

Press Statement

1 April 2017

ICSF calls for immediate action to preserve all mass graves of 1971

International Crimes Strategy Forum (ICSF) is an independent global network of experts and activists working in the interest of justice for the victims of international crimes, and has long campaigned for the recognition of the Bangladesh Genocide. ICSF firmly believes that preserving important sites relating to the Liberation War of 1971, such as sites of mass graves, and properly investing in their development and maintenance is crucial not only for keeping the memories alive and imparting the lessons of past genocide to future generations, but also for achieving global recognition of the Bangladesh genocide. It recently made this point specifically in its briefing on the occasion of the first Genocide Day on 25 March titled: *“Roadmap for ’71 Genocide Recognition: 7-Prong Strategy for Bangladesh Government”* (see <http://icsforum.org/820>).

It is thus, with much concern that we have noticed some recent media reports about the state of disrepair or otherwise negligence in preserving some of the most important symbols of our liberation history. We came to know that about 50 mass graves of the Liberation War martyrs in different areas of Naogaon district have been facing negligence for a long time (Financial Express, 29 March 2017). Another such report concerned the sale of a land in Ranishongkoil, Khuniadighi in Thakurgaon district which contains a mass grave where many freedom fighters and supporters of the Liberation War were regularly killed and disposed of by the Pakistani Army and their local collaborators during 1971 (Thakurgaoer Khobor, 20 March 2017).

Such developments are being reported in the backdrop of the news that the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh is undertaking a TK 182 Crores project for preserving 360 important historical sites related to the Liberation War by June 2019 in order to enable future generations to know about our liberation struggles (Jugantor, 21 March 2017). This is indeed a much needed overdue step in the right direction for which the Government deserves a note of thanks.

However, with the Government prioritising preservation of historical sites related to the Liberation War, it is particularly disheartening to see that some of the most important of such sites, the mass graves, are falling into disrepair or being sold like any ordinary piece of land.

ICSF therefore calls upon the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs in particular, and the Government of Bangladesh in general, to take immediate steps to identify and preserve all mass graves across the country. We cannot afford for even a single such site to fall into disrepair or being lost. These sites not only carry historical value, but are living testaments to the appalling crimes Bengalis were subjected to in 1971.