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ARTICLE 19

PRESS RELEASE

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Bangladesh: ARTICLE 19 and partners welcome the government's decision to approve Right to Information Ordinance 2008

ARTICLE 19, Mass Line media Centre, Shuprosashoner Jonno Pracharivijan and Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication welcome the government's decision to approve in principle the Right to Information Ordinance 2008.

“Such a law, when finally approved by the government, would serve as a watershed in stepping up efforts for good governance, ensuring greater transparency and accountability in Bangladesh” said Dr. Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 executive Director.

The council of advisers of the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh provisionally approved the Right to Information Ordinance 2008 yesterday. The cabinet has sent back the draft law with suggestions for some changes. After making the changes the information ministry which initiated the move is expected to get the draft law vetted by the law ministry before placing it to the cabinet for final approval. When enacted, Bangladesh would become the seventy fifth country in the world to have such a law.

Commenting on the government's move to provisionally accept the draft legislation, Tahmina Rahman, ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh director noted that *‘ARTICLE 19 and our partner organisations in Bangladesh hope with wider civil society and media advocacy groups that the government following its earlier example of good practice will make a full disclosure of the changes made to the draft Ordinance and make it publicly available before final signing off.’*

Kamrul Hasan Monju, Exective Director, Mass Line Media Centre, added that *“the extent of the successful implementation of the law would largely depend on the creation of demand for public information. This will be generated by a mass campaign for public awareness, the commitment and political will of public institutions to openness and the formulation of an effective action plan for the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the law.”*

Background:

An initial draft bill was put out by the government for a public consultation process in early April of this year. ARTICLE 19 and partner organizations provided formal submissions suggesting changes to the draft based on discussions with activists and civil society in over 20 districts of the country. Key recommendations included the narrowing of the regime of exceptions to providing information to the public and consistent standards of harm for their application, improvements to

protect the independence of the Information Commission, and making openness obligations applicable to legislative, judicial and constitutionally established bodies.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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- ARTICLE19 is an independent human rights organisation that works globally to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.

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