>36</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section III), Date accessed 04 November 2015

- 6.2.8 The Hindu American Foundation, in a report, [Diminishing Hindu Population in Bangladesh from the Perspective of Ethnic Cleansing: A Conscious Unawareness?](#), dated 16 January 2015, noted that:

'[...] in early 2014, during elections and post-poll violence, armed gangs attacked minority communities, mostly in the southwestern and northern districts, including Jessore, Satkhira, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Chittagong, Nilphamari, Kurgram, Lalmonirhat, Satkhira, Gaibandha and Dinajpur. International aid agencies estimated that as many as 5,000 families were affected. This wave of violence against the Hindu community was unprecedented and weighed heavily on conscientious and civilized citizens of Bangladesh of all religions.'<sup>37</sup>

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### 6.3 Buddhists

- 6.3.1 According to an estimate quoted by BuddhaNet, the Australian-based website of the Buddha Dharma Education Association, there were about one million Buddhists in Bangladesh by 2004, living mainly in the area of the city of Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Comilla, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and in Barisal. The Buddhists of Bangladesh belong to four groups of nations who have been gradually mixed together; the groups are the Austic, the Tibeto-Burman, the Dravilians and the Aryans. According to historians the Tibeto-Burman consists of three tribes – the Pyu, the Kanyan and the Thet (Chakma). The Chakma tribes primarily reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Kanyan tribe is known as the Rakhine (Arakanese) group who still live in the South-Eastern part of Chittagong district. The plain Buddhists of Bangladesh, known as the Burua-Buddhist, are the ancient peoples of Bangladesh who have lived there for five thousand years, according to Arakanese chronology.<sup>38</sup>
- 6.3.2 As stated in a report of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) dated 16 August 2005, the majority of the Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts practise Buddhism.<sup>39</sup>
- 6.3.3 The Myanmar Times, in an article, Rebuilding Buddhism in Bangladesh, dated 19 May 2014, reported that:
- 'Sparked by an anti-Islam Facebook post of ambiguous provenance, 22 Buddhist temples were torn down and set ablaze, with dozens of Buddhist-owned houses destroyed [the 'Ramu incident']. The Bangladesh

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<sup>37</sup> Hindu American Foundation, Diminishing Hindu Population in Bangladesh from the Perspective of Ethnic Cleansing: A Conscious Unawareness?, 16 January 2015, [http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing\\_Hindu\\_Population\\_Bangladesh\\_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf](http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing_Hindu_Population_Bangladesh_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf), (page 4) Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>38</sup> BuddhaNet (Buddha Dharma Education Association) Buddhism in Bangladesh, undated <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/bangladesh-txt.htm> Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>39</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Bangladesh: Situation of Buddhists, particularly in the areas of Chittagong and Dhaka; treatment by Muslim majority, Islamist groups, authorities and political parties; protection available (2003-2005), 16 August 2005, BGD100462.E, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/45f147e634.html> Date accessed 04 November 2015

government, acutely aware of the sensitivities, quickly sought to dampen the anti-Buddhist fury. [...] The attacks on the country's longstanding Theravada Buddhist minority – a group with a large, settled presence for centuries – were a slap in the face to Bangladesh's tolerant and inclusive self-image.'<sup>40</sup>

6.3.4 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its Preliminary findings of a Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 09 September 2015, in discussing personal and community safety, commented that in the well-known case the 'Ramu incident' of 2012. In this incident, over 20 historic Buddhist temples were ransacked, torched and finally destroyed. At the same time, quite a number of houses owned by Buddhists burnt down to ashes. The report noted that none of the perpetrators of the violence have been brought to justice.<sup>41</sup>

6.3.5 UCA News reported on 29 September 2015 that justice remained elusive for victims of the 2012 anti-Buddhist incident. The report stated:

'The lack of justice three years after the violence is "upsetting and regrettable," says David Gonsalves, a member of the Justice and Peace Commission in Chittagong Diocese [...]" In most cases of attacks on minorities, politics and communal forces are involved and they wield considerable power. If Buddhists don't get justice, we fear this might repeat to some other place, or other minorities," he says.'

