



THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

11 MAR 2009

Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens  
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector  
Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion  
Senator for New South Wales  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Stephens

Thank you for your letter received on 18 February 2009 expressing concern at the treatment of Mr Shoab Choudhury by the Bangladeshi Government.

The Australian High Commission in Dhaka is monitoring the case against Mr Choudhury and the High Commissioner has agreed to meet with Mr Choudhury's lawyer, Dr Richard Benkin, in Dhaka. In the event that Dr Benkin is not able to meet with Australian officials in Dhaka, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is exploring other options by which Dr Benkin can share his concerns about this case with the Australian Government.

During the UN Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh held on 4 February 2009, Australia recommended Bangladesh take measures to protect human rights defenders, including journalists, from harassment and repression. The Australian Government will continue to encourage the Government of Bangladesh to ensure that Mr Choudhury's trial is conducted in an expeditious and transparent fashion in accordance with proper judicial process and that his human rights are respected at all times.

Thank you for bringing your views to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith