

RICHARD J. DURBIN  
ILLINOIS

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United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1304

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The Honorable Shamsheer M. Chowdhury  
Bangladesh Embassy  
3510 International Drive, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

I have been contacted by a constituent from Illinois who is concerned about the trial of Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury in Bangladesh. Mr. Choudhury is a journalist who was arrested in November 2003 at Dhaka-Zia International Airport as he was about to board a flight to Israel and subsequently incarcerated for 17 months. He was later charged with sedition. His trial has begun but is in recess until February 28.

As a journalist, Mr. Choudhury has written articles critical of extremism and called for improved relations between Israel and Muslim countries. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, court authorities in Bangladesh have cited Mr. Choudhury's writings as the basis for the charges against him. If this is indeed the case, it would indicate that the sedition charge is a form of retaliation for Mr. Choudhury's political views and a serious violation of his human rights. This matter is made all the more serious by the fact that those convicted of sedition face the possibility of the death penalty.

Bangladesh enjoys a reputation as a thriving parliamentary democracy. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are two essential pillars of any free society, as recognized by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If journalists like Mr. Choudhury are not free to express their political views, it would represent a dramatic step backward for Bangladeshi democracy.

We ask that you communicate these concerns to the appropriate government authorities in Bangladesh. Please inform us of the status of Mr. Choudhury's case and the steps that are being taken to ensure he receives a fair trial. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator