

## 39th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

### Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> September

Oral Statement by Mr. Yashasvi Nain in behalf of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

Thank you, Mr. President

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) remains deeply concerned about the deterioration of human rights in Commonwealth countries. Many governments, which claim to be democratic are employing arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances as tools to suppress free expression and silence civil society. We would like to bring the Council's attention to developments of concern in the Commonwealth countries.

In Bangladesh, political opponents have alleged they are frequently subject to enforced disappearances, while attacks on journalists have increased. Recently, well-known photographer and human rights defender, Dr. Shahidul Alam was arrested without warrant, and alleged that he was physically and psychologically tortured in custody. He is still in prison. Twenty seven cases of enforced disappearances have been noted in 2018.<sup>1</sup> While there have been forty three cases of attacks on journalists in 2018, the Information and Technology Act has been used to curb free expression. Student demonstrators seeking safer traffic have been broken up by baton-wielding police and pro-government youth.

In Cameroon, the ongoing Anglophone crisis has developed into a brutal and factious conflict. The government is ordering arbitrary mass arrests<sup>2</sup> of civilian demonstrators, while opposition leaders have reportedly been tortured in detention.<sup>3</sup> Anglophone protestors in detention have no access to legal counsel and are in poor health condition. Civil society actors are also facing the heat for attempting to build dialogue. Security forces enjoy impunity and the Anglophone regions have become unstable, and crime has been increasing at an alarming rate.

We also remain concerned with Australia's offshore processing and detention policies, and its treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.

Mr. President, 2018 is an election year in both Bangladesh and Cameroon. We fear that governments are attempting to override democracy and civic freedoms by misusing the state apparatus. CHRI calls upon the Council to take immediate notice of the situation, urges both Bangladesh and Cameroon governments to uphold the rule of law and take measures to protect human rights defenders, journalists and civil society in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/human-rights-monitoring-report-August-2018\\_Eng.pdf](http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/human-rights-monitoring-report-August-2018_Eng.pdf), p. 4

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/10/cameroon-inmates-packed-like-sardines-in-overcrowded-prisons-following-anglophone-protests/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/01/cameroon-ten-arrested-anglophone-leaders-at-risk-of-unfair-trial-and-torture-if-deported-from-nigeria/>