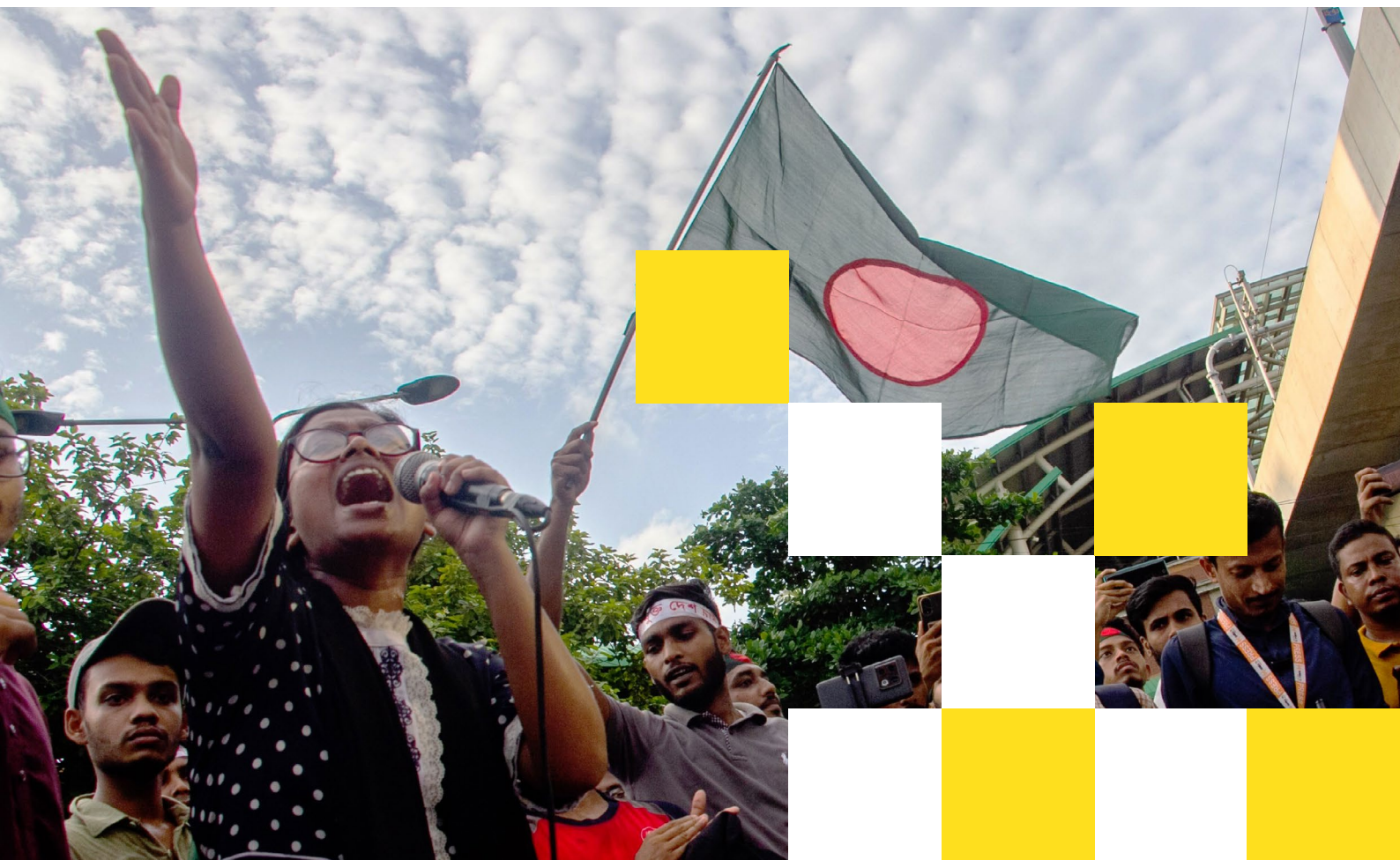


ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPARATION FOR TORTURE IN BANGLADESH: SURVIVORS' EXPERIENCES

Briefing Paper

April 2026



REDRESS

Ending torture, seeking justice for survivors

blast
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Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) is working with REDRESS to respond to the crisis in Bangladesh that began in July 2024 by seeking legal and policy reforms for accountability and reparation for torture, and enhancing survivors' access to justice and reparation.

