



Commonwealth
Lawyers Association



8 June

CLA JOINT STATEMENT WITH LAWASIA ON THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association and LAWASIA expresses immense concern at repeated reports regarding interference in the bar elections of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) of Bangladesh.

The Supreme Court Bar Association of Bangladesh notified the period for filing nomination papers for various posts in SCBA between 19.04.2026 to 28.04.2026. The qualifications for said posts are governed by the SCBA Constitution. Despite meeting the requisite qualifications, multiple qualified lawyers have been refused nomination by the current SCBA administration without any hearing, written reason or a formal decision being communication and with no avenue for appealing said denial.

It has also come to the attention of the CLA and LAWASIA that some lawyers have been denied nomination due to their alleged political affiliations, with some nomination papers being rejected on grounds of being “collaborators of fascists”.

Further news reports have also stated that approximately 200 lawyers, purportedly associated with a party whose activities are currently banned under the Anti-Terrorism Act, have been unable to participate in at least 13 bar association elections since January 2026.¹

CLA and LAWASIA has also received reports of former judges of the Supreme Court and practicing lawyers being named in multiple criminal cases with serious offences², some of which are alleged to be completely fictitious, and have been subjected to criminal intimidation and threats. These reports, if true, are deeply alarming.

CLA and LAWASIA find it relevant to recall the **Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers** 1990 which, *inter alia*, state that:

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

17. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

¹ <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/pro-al-lawyers-shut-out-least-13-bar-elections-4173681>

² <https://protect-lawyers.org/en/bangladesh-lawyers-arrested-and-prosecuted-following-a-peaceful-commemoration/>

23. Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

24. Lawyers shall be entitled to form and join self-governing professional associations to represent their interests, promote their continuing education and training and protect their professional integrity. The executive body of the professional associations shall be elected by its members and shall exercise its functions without external interference.

The right of lawyers to freedom of expression, belief and association is essential to the functioning of an independent judiciary and judicial system. The CLA and LAWASIA call upon the Government of Bangladesh, the Supreme Court Bar Association of Bangladesh, the Bar Council of Bangladesh, and other relevant authorities to:

- i. Ensure the immediate cessation of any interference in the elections of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Bangladesh and all other bar associations across the country, and to guarantee that all elections are conducted freely, fairly and in strict accordance with the applicable constitutions and rules of each association.
- ii. Ensure that all qualified lawyers are permitted to stand for election to bar association offices without discrimination on the basis of political affiliation, past association, or any other ground not recognised under the applicable constitutional requirements of the relevant bar association.
- iii. Ensure that any rejection of nomination papers is carried out in strict conformity with the applicable rules, with written reasons provided to the affected candidate and a clear and accessible avenue of appeal made available.
- iv. Immediately review all criminal cases filed against former judges of the Honourable Supreme Court of Bangladesh and practising lawyers which are alleged to be fictitious and politically motivated, and to ensure that no individual is subjected to criminal prosecution as a means of intimidation, harassment or the suppression of legitimate professional activity
- v. Reaffirm their commitment to the independence of the legal profession as a cornerstone of the rule of law, access to justice and the protection of human rights in Bangladesh.

The CLA and LAWASIA will continue to monitor the situation closely. Both organisations remain committed to advocating for the independence of the legal profession and the rule of law worldwide, and call upon all relevant stakeholders, including the international legal community, to lend their voice to these concerns.

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The **Commonwealth Lawyers Association** is an international non-profit organisation which exists to promote and maintain the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth by ensuring that an independent and efficient legal profession, with the highest standards of ethics and integrity, serves the people of the Commonwealth. commonwealthlawyers.com. **LAWASIA** is likewise an international non-profit organisation of law associations and individual lawyers with a primary focus of protecting human rights and maintaining the rule of law in the Asia-Pacific region.