



Press Release, 1st February 2014, Dhaka

Roundtable on

Access to Information Central to the Post – 2015 Development Agenda

Bangladesh: Civil society demands the inclusion of access to information as central to the government's proposals on sustainable development goals

Dhaka, 1st February 2014. Civil society leaders demanded that the government's proposals on sustainable development goals (SDGs) should include the guarantee of public's right to information and government data. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be replaced by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the year 2015. Initial recommendations of the Government of Bangladesh were discussed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2013.

"The freedom to voice views and participate in decisions without fear and need for access to information and to an independent media has been recognised as an essential component of the SDGs" said Tahmina Rahman, Director Bangladesh and South Asia of ARTICLE 19. She added, *"we believe that there should be a strong reflection of the principles on access to information, transparency and accountability in proposals of the Government of Bangladesh"*. She was speaking at a Roundtable jointly organised by ARTICLE 19 with the Daily Star and Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (EquityBD), a network of right based NGOs in Bangladesh. The Roundtable was held yesterday at the Daily Star Building in Dhaka.

Participants at the Roundtable discussions included professor Shamsul Alam member Planning Commission, Nazrul Islam, Additional Secretary Cabinet Division, Saida Muna Tasneem, Director General UN Desk, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Commissioner Professor Sadeka Halim, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director Transparency International Bangladesh, and Saheen Anam, Executive Director Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). Speakers included Dr Tofail Ahmed, Barrister Tanjibul Alam, Asgar Ali Sabri, Director Action Aid, Monisha Biswas of Oxfam, former parliamentarian Dr. Akram Hossain and Faruque Ahmed, Executive Editor the New Nation.

"The Bangladesh Government has been invited to contribute in the development of these new goals at highest level meetings of nation states because of its' success in implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and the government is open to strengthening articulations on access, governance and oversight" commented Saida Muna Tasneem. Nazrul Islam, commented that the government acknowledges that there is more work necessary for the effective implementation of the Right to Information Act. Professor Shamsul Alam emphasised that the right to information is central to Bangladesh proposals for SDGs,

Dr Iftekharizzaman of TIB mentioned that country loss 13.6 % of budget and 2.4 % of GDP due to corruption, this could be minimized if government committed on sincere implementation of right to information. Saheen Anam of MJF said that access to information is key to holding government accountable, country's media need to play proactive role in this regard. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of EquityBD commented: "Disclosure of information on matter of public expenditure such as those on defense and development are critical to discussions of equity and good governance".

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