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INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper seeks to provide the perspective of those who survived violence (torture and other serious human rights violations) in Bangladesh in the uprising of July/August 2024. It focuses particularly on survivors' experiences regarding justice and accountability after the violence, on their priorities, intentions, and the obstacles they face in accessing justice, as well as their expectations regarding reparation. Its primary objective is to inform and promote reparation initiatives in Bangladesh for survivors of the July/August 2024 uprising, ensuring that such efforts are grounded in survivors' views, responsive to the barriers they currently encounter in accessing justice and reparation, and aligned with international human rights standards.

The information here is primarily based on information collected from survivors during documentation interviews conducted in 2025. The Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) interviewed 80 survivors uprising using a structured, purposive identification process. The questionnaire drew on tools developed by the United Nations (UN) Fact-Finding Mission, adapted to the Bangladeshi legal context, and reviewed by BLAST's legal team. Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the survivors. The process gathered information on the violations experienced, as well as survivors' age and gender, any relief received, their desire for justice, priorities, intentions to pursue individual legal claims, and the forms of reparation they expect from the government.

While this paper identifies clear trends among the 80 survivors interviewed, the data does not necessarily reflect the situation of all survivors nationwide. Rather, it captures the personal experiences of these 80 survivors and highlights structural obstacles to accessing reparation, including several of those identified in our earlier briefing paper, *"Exploring Avenues in Bangladesh for Reparation for Survivors of Torture"*, published by REDRESS and BLAST in February 2026.

CONTEXT

The July/August 2024 uprising in Bangladesh was characterised by systematic and widespread human rights violations, committed primarily against civilians. Violence against protesters and other individuals resulted in thousands of victims of serious crimes, including killings, arbitrary detention, and torture. According to the [UN Fact-Finding Mission Report](#), at least 1,400 protest-related deaths were documented, most of them caused by firearms, including military-grade weapons and other equipment used by security forces and affiliated paramilitary groups. In addition, the report documented that more than 11,702 individuals were arbitrarily arrested, many of whom were subjected to torture and inhuman detention conditions, whilst some suffered gender-based and sexual violence, including rape. Thousands of individuals sustained serious, life-changing injuries.

Bangladesh has accepted various international obligations to ensure comprehensive reparation for victims of gross human rights violations including torture, through the ratification of several core human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT). In February 2026, Bangladesh further reinforced these commitments by withdrawing its reservation to Article 14 of UNCAT, thereby strengthening its obligation to ensure effective remedies and reparation for victims of torture.

As a result of ratifying these treaties, Bangladesh has an obligation to provide reparation when human rights violations are attributable to them, including when they are committed by State authorities or occur with their tolerance or acquiescence. Where violations are committed by private actors, States nevertheless retain an international obligation to ensure the availability of effective domestic mechanisms through which victims can obtain reparation, regardless of the ability or willingness of the perpetrator to provide redress for the victims.

The [briefing paper](#) published by REDRESS and BLAST in February 2026 analysed the main avenues for accessing justice and reparation for survivors of the uprising in the light of international standards and obligations accepted by Bangladesh. It also included an analysis of the main obstacles for survivors to access reparation and the limitations of the current avenues. It concluded, for example, that the legal avenues available in Bangladesh to those who suffered torture and other serious human rights abuses in the July/August uprising (including judicial proceedings under the Torture and Custodial Death Act, general criminal procedures, and the Constitutional Writ Petition process) are complex, subject to chronic delays, and provide only limited possibilities for adequate compensation and reparation. The administrative reparation mechanisms established by the interim government to respond to the urgent needs of survivors, including the creation of the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation and the Relief Fund, were conceived as emergency relief measures rather than comprehensive reparation schemes. Additionally, these administrative mechanisms have faced allegations of corruption, delays in disbursement, insufficient protection for victims, and limited amounts of compensation.

