

Civil Society Workshop on Universal Periodic Review

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 26 August 2016

Organised by Bangladesh DTP Alumni 1990-2016

Orchard Suites Hotel, Banani, Dhaka

REPORT

Summary

This is the brief report of a national workshop on human rights advocacy, human rights in Bangladesh and the UN's Universal Periodic Review. The workshop was organised in Dhaka by alumni of the Diplomacy Training Program¹ and took place on August 26th, 2016. This was the first such initiative of the DTP alumni in Bangladesh.



There were 50 participants in the workshop, drawn from over 17 NGOs and CSOs working on a diverse range of human rights issues in Bangladesh including:

- The rights of migrant workers – including migrant domestic workers
- The rights of Indigenous peoples
- The rights of persons with disabilities
- Women's rights and gender discrimination
- The situation of workers in the garment sector – mainly women
- Labour rights
- Discrimination, intolerance and attacks on religious minorities
- The situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Bangladeshis
- Rights for elderly people
- Free speech and freedom of association
- The safety of human rights defenders

¹ The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) is an NGO affiliated with the Faculty of Law at UNSW in Sydney. It was established in 1990 to build the knowledge, skills and networks of human rights defenders and community advocates in the Asia-Pacific Region. It has over 2600 alumni of its programs, including over 100 alumni in Bangladesh. This workshop was made possible with funding from the Australian government through its aid program – which provides support to DTP.

Some of the participants and their organisations had previous experience of engaging with the UPR process, and with other human rights accountability processes. Others had no experience. While some organisations focused on civil and political rights and the rights of Indigenous peoples, have previously engaged with the UPR, migrant workers NGOs had not.

One of the potential advantages of advocacy around the UPR process is that covers all human rights and that it creates a space for organisations working on different human rights issues to come together, and develop complementary strategies and approaches with a long term perspective.

One outcome of the workshop was the interest of DTP alumni establishing a DTP alumni association in Bangladesh to organise similar initiatives. Another outcome was the interest expressed among the participants in following up this initiative on the UPR with further discussions on how the UPR process could be used to engage with the government, identify shared human rights priorities and build wider awareness and support for human rights.

Brief Description of Workshop Content

The day began with introductions, followed by a session providing an overview of how the UPR process works, by DTP trainer, Joshua Cooper.

Joshua explained that the UPR process, like other UN reporting and monitoring processes could be broken down into five phases:

- Preparation
- Interaction
- Consideration
- Adoption
- Implementation

The cyclical nature of the UPR process was emphasised. The review takes place every 4.5 years. Each review will look at the progress made in implementation of recommendations from the previous cycle – while also looking at new issues.

NGOs/CSOs can submit documents raising their concerns about human rights in the preparation phase. These documents are distilled and filtered by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into a 10 page “stakeholders” report.

There is no formal space for NGOs/CSOs in the interaction and consideration phases, but NGOs/CSOs can seek to influence the outcomes through persuading other governments to take up their issues of concern, to ask questions and make relevant recommendations. For this, they should identify countries and lobby with them.

As in other UN human rights reporting processes it is useful to prepare brief and concise documents with:

- Issue – brief statement about the concern
- Question - a suggested question to the government of Bangladesh

- Recommendation – a suggested and relevant recommendation to address/fix the issue

It was emphasised that there are governments that are appreciative of good information, and informed recommendations – and it is important for advocates not just to state problems – but to suggest solutions in terms of changes in law or policy, or increased allocation of resources etc. He also shared that UPR is a great opportunity to engage more people to discuss human rights and include their concerns.

Joshua's session was followed by a panel presentation sharing experiences, with special guest speaker Advocate Sultana Kamal, leading human rights activist and John Tripura from Kapaeeng Foundation, and Lisa from Human Rights Forum. The panel was chaired by DTP alumnus, Sayeed Ahmed (Front Line Defenders). This session provided an opportunity to share experiences about human rights concerns – and reflections on using previous cycles of the UPR process to bring about change in human rights in Bangladesh. In the panel discussion implementation and follow up was highlighted as the crucial aspect of UPR. That needs close collaboration and coordination among civil society members.