'[...] There are allegations that some perpetrators and attackers have threatened victims and witnesses to keep them from testifying in court.'<sup>42</sup>

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## 6.4 Christians

6.4.1 Minority Rights Group International, in its Bangladesh overview 2015, stated that some 580,000 Christians adhere to at least 32 different denominations.<sup>43</sup>

6.4.2 International Christian Concern, in a report dated 2 July 2013, stated that:

'Against the setting of rising social turmoil and a weakened political framework, attacks against Christians in Bangladesh are increasing, even as the nation cries out for the government to quickly discover its political will. On June 5, Muslim extremists entered the Tumilia mission, a Catholic

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<sup>40</sup> The Myanmar Times, Rebuilding Buddhism in Bangladesh, 19 May 2014, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/in-depth/10408-rebuilding-buddhism-in-bangladesh.html>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>41</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>42</sup> UCA News, In Bangladesh, justice elusive for survivors of anti-Buddhist riots, 29 September 2015, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/in-bangladesh-justice-elusive-for-survivors-of-anti-buddhist-violence/74342>, Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>43</sup> Minority Rights Group International, Bangladesh Overview, 2015, <http://minorityrights.org/country/bangladesh/>, Date accessed 04 November 2015



compound, and physically attacked a priest, Father Abel, as he came out of his room. International Christian Concern (ICC) sources confirmed that it was targeted persecution on the Christians by a group of Islamists. On June 6, the same group of Islamists attacked an entire village in Dinajpur, in northern Bangladesh. As Christians fled and sought shelter in a Catholic Church's mission compound, a mob of more than 100 Muslims, armed with local weapons, stormed in and beat up the priest and seminary students. [...] No arrests were made in either incident.'<sup>44</sup>

#### 6.4.3 The report continued:

'Christians are at the bottom of Bangladesh's social hierarchy. The majority of discrimination against Bangladeshi Christians comes from sections of Muslims who beat them, extort money from them, deny them access to public water wells or destroy their rickshaws to eliminate their only source of income, according to the Voice of the Martyrs. [...] "Not only religious motives are involved here, but also political ones".', said Veronique Vogel, head of the Indian section of Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity.'<sup>45</sup>

The same report also noted that 'One of Bangladesh's serious social problems is human trafficking, with nearly 13 women and children trafficked from Bangladesh every day. Low-income Christian families are commonly targeted by traffickers because of their faith and economic vulnerability'.<sup>46</sup>

#### 6.4.4 Odhikar, a Human Rights NGO, in its Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, dated 17 August 2015, noted that:

'Social, economic and political vulnerability increased for groups belonging to Hindu, Christian and other religious and cultural minority communities. Their vulnerability has two aspects. Socio-economic vulnerability has decreased their political standing locally, where local political thugs are always ready to exploit the situation. Secondly, communalisation of such incidents obscures the possibility of arresting and punishing the offenders. Unilaterally blaming the so-called 'Islamists' or 'Islam' to prove that the minorities are not safe in Bangladesh, has further aggravated their situation, since it creates mistrust and alienation at the local level. The systematic politicisation of these incidents and the ensuing blame game makes the situation more vulnerable. Apathy of the government and the administration is the single most worrying issue for human rights defenders concerned about the safety and security of these vulnerable communities.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> International Christian Concern (ICC), Christian Persecution Increases amid Protests in Bangladesh, 2 July 2013 <http://www.persecution.org/2013/07/02/christian-persecution-increases-amid-protests-in-bangladesh/>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>45</sup> International Christian Concern (ICC), Christian Persecution Increases amid Protests in Bangladesh, 2 July 2013 <http://www.persecution.org/2013/07/02/christian-persecution-increases-amid-protests-in-bangladesh/>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>46</sup> International Christian Concern (ICC), Christian Persecution Increases amid Protests in Bangladesh, 2 July 2013 <http://www.persecution.org/2013/07/02/christian-persecution-increases-amid-protests-in-bangladesh/>, Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>47</sup> Odhikar, Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, 17 August 2015, <http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp->