■ ENGAGING WITH THE SURVIVORS ■

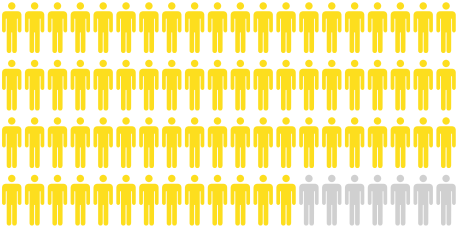
BLAST collected information from 80 survivors, documenting cases of arbitrary detention, torture, serious injuries, and other forms of abuse. The purpose of the information collection was to gather detailed accounts of the incidents as well as the survivors’ main priorities and needs. All survivors were interviewed following a screening process and verification methodology developed by BLAST, which included a review of medical records, conducted with the survivors’ consent, as well as an examination of other relevant documentation.

Further comments and reflections from survivors were obtained during the workshop “*Reflections on Justice and Reparation for Victims of the July Uprising,*” facilitated by BLAST in September 2025. The workshop brought together survivors and relatives, practitioners, and representatives of civil society organisations to discuss avenues for accountability and reparation for the victims.

■ INFORMATION FROM SURVIVORS ■

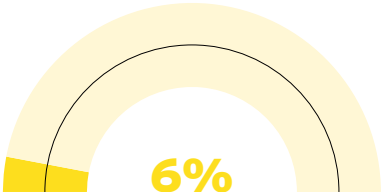
Out of the 80 survivors, at least eighteen suffered severe ocular trauma resulting in blindness, with pellets damaging their eyes and causing irreversible damage to the cornea and retina. Others sustained permanent mobility impairments from gunshot wounds and spinal injuries that left them unable to stand or walk as before. Several experienced hearing losses from close-range sound grenade explosions that ruptured eardrums and caused lasting disorientation. Many continue to suffer from profound psychological trauma.

91% of the survivors interviewed had been shot



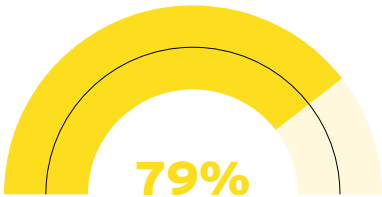
Of the 80 people interviewed, 73 were victims of gunshot injuries inflicted by security forces or paramilitary groups. The remainder reported having sustained injuries caused by blunt force and, in some cases, sharp weapons.

6% of survivors interviewed had been arbitrarily detained



Five individuals of the 80 interviewed reported having been arbitrarily detained, and all of them described ill-treatment and other treatment that could amount to torture, including beatings whilst in custody and inhuman detention conditions.

79% of the survivors interviewed had already received some support from the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation



Only 17 of the 80 survivors had not received any relief or lacked available information; among them, 11 had already applied and were awaiting a response, while the remaining survivors chose not to apply for interim relief.

Parvin's story

Parvin is a 27 year old woman from Dhaka. She is a garments worker who was on her way back from work in July 2024 when she was caught in the middle of police action during the violence. Six shotgun pellets destroyed her cornea. She was not actively participating in the protests.

After her urgent situation had been documented by BLAST, they immediately sought medical referral. Bangladeshis, including those in the diaspora, stepped forward and informally took on responsibility for assisting individual survivors like Parvin. They covered hospital bills, rent, and daily expenses.



© BLAST

A donor cornea was flown in from Sri Lanka. Surgery was performed. But, tragically, it was too late. The damage was irreversible. Parvin lost her vision completely in both eyes.

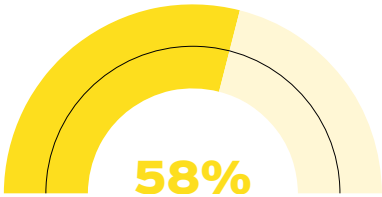
The first failure in Parvin's story is structural. There was no decentralised emergency centre equipped to respond immediately to mass ocular trauma. In cases like this, hours matter. The system failed her.

After the operation, Parvin showed BLAST photographs of herself from before the incident. She said, "Look, I used to look so pretty. Before, my husband used to beat me. Now, after being injured, he no longer beats me. But I fear he is seeing other women. I am no longer pretty. I do not know how long he will keep me."

Effective reparation for Parvin will require more than reimbursing a medical bill. She needs transformative reparation that includes disability adaptation, rehabilitation and psychosocial support, safe housing, protection from domestic and other forms of gender violence, and economic reintegration.

