

# International Crimes Strategy Forum (ICSF)

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## **VIOLATED AND FORGOTTEN AGAIN: VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE OF BANGLADESH IN 1971**

International Crimes Strategy Forum (ICSF) welcomes the London Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (London, 10-12 June 2014) which is no doubt a laudable and timely initiative. We are, nevertheless, surprised by the fact that the stories of the sexual violence committed against Bengali girls and women during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 despite its overwhelming scale and magnitude have not found a place in the summit. The decision to exclude the Bangladesh experience is one we can not support and we feel it is our responsibility to remind the organizers of the summit that the sacrifices of Bengali girls and women during the war of 1971 were one of the goriest of the 20th century.

In 1971, core international crimes of the likes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed against the Bengali populace. During the course of the war 10 million people fled across the border into India as refugees. The occupying Pakistani military and its local auxiliaries in the form of the Peace Committees, Razakar, Al Badr and Al Shams forces specifically targeted among others, the Bengali girls and women of Bangladesh. The overarching objective, irrespective of the outcome of the war, was to ensure the presence of the Punjabi (i.e., Pakistani) imprint or 'gene' so to speak on the future generations of the Bengalis, the consequence of which rape and other forms of sexual violence was used as weapons of war.

The policy of raping and murder of Bengali women and girls continued throughout the war which lasted nine months. Incidents of hundreds of Bengali women being held captive inside military brothels run by the Pakistan military were reported in the international media at the time. Reportedly, around 200,000 women had been raped by Pakistani soldiers and they were now being ostracized by the predominantly conservative Bengali society.

Determined to provide justice to the millions who had suffered, the government of the newly independent State produced two pieces of legislation in quick succession to try persons against whom there were allegations of committing wartime offences. Although, the charges and verdicts against the accused under the Bangladesh Collaborators Special Tribunals and the International Crimes Tribunals did not shed specific focus on the targeted raping and killing of Bengali women and girls during the Liberation War of 1971, a regrettable trend that is also somewhat typical of other international tribunals, some of the accused before the Tribunals have been found guilty for committing the crime of rape. For instance, in cases, *The Chief Prosecutor Versus Delowar*

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*Hossain Sayeedi and The Chief Prosecutor Versus Abdul Quader Molla*, the accused were found guilty by the International Crimes Tribunal of committing rape as a crime against humanity.

The organizers of the *Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict 2014* has claimed that it is “*the largest gathering ever brought together on the subject, with a view to creating irreversible momentum against sexual violence in conflict and practical action that impacts those on the ground.*” Our questions to the organizers are unambiguous and simple: Were the stories of sufferings of countless Bengali girls and women during 1971 not worth telling at the global summit? Don’t the Bengali victims of sexual violence deserve to be recognised and rehabilitated by the world community? When it comes to acknowledging immeasurable crimes committed four decades ago, of all things, time is not on our side.

Operating from more than 30 cities around the world, International Crimes Strategy Forum (ICSF) is an independent global coalition and network of activists, experts and academics. The network is committed to support justice initiatives and campaigns that are aimed at the serious international crimes perpetrated by the Pakistani armed forces and their local collaborators during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. United the coalition stands against all forms of impunity.

Submitted by –

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