



WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION ASIA PACIFIC REGION

"That they all may be one" - John 17:21

World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific demands protection and safety of LGBT human rights defenders and ensure freedom of speech in Bangladesh

The World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region (WSCF-AP) condemns in the strongest terms the recent brutal killings of two gay rights activists, Xulhaz Mannan and Tanay Mojumdar, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. On 25th April 2016, six unidentified attackers entered their apartment and hacked Mannan and Majumdar to death in the presence of Mannan's 80-year-old mother, leaving behind a seriously wounded security guard of the apartment building, according to the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency.

WSCF-AP expresses its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of Mannan and Mojumdar. Mannan was a passionate dreamer to create an inclusive community in Bangladesh. He stood for justice and human rights and tried to uplift the voices of the oppressed and marginalized sexual minorities, the LGBT community, through his courageous initiative. Mannan was the editor of the country's only LGBT magazine *Roopbaan*, which was launched two years ago to become a platform for promoting the rights of the LGBT community in Bangladesh. Mannan also worked at the U.S. embassy prior to joining the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, he was also serving as a founding member of the U.S. Embassy Diversity Committee.

"I am devastated by the brutal murder of Xulhaz Mannan and another young Bangladeshi," said U.S. Ambassador Marcia Bernicat. *"We abhor this senseless act of violence and urge the government of Bangladesh in the strongest terms to apprehend the criminals behind these murders."*

The chairperson of Student Christian Movement (SCM) Bangladesh, Edward Tarun, condemned the recent killings and expressed his concern about the recent developments in the country in which a series of systematic killings have been carried out to suppress any expression of liberal ideas or writings of dissent by civil society.

"We are no longer allowed freedom of speech," Tarun said. *"There is fear-mongering among the community who express their dissent. The government is least bothered to take action against the perpetrators. We are living in a dangerous situation in the country."*



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Earlier this month a Bangladeshi law student who had expressed secular views online was hacked to death with machetes and was then shot in Dhaka. This attack took place within a context in which last year four prominent secular bloggers were also brutally killed with machetes. The four bloggers had all appeared on a list of 84 "atheist bloggers" drawn up by Islamic groups in 2013 that was widely circulated.

The situation in Bangladesh is disturbing as the targeting of progressive authors and writers is growing at an alarming rate. We in the student community in WSCF Asia-Pacific Region seek your solidarity and action to protect the lives and human rights of minorities in the country, especially Bangladesh's sexual minorities.

We stand in solidarity with the justice and peace-seeking community and urge the Bangladesh government to urgently undertake the following actions:

1. Ensure that everyone in Bangladesh is secured and protected under human rights protection laws, particularly the country's progressive thinkers, writers and creative artists who have recently become victims in the hands of religious fanatics;
2. Undertake measures to ensure the protection and safety of all LGBT human rights defenders in the country;
3. Bring the culprits to justice as quickly as possible and render the most stringent punishment in order to prevent any future occurrence of such heinous criminal acts;
4. Proactively address cases of violence against LGBT people, including the implementation of measures to prevent all forms of violence by investigating and penalizing such actions and by undertaking necessary reforms to the justice system;
5. Ensure freedom of speech as a fundamental right of every human being.

In Solidarity,

**Human Rights Justice and Peace Committee – WSCF - AP
April 28, 2016**