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Dhaka, 19 February 2015

For immediate release

Press Release

A three-member delegation of the Sub-committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament led by MEP Cristian Dan Preda (The European People's Party) visited Bangladesh from 16- 20 February. The other members of the European Parliament in the delegation were MEP Josef Weidenholzer (the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) and MEP Karol Karski (European Conservatives and Reformists Group).

The European Parliament considers human rights and democracy an essential element of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the EU, in accordance with article 1 of the 2001 bilateral Cooperation Agreement.

The purpose of the visit was to assess the current human rights situation in the country, focusing on the areas of labour rights, children and women and minority rights. During discussions Members paid special attention to civil and political rights against the background of violence generated by the current political impasse. The delegation, having met government and opposition representatives, urged an immediate end to the increasing violence and echoed calls from the international community and Bangladeshi civil society to solve the political crisis.

In follow-up to the European Parliament resolution of September 2014 the delegation raised Parliament's continued concerns regarding enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Freedom of expression was also a matter of concern, discussed with multiple interlocutors. Peace and stability should not be restored at the expense of civil and political rights. Freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of a pluralistic and vibrant democracy. Members underlined the need for consolidating democratic institutions and reiterated their expectations that the draft Foreign Donations Act should guarantee adequate space for civil society organisations to continue working for the betterment of the situation of vulnerable populations. This is also critical for the smooth implementation of EU funded development projects.

The delegation met trade union and business leaders, environmental activists, representatives of local and international civil society, members of minority groups, senior political leaders, the Speaker of Parliament and members of the government.

The Members visited an RMG factory in Dhaka and exchanged views with Accord representatives, trade unions and industry stakeholders to gain insight into the implementation of the Sustainability Compact and to assess labour conditions. While welcoming the progress achieved through inspections and consultations, they called for further support to Accord, and working towards a supportive environment to ensure effective rights to collective bargaining and the full implementation of the amended Labour Law including in the EPZs.

The delegation also undertook a field visit to Mirpur to see a school and a project linked to children's migration to urban areas financed under EU-funded programmes, run by the NGO "Save the children". The delegation welcomed government efforts and progress achieved in basic education of children while encouraged further measures, such as nationwide birth registration and the protection of the particularly vulnerable groups, especially in large urban areas.

Members also discussed women's rights and children's rights and urged the government to ensure the full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord. Members expressed hope that the government of Bangladesh will continue engaging with the international community towards improving the situation of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. During various meetings Members reiterated the EU's principled position on the death penalty, opposing it under all circumstances.

The Chair of the delegation stated: "We were here because of our concerns regarding the human rights situation. We need Bangladesh as a strong partner. The respect for Human Rights and democracy will be an essential component for Bangladesh to realise its full potential in order to reach its declared goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2021".

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