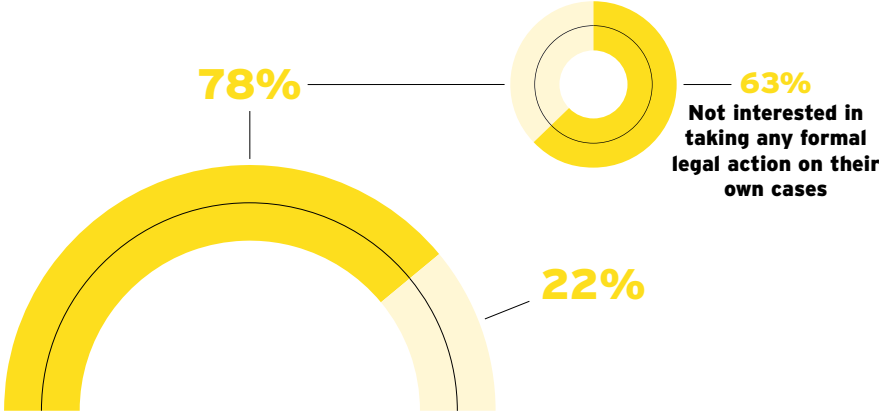
All successful applicants who received support from the July Shaheed Foundation received the standard amount of around US\$800. Injuries are put into categories by the Foundation, depending on the type and seriousness of harm suffered. However, a key concern raised by many survivors was that due to inadequate medical assessments being carried out, they were often placed in a lower category that did not accurately reflect the severity of the harm they suffered, and so did not then receive additional support - such as medical treatment - which was only available for those in the higher categories. For example, serious cases involving ocular trauma and pellets lodged in various parts of the body, including the skull, were often classified in lower categories. This misclassification not only underestimated the seriousness of their injuries but also resulted in inadequate assistance being provided.

58% Of the survivors interviewed said they needed medical treatment or further medical treatment



Of the survivors interviewed, 46 indicated that they needed medical treatment or further medical treatment. Three reported that doctors had informed them that no further medical treatment options were available. 27 considered that they did not need medical treatment, while five stated that they were already receiving medical treatment at the time of the interview.

78% of the survivors interviewed expressed a desire for justice



While 78% of the survivors interviewed expressed a desire for justice, 22% said they were not interested in justice in relation to what happened to them.

But of the 78% who expressed a desire for justice, 63% of these people said they were not interested in taking any formal legal action on their own cases.

The story of Armaan and his mother

In Chattogram, BLAST met a mother caring for her teenage son, Armaan, who on 18 July 2024 sustained severe lower-body injuries from gunfire that left him permanently immobile and dependent on assistance for movement, alongside another child with significant learning disabilities.

When she approached the BLAST team, she did not begin with demands for criminal prosecution of the perpetrators. She asked for help securing Armaan's birth certificate so she could access state financial assistance. Her husband was intentionally refusing to sign it out of spite.

The violence she was confronting was administrative just as much as it was physical.

Reparation must therefore recognise carers' rights, the burden of care and dependency structures as concrete realities.



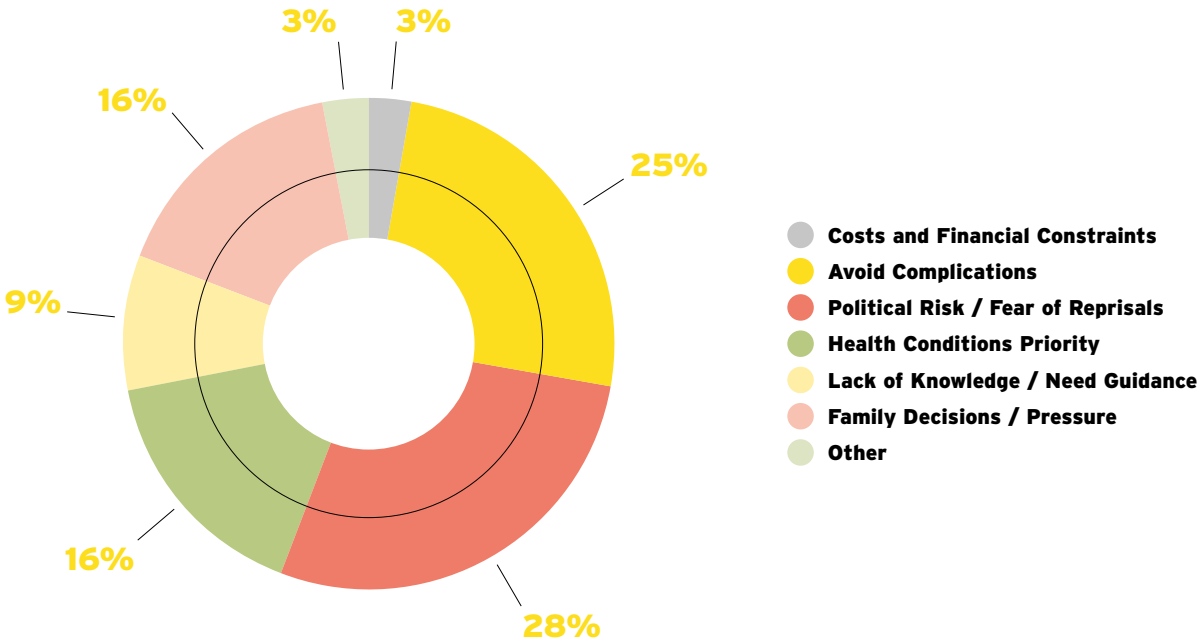
© Armaan and BLAST, Ensuring Justice For Victims of Torture July Project Workshop

