

Thursday, December 3, 2009

2 UN experts on poverty, human rights in Dhaka

Star Online Report

Two independent UN experts arrived in Dhaka on Thursday on a weeklong visit to monitor the status of extreme poverty, safe drinking water and sanitation and its relationship with human rights.

The experts are Magdalena Sepulveda, research director at the International Council on Human Rights Policy in Geneva, and Catarina de Albuquerque, a Portuguese lawyer.

Human Rights Forum on Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Bangladesh, a network of 17 organisations, informed it at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters Unity in the capital today.

They are in Bangladesh upon invitation from the government of Bangladesh and will collect first hand information from the stakeholders concerned and will report to the UN Human Rights Council in 2010.

De Albuquerque and Sepulveda will meet the government officials, UN agencies and civil society representatives.

During their visit, they will also visit Bihari camps in Dhaka, Dalit colony, communities in Comilla, Rohingyas in Cox's Bazaar and Unicef project in Sirajganj.

"In Bangladesh, extreme poverty is interrelated with limited or lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation," said the experts in a joint statement before starting the country visit.

"A better understanding of how they intersect will help us determine how they can be overcome," says a UNDP press release quoting the statement.

Tackling extreme poverty and improving access to water and sanitation are equally daunting tasks for a country such as Bangladesh, where poor water quality or the consequences of natural disasters are additional obstacles faced by the State authorities, it said.

Addressing the press conference, Ain O Salish Kendra Executive Director Sultana Kamal said there are frustrations that the regular UN mechanism sometimes cannot work properly where the member states also have responsibilities.

"Therefore, such visit by the independent experts is required and we are happy that our government has invited them," she said urging media and civil society to highlight the exact picture of the country's status on sanitation, drinking water, sanitation and extreme poverty, which affect the minority communities the most.

Sultana Kamal said Bangladesh in principle agreed to invite the special rapporteur on religious freedom, but has yet to finalise the visit schedule. Besides, the government has also not responded positively to the request of the special rapporteurs on rights to housing, minorities, speedy trial and freedom of the judges and lawyers.

Human Rights Forum on UPR Bangladesh members Mohsin Ali Khan, Zakir Hossain, Syeed Ahmed and a Dalit community member Saloman were also present.

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The Daily Star

Friday, December 11, 2009

Benefit of economic growth not reaching the poorest

Say independent UN experts

Staff Correspondent

The benefit of Bangladesh's economic growth is not reaching the poorest people, contributing to the rise in inequality in society, two independent UN experts said yesterday.

"Even if poverty indicators point to a decline in poverty, some regions are lagging behind and segments of the population are not reaping the benefits, thus inequality is on the rise," Catarina de Albuquerque and Magdalena Sepulveda said in a joint statement at a press conference at Sonargaon Hotel in the city.

Albuquerque and Sepulveda -- the two experts on safe drinking water and sanitation and extreme poverty respectively -- came to Bangladesh on an invitation from the government. They will submit a report to the UN Human Rights Council next year.

The two experts visited slums, Dalit colonies and Bihari camps in Dhaka, Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and poor communities in Comilla from December 3 to 10.

They also met the prime minister, high officials of various ministries, NGO officials and donor community to learn about social protection policies and access to water and sanitation.

"We found people living in tremendously difficult conditions, which are a cause and consequence of a wide range of human rights violations," Albuquerque said while reading out the joint statement.

"The state must put the extreme poor at the centre of national policies and public debate," she said, adding that poverty reduction measures will be in vain so long as corruption persists.

The urban poor, particularly slum dwellers, seem to be invisible for policymakers, she said and called for security of tenure to slum dwellers.

Albuquerque also urged the government to include explicit recognition of water and sanitation as human rights in the legislation, saying that a large number of people are denied of safe drinking water and sanitation.

Bangladesh must design an integrated and comprehensive social protection strategy, Sepulveda said, adding that such schemes are being implemented in a disconcertingly fragmented manner.

Expressing concern over child labour, she stressed the need to combat it fiercely.

The experts also called for giving some sorts of identity to about 2 lakh Rohingyas living outside the camps in Cox's Bazar so that they can have access to basic rights.

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The Daily Star

Friday, December 4, 2009

2 UN experts in city

Staff Correspondent

Two independent UN experts arrived in Dhaka yesterday to investigate the relationship between sanitation and human rights in Bangladesh.

Magdalena Sepulveda, research director at the International Council on Human Rights Policy in Geneva and Catarina de Albuquerque, a human rights activist and lawyer, began their weeklong visit with a press conference held at the Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday.

It was organised in conjunction with the Human Rights Forum on Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Bangladesh, which is a network of 17 human rights based organisations.

In a joint press release, De Albuquerque and Sepulveda said, "In Bangladesh, extreme poverty is related to a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

"A better understanding of this relationship will help us determine how these problems can be overcome."

Sepulveda supports the recognition of sanitation as a distinct human right and contends that international human rights law requires states to ensure access to clean drinking water.

De Albuquerque and Sepulveda will meet with government officials, UN agencies and civil society representatives.

They will visit minority communities in Comilla, as well as Bihari camps in Dhaka, a Dalit colony and the Burmese ethnic group the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazaar.

They will also visit a Unicef project in Sirajganj.

Human rights activist and executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra Sultana Kamal welcomed the experts' visit and praised the Bangladesh government for inviting them.

She added that she hopes a clear picture of the status of sanitation, drinking water and extreme poverty in Bangladesh will emerge in their forthcoming report, which will be presented to the Human Rights Council in 2010.

Other members of the Human Rights Forum UPR Bangladesh who attended yesterday's press conference included Mohsin Ali Khan, Zakir Hossain, Syeed Ahmed and a Dalit community member Saloman.

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