

Press Release

CPJ Organizes Roundtable on Rule of Law in Bangladesh Engaging Experts and Youth

Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ), BRAC University, organized a roundtable discussion on “*The Rule of Law in Bangladesh: Challenges and Way Forward.*” The event was held on December 15, 2024, at the BRAC Centre, Mohakhali, Dhaka. The opening remarks were delivered by Manzoor Hasan, Executive Director of CPJ, who also served as the chair of the event. The discussion was moderated by Shahariar Sadat, Deputy Executive Director of CPJ. Other attendees included a diverse group of journalists, academics, NGO representatives, lawyers, activists, university students, and other relevant stakeholders, leading to a rich exchange of insights and perspectives on the current state of the rule of law in Bangladesh and its impact on peace and justice in the country.

It is worth mentioning here that the World Justice Project (WJP) defines the rule of law as a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers accountability, just laws, open government, and accessible justice. Over the past decade, Bangladesh’s performance in the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index has shown a consistent decline, reflecting a gradual erosion of the rule of law. In 2015, Bangladesh was ranked 93rd on the index, but by 2023, it had dropped to 127th. This decline has exacerbated several long-standing challenges, negatively impacting both peace and access to justice in the country. The deterioration of peace is evident in Bangladesh’s declining rankings on the Global Peace Index. In 2015, the country was ranked 62nd, but by 2024, it had fallen to 93rd. Access to justice has remained elusive as well. The judiciary is now burdened with a backlog of at least 4.3 million cases. Alarming, this backlog is growing by about 200,000 cases each year.

The event started with a presentation by Dr. Faustina Pereira, Senior Fellow at CPJ, which highlighted the historic trend of rule of law, peace, and justice in Bangladesh. The participants were invited to share their thoughts on three key points. The first point of discussion was identification of factors contributing to the weakening of the rule of law in Bangladesh. Several

factors were identified, including, lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies, tacit political influence over the judiciary, flawed democracy, lack of legal knowledge among citizens, weak implementation of laws, and a lack of self-reflection among key stakeholders. The second point of discussion focused on highlighting the key challenges in improving the rule of law. Numerous challenges were highlighted, including, not being able to get out of the colonial mindset resulting in outdated approaches, declining ethical values, not properly addressing the rights of minorities, power politics resulting in state capture of institutions, outdated laws and policies, lack of institutional and individual accountability, and lack of awareness about rights and responsibilities. The following points were articulated as recommendations: regular and evidence-based evaluation of the justice system; ensuring that institutions uphold democratic norms; reforming the education system to incorporate ethics and integrity into the curriculum; and fostering social cohesion.

The event concluded with remarks by the Guest of Honour, Ms. Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, who emphasized on the difference between the rule of law and rule by law. Among other points, Ms. Khan emphasized that the government should prioritize human-centred justice, meaning that the justice system should be designed to meet the needs and rights of individuals, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable. Without a sound understanding and practice of human rights, the rule of law can quickly devolve into rule by law.

For further information, please contact:

Arafat Reza, Research Associate, Phone: +8801601680916, Email: arafat.reza@bracu.ac.bd