



05 September, 2016

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Ensure Security for Victims and Witnesses for Justice and Fair Trial**

At a meeting today on 05 September, 2016 lawyers, journalists and rights activists called for activation or review of laws to ensure protection of the identity of victims and witnesses of serious crimes, including violence against women and children and for the media to frame guidelines to regulate their role.

The meeting on “Disclosure of Identities of Victims and Witnesses: Need for Security” was held at the Liberation War Museum Auditorium.

Speakers noted that there is no comprehensive law on the protection of victims and witnesses, including disclosure of identities of survivors and the role of the media in this regard. There is also no clear legal guidance regarding the publication of details of suspects. Often the media knowingly or unknowingly publish or disclose the identity of a victim or survivor of a crime, or a witness, without any consideration for their privacy, or the security implications, and the person becomes vulnerable to threats. Suspects are also routinely identified in the media as offenders, flouting the basic presumption of innocence.

**Dr. Gitiara Nasreen**, Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, who chaired the seminar, called for the Press Institute to provide skill development trainings for journalist, and for “greater collaboration between the media and citizen groups to ensure both accountability and rights of journalists”.

**Dr. Mofizur Rahman**, Chairman, Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, highlighted the need for “developing institutional guidelines for the media, in particular to handle and publicize sensitive new”. **Mizanur Rahman Khan**, Joint Editor, Prothom Alo, suggested that the recommendations be placed before the Editors’ Guild to highlight action needed to prevent the risks associated with media publication of victims’ and witnesses’ identity.

Sara Hossain, Honorary Executive Director, BLAST said that “It is important to ensure both the privacy and security of victims and witnesses and to take care with presenting information regarding suspects so that the right to justice and to fair trial can be ensured.” She also called for anonymizing names of the parties in family cases in reported judgments.



**Sheepa Hafiza**, rights and gender activist, **Tasaffy Hossain** from Bonnishika, and other representatives from rights and development organizations, including ASK, Manusher Jonno and Bandhu, journalists and lawyers participated in the expert consultation.

Advocate Rejaul Karim Siddiquee and Advocate Saraban Tahura Zaman from BLAST presented a paper outlining the relevant legal framework. Mahbuba Akhter, Deputy Director Advocacy, BLAST, moderated the seminar.

**Background:** The Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) organised a consultation on “Disclosure of Identities of Victims and Witnesses: Need for Security”. Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka chaired the expert consultation. Sheepa Hafiza, rights and gender activist; Dr Md. Mofizur Rahman, Chairman, Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka and Mizanur Rahman Khan, of the Daily Prothom Alo spoke as panel discussants.

Article 31 of the Constitution clearly states that every person has a fundamental right to enjoy the protection of the law, and to protection of their body and reputation. Certain laws lay down sanctions to prevent or restrict reporting of details of the information of victims and witnesses. These include Sections 11 (2)(b) and 12 of the Press Council Act, 1974; the Rules of the International Crimes Tribunal Act 1973; Section 14 of Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain, 2000; Sections 151 and 152 of the Evidence Act, 1872; Section 37 of Manob Pachar Domon o Protirodh Ain, 2012; Sections 53 and 54 of the Children Act, 2013; Sections 500, 504 and 509 of the Penal Code, 1860 among others.

The Law Commission in its Reports in 2006 and 2011, has proposed criminalizing publication of the identity of victims and witnesses. Yet to date no one appears to have been sanctioned for disclosing the identity of a victim of a crime of violence against women or children. The term ‘victim’ is not defined by any law. Victims who are women and children are disproportionately affected. Other groups, marginalized or discriminated against due to their ethnicity, occupation, disability or sexuality are also particularly vulnerable.

For further information, please contact:

Mahbuba Akhter

Deputy Director (Advocacy and Communication) BLAST

Mobile: 01776060113

E-mail: [mahbuba@blast.org.bd](mailto:mahbuba@blast.org.bd)