



## Press Release

NHRC Roundtable with the Business Community, Government and Civil Society

### Business, Women's and Children's Rights

**29 October, 2012:** The National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh has convened a roundtable discussion engaging members of the Business community, local and international NGO's, and selected line Ministries on the relationship and commitment of the business community on human rights, with a particular focus on women and children.

Justice M. Imman Ali, Judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh gave a robust presentation on the topic and called for a stronger role by both Government and Industry in the protection of working women's rights, and the elimination of child labour and negative environmental practices in Bangladesh.



Justice M. Imman Ali highlighted the positive role that business can and does play in the economic empowerment of women, but called for increased implementation of existing legislation by extension; to the informal labour market where children are most at risk of being exploited.

Moreover, Justice M. Imman Ali highlighted the role of poverty as one key driver of child labour, and called for greater investment in social safety nets, and measures to lift people out of poverty and of the need to balance the demands of profit, with investment in future generations.

After the keynote address Mr. Kazi Reazul Hoque, Acting Chairman, NHRC, said that the role of the business community in the economic and social development of Bangladesh was truly remarkable. The business sector has created significant employment opportunities for women in Bangladesh. He added that the business community encourages women's participation in economic activities which help to empower women economically and socially, however that the most effective way to tackle issues of labour rights violations affecting women, was closer partnership and collaboration between relevant Government Ministries, civil society and business.

In this regard, representatives from the Ministries of Industry & Employment, Women and Children, and Environment and Forestry, highlighted positive efforts aimed at improving working conditions for women, particularly in the garment industry with work based child minding facilities, and projects aimed at assisting street children through the implementation of cash transfer schemes.

All parties acknowledged however that there was still much to be done, particularly to provide better working conditions for women engaged in high risk industries such as ship breaking, and construction. Moreover, reducing the wage gap between men and women, and more extensive implementation of existing legislation around paid maternity leave, and work based child care facilities was urgently required. NHRC Honorary Member Prof. Niru Kumar Chakma and Adv. Fawzia Karim Firoze concluded the discussion with an appeal for greater enforcement of existing legislation on these issues.

Members of the Business Community present including Mr. Md. Hafizur Rahman, Chairman of Arenco Group and former President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry, welcomed the outcome of the discussions, and pledged to work more closely with the NHRC and civil society groups on additional consultations which would align the business community in Bangladesh to international norms on business best practice and ethics, including the UN 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework which outlines the duty of the state and business to protect human rights, and the 2010 Edinburgh Declaration Recommendations.

This was welcomed by members of the NGO community present including Save the Children Bangladesh, and JAAGO Foundation. Both organizations in addition, appealed for greater participation by the youth and women in decisions which directly affected the welfare of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

All parties present agreed on the need for business to invest in positive measures which would improve working conditions for women, since improved health and wellness are critical to productivity levels and to align the business community with international corporate commitments on the Triple Bottom Line – People, Planet, Profit.

*Ends.*

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