- 6.4.5 The same report recounted that ‘On 7 January 2014 a group of criminals attacked some Christian families at Bhagra in Shreepur Union under Jamalpur District. 15 persons were injured in this attack. The victims claimed that they were attacked by men who opposed the elections and because they voted for ‘Boat’ [The boat is the symbol of the Awami League].’<sup>48</sup>

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## 6.5 The Ahmadiyya community (alternatively Ahmadis)

- 6.5.1 The Freedom House report, Freedom in the World 2013, covering events in 2012, published 31 January 2013, stated that:

‘Members of the Ahmadiyya sect are considered heretical by some Muslims, and despite increased state protection since 2009, they have encountered physical attacks, boycotts, and demands that the state declare them non-Muslims. They are also occasionally denied permission to hold religious events. In November 2012, Islamist extremists attacked an Ahmadi mosque and several homes of Ahmadis in the village of Taraganj in Rangpur; some 15 people were injured and two homes destroyed in the attack.’<sup>49</sup>

- 6.5.2 The US State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, published 20 May 2013, stated that:

‘The Ahmadiyya Muslim community also suffered harassment. In addition to destruction of Ahmadi homes and mosques, the community faced obstacles in conducting burials and building mosques. For example, when an Ahmadi family tried to bury a family member at an ancestral site in Tejgaon, Dhaka on July 20, members of the anti-Ahmadi Khatme Nabuwat Movement obstructed his burial. When the family buried him at a different site, members of the same movement tried to exhume his body, although local officials and police stopped the exhumation attempt. On November 7, inhabitants of Taraganj, Rangpur attacked an Ahmadi community, setting fire to two homes and a mosque and injuring 15. The attackers, who numbered over 1,000, were allegedly incited by loudspeaker announcements concerning the building of a new Ahmadi mosque in the area. Police quelled the violence and arrested eleven people in connection with the attack.’<sup>50</sup>

- 6.5.3 On 26 December 2015, the Dhaka Tribune reported that ‘Islamic State has claimed their first ‘suicide bomb’ attack in Bangladesh at Ahmadiya mosque

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[content/uploads/2015/12/Annual\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_2014\\_Eng.pdf](#), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>48</sup> Odhikar, Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, 17 August 2015,

[http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_2014\\_Eng.pdf](http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual_Human_Rights_Report_2014_Eng.pdf),

Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>49</sup> Freedom in the World – Bangladesh (2013) (events of 2012), 31 January 2013

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/bangladesh>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>50</sup> US State Department: 2012 International Religious Freedom Report: Bangladesh, 20 May 2013. (Section 3)

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208424#wrapper>, Date accessed 04 November 2015



in Rajshahi's Baghmara upazila, on Saturday [...]. On Friday, one person was killed in a suicide bomb attack at an Ahmadiyya mosque during Jumma prayers at Chakpara village under Bagmara upazila in Rajshahi. At least 10 others were injured in the incident.<sup>51</sup>

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## 7. Avenues of redress and protection

7.1.1 The US State Department's International Religious Freedom Report (USSD IRF) for 2014, published 14 October 2015, stated that:

'Following many incidents of societal violence against religious minorities, particularly Hindus, surrounding the national elections in January, the High Court directed the government "to take immediate steps to protect life, liberty, property and dignity of the citizens, by deploying forces not only to the specified districts and communities, [but] all over the country wherever the citizens of the country, especially those who are either minority, or are identified as a vulnerable group." The court further ordered the inspector general of police to submit a report within seven days outlining measures taken to protect minorities and arrest perpetrators of such violence. In the submitted report, the government detailed 36 criminal cases and 139 arrests of religious minorities. The NHRC also condemned election-related violence against minorities, and urged authorities to arrest those responsible.'<sup>52</sup>

