

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 24, 2007

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed  
Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government  
Dhaka  
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dear Dr. Ahmed:

We write to express our support for the ongoing efforts of the caretaker government to institute the economic, political, and social reforms needed to assist Bangladesh in becoming a prosperous, democratic government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, we also write to express our concern with recent reports indicating that the national elections, which were originally scheduled for January 22, 2007, have been postponed, yet again, until the end of 2008. Equally disconcerting are the same reports that describe efforts by the caretaker government to arrest and detain more than 250,000 Bangladeshi citizens without respect for due process or the civil rights of its citizens.

As you know, this past May, several Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, met with your Special Envoy, Farooq Sobhan, in Washington D.C. to discuss United States support for Bangladesh. During our discussion, we pledged support for trade measures such as the Tariff Relief Assistance for Developing Economies Act that will provide Bangladeshi exporting industries with greater economic stability through stronger trade relations with the United States. At the same time, we expressed our hope that free and fair national elections would be held as soon as reasonably possible, and our desire to see the caretaker government recognize and respect the rights of its citizens, even as it pursues initiatives to end corruption and fraud.

The continuing news reports describing the caretaker government's unwillingness to provide specific benchmarks that will lead to national elections and the continued accounts of human rights violations are alarming. The optimism felt for a country moving toward democracy has been replaced with concern that military rule will govern. Indeed, the need to delay the January 22, 2007 elections was a necessary course of action to ensure that a fair and just election is administered. However, it has been more than seven months since the caretaker government was installed and the constraints placed on civil rights have not been eased. The same citizens and international community that supported your efforts in January deserve a clear roadmap that will provide them stability and certainty for the future.

We wholeheartedly agree that corruption has no place in politics, the electoral process, or in government. Building a corruption-free electoral process is critical to the future of Bangladesh. Yet, the success of a democracy also rests in the ability of its people to enjoy civil and political rights unhindered, including the freedom to associate with and participate in the political party of one's choosing without fear of repercussion. Unfortunately, the recent high profile arrests of former Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, together with the arrest and the 17 month detainment of Shoaib Choudhury only gives credence to the speculation that the caretaker government's anti-corruption campaign is politically motivated and contrary to international human rights and due process practices. During this turbulent time, it is important that each and every citizen, regardless of social and political party affiliation, be able to expect that the rights and civil liberties provided by Bangladeshi law, including due process, will be followed in each and every case. The success of a democracy rests in the ability of its people and the press to rely on the Constitution and laws, which they supported, and operate in an open and independent process, one in which views can be expressed without fear of intimidation.

We urge you to publish, as soon as possible, a timeline describing the process to be administered over the next several months that will result in elections before the end of 2008, including the compilation of a voter list. In addition, we urge you to restore the fundamental rights of all Bangladeshi citizens, including the right to due process under the law. We remain committed to supporting the caretaker government and its reform efforts. However, the political and civil rights of the Bangladeshi citizens must not be compromised in the name of reform.

Sincerely,



Steve Chabot  
Member of Congress



Mark Kirk  
Member of Congress