During the interviews conducted by BLAST, survivors were asked about their intentions and willingness to pursue justice, whether through accountability processes or through reparation mechanisms. The questionnaire also sought to understand their priorities and expectations regarding different forms of reparation. A clear majority of interviewees explicitly expressed a desire for justice, including the accountability of perpetrators as well as access to reparation.

Out of the 64 people who indicated that they want justice, 40 stated that they were not interested in taking any legal action on their own cases. Some of them did not specify the reason for this reluctance, however, among those who did provide an explanation, the reasons included the following (and some cited more than one of these):

- A desire to “avoid complications” (including legal complexities and costs)
- Political risk and fear of reprisals
- Health conditions and the need to prioritize medical treatment
- Lack of knowledge and need for guidance
- Family decisions or pressure

Reasons for not filing a case



16 of the 80 survivors interviewed stated that they were not interested in engaging in any justice-related processes in relation to their cases, either due to a lack of willingness to do so or due a preference to avoid formal mechanisms.

The primary factor preventing survivors from reporting their cases to the judiciary or law enforcement authorities is the lack of trust in the system and the absence of effective protection mechanisms. Survivors have commented that legal procedures are often excessively long, politicised, or ultimately ineffective, further discouraging them from pursuing formal remedies.

Some survivors who have expressed fear of reprisals for reporting their cases through legal avenues indicated that they would be willing to file a claim if it were submitted by an organisation on their behalf, provided that their identities and personal data were treated with strict confidentiality, but this is not currently possible within the domestic mechanisms in Bangladesh.

The lack of trust felt by many survivors is compounded by the absence of convictions under the 2013 Anti-Torture Act and the failure of existing judicial avenues to provide comprehensive reparation. Several survivors have commented that they do not see any tangible benefits of reporting their cases.

Several expressed fear of becoming part of mass criminal cases (a long-standing poor practice in Bangladesh, in which scores of named and unnamed suspects are listed in a case in which there is little or no evidence to link the individuals to any criminal conduct) and chose to stay away from formal legal proceedings altogether.

Therefore, whilst a clear majority of the survivors interviewed wanted justice in principle, structural, financial, and personal barriers discourage them from pursuing individual legal action.

Male survivor shot by the police on 18th July 2024 in Dhaka



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Protesters and Bangladesh Police during the Quota Reform Movement in 2024



I was shot in the leg and hospitalised for three months. Due to the injury, I am unable to work for long periods. During this time, the Imu Apu's team helped me by setting up a small shop and supported my family while I was recovering.

