

7 August 2018

Bangladesh: Shahidul Alam falsely charged and tortured in police custody

On 5 August, human rights defender **Shahidul Alam** was detained at his home by members of the Detective Branch of Police. He appeared in court on 6 August, charged with “spreading propaganda and false information against the government”. During the session, the human rights defender informed the Court that he had been tortured in custody.

[Shahidul Alam](#) is an award-winning photographer, academic and human rights defender. In 1998, he founded **Pathshala South Asian Institute of Photography**. Pathshala has trained hundreds of photographers and helped in diversifying methods of highlighting human rights violations in the country. The defender is also a director of Chobi Mela, a festival of photography in Asia. His recent photography exhibitions have exposed human rights violations suffered by victims of extra judicial killings, Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrant workers abroad.

On 5 August, in the afternoon, Shahidul Alam was attacked by an armed group near City College in Dhaka while he was recording attacks on students protesting for safer roads. Soon after the attack, he took shelter inside a nearby guest house and narrated the incident live on his Facebook page. Later that evening, at approximately 10:30 p.m., the human rights defender was forcefully taken from his Dhanmondi residence by a large number of plainclothes men who identified themselves to building security as members of the Detective Branch of Police. His lawyer, family members and friends later arrived at the Detective Branch office, but were not provided with any information as to his whereabouts.

Following a press conference with Shahidul Alam’s family and lawyer on 6 August at 11:30 a.m., the human rights defender’s partner was informed that Shahidul Alam would appear in court that afternoon. At approximately 5:00 p.m., Shahidul Alam was taken to the courtroom, barefoot and walking with difficulty. During the session, he informed the Court that he had been tortured in custody and that police had forced him to wash the blood from his clothes and put them on again. Rejecting the bail application submitted by his lawyers, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in Dhaka ordered the human rights defender’s remand in custody for seven days on charges of “spreading propaganda and false information against the government”, filed against him under the controversial section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act. On 7 August 2018, due to his medical condition, the High Court bench of Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir asked jail authorities to immediately send the human rights defender to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) for treatment.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arrest and charges against Shahidul Alam and is gravely concerned by reports of his torture in detention. Bangladesh’s remand detention procedures often result in the torture and abuse of human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Shahidul Alam and drop all charges against him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security and integrity, as well as that of his family and ensure that the treatment of Shahidul Alam, while in

detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the “*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*”, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;

3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into any instances of torture against Shahidul Alam with a view to publishing the results of any such investigation and bringing the perpetrators to justice in line with Bangladesh’s international human rights obligations;

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bangladesh are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.