7.1.2 The same USSD IRF 2014 report, published 14 October 2015 stated that:

'Incidents occurred in which the government placed limits on religious speech or failed to prevent or investigate acts of violence against religious minorities. According to religious minority leaders, individuals affiliated with both the ruling and opposition parties instigated violence against religious minorities for political purposes. Government officials stated that resource and capacity constraints sometimes limited the government's ability to make proactive efforts to extend greater religious freedom protections or to counter societal actors. Representatives of religious minorities stated that the government sometimes failed to prevent abuses by non-governmental actors, police in some instances failed to enforce the law appropriately, and the courts failed to administer justice effectively.'<sup>53</sup>

7.1.3 The USSD IRF 2014 report also noted that:

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<sup>51</sup> Dhaka Tribune, IS claims first 'suicide bomb' attack in Bangladesh, 31 January 2016, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2015/dec/26/isis-claims-first-suicide-bombings-ahmadiya-mosque-bangladesh#sthash.dmGIKng5.dpuf>, Date accessed 31 January 2016

<sup>52</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section II), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>53</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Section III), Date accessed 04 November 2015

'Members of minority religious groups from lower economic strata said they were further disadvantaged due to their inability to afford personal security or to motivate officials to provide security against harassment or violence.'<sup>54</sup>

7.1.4 Odhikar, a Human Rights NGO, in its Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, dated 17 August 2015, noted that:

'Attacks on religious minority communities after elections have become a common phenomenon. Despite the known areas of vulnerable localities where such violence could take place, the apathy of the government and the local administration is the single most worrying issue for human rights defenders who are concerned about the safety and security of these vulnerable communities. Such incidents occur repeatedly due to the failure to arrest and punish perpetrators or sometimes due to the fact that the perpetrators enjoy the support of the government.'<sup>55</sup>

7.1.5 A report published by the Hindu American Foundation on 16 January 2015 stated that:

'[...], the state's reluctance to protect and promote the rights and safety of Hindus is clearly visible. While current and past Bangladeshi governments have repeatedly noted that the perpetrators of violence were not government agents, they have nonetheless been complicit in such acts by prosecuting few and punishing even fewer.'<sup>56</sup>

7.1.6 The OHCHR Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in his report, when discussing personal and community safety noted that:

'In order to restore and enhance the sense of security of individuals and communities in vulnerable situations, projects of 'community policing' have been designed and are currently in their implementation phase, in particular in the CHT. Regular communication between law enforcement and members of various communities can certainly help to prevent misunderstandings, build mutual trust and alert law enforcement to possible risk situations. When visiting the CHT, I received specific information about ongoing community policing projects in Bandarban and Rangamati. Moreover, the number of indigenous persons who operate in the regular police force (unlike in the military) has reportedly risen in the CHT region and is clearly above the national quota. This seems to have led to a somewhat improved sense of security among the indigenous peoples. However, 'mixed policing', i.e. a

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<sup>54</sup> The US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Bangladesh, 14 October 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238490>, (Executive summary), Date accessed 04 November 2015

<sup>55</sup> Odhikar, Human Rights Report 2014 on Bangladesh, 17 August 2015, [http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_2014\\_Eng.pdf](http://1dgy051vgyxh41o8cj16kk7s19f2.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual_Human_Rights_Report_2014_Eng.pdf), (page 39) Date accessed 30 January 2016

<sup>56</sup> Hindu American Foundation, Diminishing Hindu Population in Bangladesh from the Perspective of Ethnic Cleansing: A Conscious Unawareness?, 16 January 2015, [http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing\\_Hindu\\_Population\\_Bangladesh\\_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf](http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Diminishing_Hindu_Population_Bangladesh_AnirbanChoudhuryArup.pdf), (page 14) Date accessed 30 January 2016

direct cooperation between Bengali and indigenous individuals operating within the police is apparently confronted with obstacles.’<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Press Statement, 09 September 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16399&LangID=E>, Date accessed 04 November 2015

# Version Control and Contacts

## Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email [the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

## Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- Version: **1.0**
- valid from: **31 March 2016**
- this version approved by: **Sally Weston, Deputy Director, IBPD**
- approved on: **24 March 2016**

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