Following lunch there was a final session that was facilitated by Joshua Cooper and Igor Bosc from ILO South Asian Region that looked at how NGOs/CSOs could use the UPR process and ILC to engage with the government and with wider constituencies. Joshua shared from his experience in the USA and working with NGOs from other countries about the value of direct testimony from victims/survivors and affected communities, the possibility to organise side-events and to use the web-casting of the UPR process to engage wider audiences – and to hold governments accountable.

Joshua emphasised that the UPR process should be seen as complementary to the other reporting processes such as the UN human rights Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures and Rapporteurs – and could be used to engage the UN's specialised agencies such as UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF and UNESCO. Joshua also mentioned that there will be an upcoming UPR of Bahrain. The CSO can prepare shadow report with related concerns and share with Joshua. He will then raise the issues.

In different countries NGOs/CSOs have not just submitted written documents but they have also produced short videos – that can be used in side events and submitted directly. Videos can be much more emotionally engaging, immediate and powerful than written reports.

As an example of this, DTP alumnus, Pervez Siddique, an independent film and documentary maker showed his recent film "Open Door" that dramatizes the abuse and wrongful detention of a Bangladeshi female domestic migrant worker in a Gulf country. The 10 minutes video is targeted towards labour attaches – to emphasise the practical role that they could and should play in addressing abuses. The video sparked lively discussion.

Igor Bosc shared the opportunities to engage with the government for both countries of origin and countries of destination referencing different ILO conventions and at the International Labour Conference that takes place each year. He shared that there are opportunities to refer to different ILO conventions like forced labour, freedom of association while developing bilateral agreements and MoUs on labour migration.

The workshop was brought to a close by Patrick Earle, Executive Director of the Diplomacy Training Program who thanked the participants for giving up a day of their weekend for the workshop, and the DTP alumni who organised the event.

Patrick noted that this was the first event organised by DTP alumni in Bangladesh and interested DTP alumni would need to reflect on the follow-up to the workshop and whether and how DTP alumni in Bangladesh would like to come together in the future. It was noted that the final module of the DTP/MFA program on the rights of migrant workers would be held in Dhaka in November/December and this might provide an opportunity for some follow-up or another workshop etc. DTP is happy to share its resources and materials. Before that, interested CSOs can sit together to reflect on how they can proceed with preparing a UPR report on behalf of CSOs, involving more stakeholders.

It was agreed that a follow-up email and workshop report would be sent to all of workshop participants², sharing contact details.

Appendix 1: Program Schedule

Time	Agenda
08:30 – 09:30am	Registration
09:30 – 10:00am	Welcome address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DTP, Patrick Earle - DTP Bangladesh Alumni - Pervez Siddiqui; John Tripura, Chanchana Chakma,
10.00 – 11:15am	Brief introduction on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human Rights, the Universal Periodic Review and Effective NGO engagement – Lessons from the first 2 UPR Cycles <hr/> Facilitator: Joshua Cooper
11.15 – 11:30am	TEA BREAK
11:30 – 1:00pm	Panel Discussion - The Universal Periodic Review Integrating UPR Engagement into Advocacy Strategies Sultana Kamal, Convenor-Human Rights Forum, Bangladesh (HRFB) Experience sharing on previous UPR engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kapaeeng Foundation - Human Rights Forum, Bangladesh (HRFB) <hr/> Facilitator: Sayeed Ahmed (DTP Alumnus)
1.00pm – 2:00pm	LUNCH
2:00 pm– 4:00pm	Preparation for 3 rd cycle- tips and innovative ideas <hr/> Facilitator: Joshua Cooper Closing Remarks – Patrick Earle, DTP
04:00 – 04:30pm	TEA Refreshments

²See appendix 2 for list of participants and their organisations

Appendix 2: Workshop Participants

Name	Organization	Email
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