

# **Democracywatch Workshop Report**

Updating the manual on Media and Human Rights

Venue: Democracywatch Auditorium, Dhaka

Organized by: Relief International and Democracywatch

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Bangladesh is signatory to eight international human rights conventions, four of which have been ratified. Despite these legal achievements, the reality of the current state of human rights in Bangladesh remains bleak, according to different International's latest State of the world's Human Rights Report. Prison torture, deaths in custody, attacks on minorities, forced disappearances, attack on journalists, honor killings, and domestic violence persist.

Yet, Bangladesh is well known for its robust electronic and print media, which has emerged as a mouthpiece for its citizens to voice concerns about governance, democracy and human rights. Bangladeshi journalists are at the forefront of covering human rights abuses.

However, rapid growth has come with its own challenges. Inadequate media facilities, lack of training and little understanding of human rights framework undermines the media's ability to protect and promote human rights. District and Upazilla level journalists attempting to cover systematic violations of human rights in Bangladesh are particularly affected by such deficiencies.

The absence of a responsive audience, fear of persecution and a lack of state mechanisms to address such issues are factors that also contribute to the challenges. Most local journalists who report on human rights from far away districts remain uncertain if their news reports will ever reach the editor's desk, thus discouraging districts level reporters to cover any incidents at all where human rights violation have been taken place. Given these circumstances, what is really needed is a platform for journalists to produce effective, accurate and reliable reporting.

In this connection Relief International in association with Democracywatch undertook a project titled 'fostering a culture of human rights' with the generous support of European Commission. To implement this project smoothly Democracywatch organized a half day workshop for updating the existing manual on human rights and media on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2010 at the auditorium of Democracywatch. Taleya Rehman, Executive Director of Democracywatch opened the session and Shafik Rehman, Editor, Mouchake Dhil and senior columnist was present in the workshop as a special guest. Rahmatullah Faruque, Program Officer of Relief International made a brief presentation about the project. Mostafa Sohel, Director (Advocacy and Communication) of Democracywatch moderated the session. Among others Feroz Nurun Nabi Jugal, Mohiuddin Moin and Tawfiq Alahi were present on behalf of Democracywatch.

A number of 16 senior journalists from different print and electronic media were present at the workshop.

**The recommendations are as follows:**

- Manual should be produced in Bangla so that grassroots journalists will get more benefit from this.
- Manual could be divided into two parts- one is International laws and treaties and other one is code of ethics of journalism.
- General guidelines could be more useful for working journalists rather than producing a comprehensive manual.
- Media watch could be useful to produce updated manual on human rights
- Democracywatch should focus on grassroots journalist who really needs training for their professional development.
- Journalist groups should be maintained from central level
- Only grassroots journalists should get high priority to be involved in capacity building programs.
- A group of journalists from Dhaka can visit different parts of Bangladesh and can train rural journalists in those places.

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