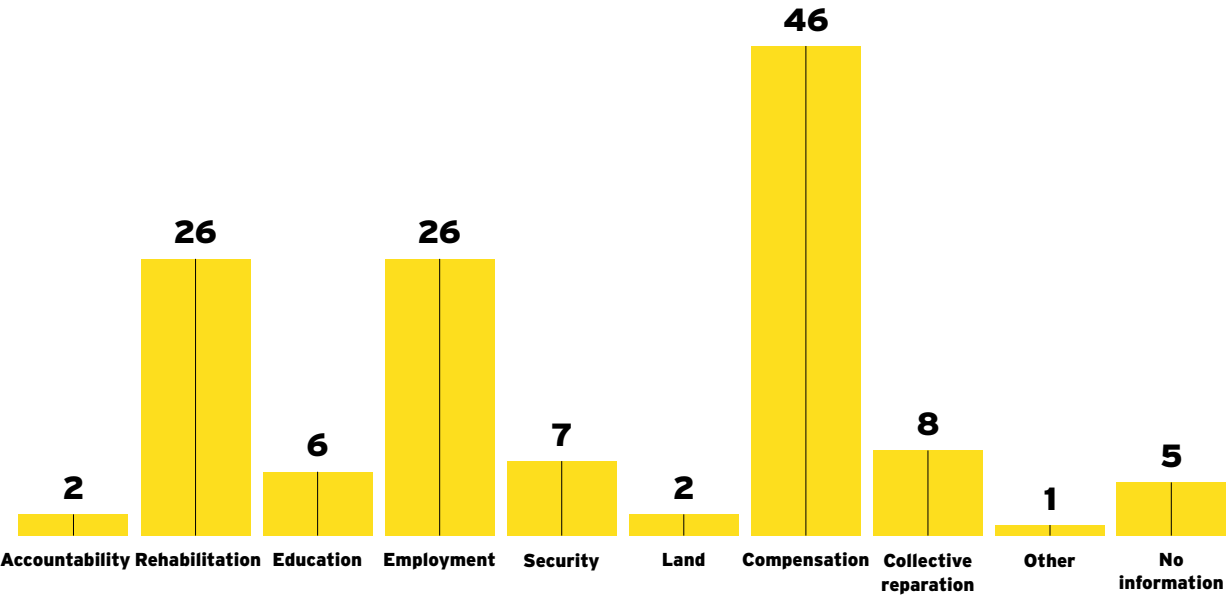
In July, Sriti Foundation provided me with 100,000 BDT [around US\$800]; however, the cost of my leg treatment exceeded 300,000 BDT [around US\$2440]. As a result, my daughter's education has been interrupted. Imu Apu and Ashfia Apu supported my family's basic needs for one year.¹

I now require further and more advanced medical treatment for my leg. My priority is to secure my family's livelihood and ensure that my children can continue their education.

¹ Imu Apu and Ashfia Apu are part of a group of Bangladeshi architects with whom BLAST is connected. The group, known as the Visionary Voyage Group, has, among other initiatives, mobilised ad hoc private funding and provided guardianship support to survivors, including access to medical services.

Survivors were also asked about their priorities regarding reparation. They were asked an open-ended question inviting them to identify any additional measures they wished to request from the government. Compensation, rehabilitation, and employment opportunities emerged as the most frequently cited priorities (many cited more than one priority), and these priorities are clearly included in the international standards on reparation which require a comprehensive and holistic approach:

Additional Requests from Victims



Many survivors had faced prolonged delays in hospitals simply waiting to be examined or referred. Many struggled with bureaucratic hurdles when applying for government financial assistance.

What united the survivors was the lack of effective measures from Bangladesh to deliver redress for the harms caused. Most of the interviewees were experiencing profound economic fragility and the need for urgent rehabilitation, because many of the injuries were such that the survivors could not return to work.

Hiron's story



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Protesters gather in Dhaka during the 2024 quota reform movement, waving national flags and calling for changes to Bangladesh's public sector recruitment system

Hiron was severely injured during the violence. He and his wife are in an interfaith marriage. Their families had already distanced themselves from them because of that union. When Hiron lost his ability to work, there was no extended family network to absorb the shock. They faced imminent eviction.

In their case, state violence intersected directly with social and religious marginalisation.

Reparation for them means more than compensating for a physical injury. It means preventing homelessness and recognising how social exclusion magnifies economic harm and exacerbates the impact of violence.

THE SURVIVORS' PRIORITIES

The survivors who attended the workshop organised by BLAST were categorical about what mattered most to them – even though they didn't have detailed knowledge about the forms of reparation they might be entitled to under international standards.

They asked for immediate financial support to prevent a total collapse of their households, but they also insisted that assistance needed to include livelihood restoration, and not create dependency. They wanted re-training where necessary and structured support that restored their independence and maintained their dignity.

In Bangladesh, the ability of the main bread-winner (which, due to entrenched gender stereotypes, is often the man) to provide for their family is deeply tied to social identity and self-worth. Losing that ability is not just economic harm. It is a profound social humiliation layered directly onto a physical injury.

Survivors also emphasized the need for quality, long-term medical follow up and – for many of them - the urgent need to be able to access medical treatment. Many eye injury survivors spoke about the fear that their sight would further deteriorate and the need for continuous, quality care. In cases of eye injuries, which in several instances resulted in partial or total blindness, there is a particular need for specialised care and rehabilitation services. This is essential to ensure that survivors can adequately adapt to the long-term consequences of their injuries. Providing sustained and tailored support in this regard is crucial to safeguarding their dignity, autonomy, and quality of life. Mental health support was also repeatedly raised because many recognised that trauma deepened over time.

Survivors in Bangladesh therefore demand not just immediate survival support, but also long term economic reintegration and integrated medical, psychosocial, legal, and administrative services. When victims are women, reparation must also ensure that they will not be subject to gender violence. Survivors were clear that reparation is not just about money, but also about restoring the possibility of living a life with dignity and avoiding repetition of the crimes and human rights violations.

These demands from survivors reflect the concept of 'transformative reparation', which attempts to change the circumstances in which victims and survivors live, and address the unequal structures and norms at the root of the violation. Transformative reparation seeks to improve the lives of survivors and to eliminate the conditions that enabled violations to occur, rather than merely restoring survivors to the position they were in prior to the violations. Where transformative reparation has been implemented in other countries, the measures have included, for example, training on human rights and gender for relevant authorities, including members of security forces and the judiciary; the adoption of protocols aligned with international standards to effectively regulate the use of force during protests; and the meaningful participation of survivors in decisions concerning their reparation measures. From an individual perspective, such measures have included, for example, vocational training for survivors, educational scholarships, support for productive projects, and employment programmes for victims.

Transformative reparation can change people's lives. In the context of Bangladesh, transformative reparation could mean that further harm to a survivor is prevented because emergency medical services respond in time; that reparation mechanisms recognise the vulnerability of survivors, thus

preventing them being pushed into homelessness; that compensation is comprehensive and not only provided as interim relief; that parents do not face administrative obstructions in securing support for an injured child; and that grieving families receive acknowledgment and the truth about violations without years of delay.

This must be the standard against which action by the government of Bangladesh is measured when considering their compliance with their obligation to ensure reparation for survivors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account survivors' perceptions, existing international obligations, and complementing the recommendations previously presented in the briefing paper "*Exploring Avenues in Bangladesh for Reparation for Survivors of Torture*", REDRESS and BLAST make the following recommendations to the Government of Bangladesh, urging it to:

- Ensure a comprehensive and effective assessment of the needs and priorities of survivors of the July/August 2024 uprising, with a view to establishing adequate, accessible, and trauma-informed reparation mechanisms that address their urgent needs and incorporate transformative approaches and guarantees of non-repetition. Such measures should include both individual and collective forms of reparation. Individual measures should encompass accessible rehabilitation services to address physical and psychosocial needs, as well as support for livelihoods, including employment programmes, educational opportunities, and broader development initiatives. Collective and structural measures should include public apologies, training for security forces on human rights standards and the use of force, judicial reforms, and truth-telling initiatives.
- Ensure that the design and implementation of reparation mechanisms guarantee the meaningful participation of survivors, with particular attention to the effective inclusion and representation of groups in situations of heightened vulnerability, including women, children, and persons with disabilities.
- Facilitate the dissemination of information on existing and forthcoming relief and reparation mechanisms, ensuring that such information is accessible, clear, and understandable to all segments of the population. Provide adequate support to survivors to enable them to effectively access and make applications to these mechanisms.
- Provide relief and compensation to survivors that is proportionate to the injuries suffered, either through existing mechanisms or through the development of new mechanisms, ensuring the proper categorisation of injuries.

Photo cover by: Rayhan9d CC 4.0
A protester speaks to demonstrators
during the 2024 quota reform protests
in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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