

PROCEEDINGS OF

PROMOTING A MULTISTAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO SUPPORT CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IN BANGLADESH TO ENHANCE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

26 JUNE 2025

Organised by



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

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Published by

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)
1/46, Old Elephant Road (West of Ramna Police Station), Dhaka-1000,
Bangladesh.

Phone: (+88) (02) 9353808, 9336287, 8315808

Fax: 88-02-48312625

E-mail: info@biiss.org

Website: www.biiss.org

Printed by

GraphNet Limited

95 Naya Paltan, Khan Tower

1st Floor, Dhaka-1000

Phone: 02-48314842, 48314193, 01715011303

E-mail: graphnet@gmail.com

Dialogue on Promoting a Multistakeholder Approach to Support Criminal Justice Reform in Bangladesh to Enhance Equal Access to Justice for All

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) jointly organised a Dialogue titled ‘Judicial Reform’ on Thursday, 26 June 2025 at Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka, Bangladesh. H E Dr Asif Nazrul, Honourable Advisor, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, graced the Dialogue as the Chief Guest. The event was divided into four sessions including the inaugural session and based on the following themes, such as: i) Strengthening access legal aid services to those detained, arrested or imprisoned, suspected or accused of, or charged with a criminal offence and for victims and witnesses, ii) Supporting the establishment of impartial, professional and accountable public prosecution service, and iii) Strengthening police-prosecution cooperation for more efficient, human-rights based investigation. Senior officials from different ministries related to judicial system; members of Judiciary Reform Commission; Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI); Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association; Dhaka Bar Association; Attorney General’s Office; High Court Division; Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Dhaka; District Session Court; Metro Station Court; CMM Court; National legal Aid Support Organisation (NLASO); Public Prosecutors; Subordinate Court, Dhaka; Different branches of Bangladesh Police; Department of Narcotics Control; Department of Prisons; Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB); Bangladesh Coast Guard (BCG); National Board of Revenue (NBR); Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC); Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU); Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD); Financial Institutions Division of Ministry of Finance; Department of Immigration and Passports; UN Residence Coordinator’s Office; UNDP; UNICEF; UNFPA; UN Women; IOM; UNOPS; UNHCR; ILO; OHCHR; researchers, academics, and students from various universities, representatives from different Civil Society Organisations (BLAST, Adhikar, Madaripur Legal Aid Association; GIZ) participated in the Dialogue and enriched it by presenting their valuable opinions, media, comments, suggestions, and observations during the open discussion session.

H E Dr Asif Nazrul, Honourable Advisor, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh
Dialogue on Accessible and Effective Criminal Justice System
26 JUNE 2025
Venue: Ballroom, Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka



WELCOME REMARKS



Dr Suruchi Pant

UNODC Regional Representative, South Asia

Dr Suruchi Pant extended greetings to everyone and acknowledged Dr Asif Nazrul, Honourable Advisor at the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh. She stated that it was a privilege to welcome him as the Chief Guest and expressed deep appreciation for his esteemed presence at the day's dialogue.

On behalf of the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia, Dr Pant conveyed a warm welcome to all attendees to the national dialogue on accessible and effective criminal justice systems. The speaker mentioned that it was indeed a profound honour to welcome everyone to a collective reflection and action around an issue situated at the heart of democracy, human dignity, and the rule of law, namely, the strengthening of criminal justice systems and reforms aimed at enhancing equal access to justice for all.

Dr Pant went on to express appreciation for the Government of Bangladesh's continued collaboration with UNODC's initiatives over the years in the areas of drug control, crime prevention, health, and criminal justice responses, emphasising the value of this partnership. The speaker explained that UNODC supported Member States in implementing the United Nations Drug and Crime Conventions and the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice. The speaker added that the agency supported the country in reviewing national legislation, developing national action plans and strategies, and strengthening institutions in alignment with these standards.

It was also stated that UNODC was well positioned to facilitate exchange at both policy and practitioner levels on crime prevention and criminal justice, at regional and global platforms. In this context, the speaker respectfully requested the Honourable Advisor and other senior officials to consider attending the 50th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which was scheduled to take place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in 2026.

Dr Pant noted that in any effort made to increase the accessibility and efficiency of the criminal justice system, it was essential to address the entire system, including the challenges in coordination among different institutions. UNODC, as a strong partner of Bangladesh's criminal justice system, was said to be facilitating capacity development for all criminal justice practitioners in many of its mandated areas. For instance, the speaker mentioned that UNODC was working closely with criminal justice actors in Bangladesh on preventing and countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling,

promoting non-custodial measures, countering illicit financial flows, addressing drug use and HIV prevention, including within closed settings, community policing, countering maritime crime, countering wildlife crime, and tackling terrorism and violent extremism.

Dr Pant added that, in line with the UNODC Strategy 2021–2025 and the Regional Programme for South Asia 2024–2028 under Sub-Programme 5, UNODC’s work on crime prevention and criminal justice focused on ensuring equal access to justice for all as a key component of a fair, humane, effective, and efficient criminal justice system. This included human rights and gender-sensitive criminal justice systems, access to legal aid services, victim services, and restorative justice mechanisms where appropriate.

Dr Pant reaffirmed UNODC’s commitment to supporting Bangladesh in building a more accessible and effective criminal justice system, one that was trusted by the communities it served. It was noted that the dialogue brought people together not only as representatives of institutions and communities, but as individuals who shared a common aspiration: that every person, regardless of background or circumstance, could trust the justice system to be fair, impartial, and accessible.

Dr Pant emphasised that they would be failing in their responsibilities if they did not acknowledge that the day, 26 June, marked the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, an area of work requiring unwavering support from the criminal justice system

In conclusion, Dr Pant wished all participants a very fruitful dialogue, thanked everyone for their presence, expressed gratitude to the national and international experts for participating and contributing to the event’s success, and extended best wishes for the dialogue. The speaker concluded by thanking everyone once again.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DIALOGUE



Felipe Ramos

UNODC Head of Office, Bangladesh

Mr Felipe Ramos notes that UNODC is a vanguard agency on criminal justice and rule of law issues. According to him, the event reflects a shared commitment to promoting modern, inclusive, and people-centred justice systems in Bangladesh and the broader region. He acknowledged significance of the current moment, characterising it as a critical juncture marked by both challenges and opportunities. According to him, the legal and judicial landscape is undergoing profound transformation globally and within Bangladesh. In this evolving context, there lay a unique opportunity to enhance justice delivery mechanisms so that they could respond more effectively to the shifting needs of society, particularly in upholding human rights, the rule of law, and access to justice for all. The dialogue had been thoughtfully designed as a platform for mutual learning, collaborative engagement, and exchange of experiences among key stakeholders. By convening this multi-stakeholder event, the organisers aimed at uniting voices from across the criminal justice chain including the judiciary, prosecution services, legal aid institutions, academia, civil society, and development actors. According to him, this inclusive engagement would facilitate identification of actionable strategies and shared solutions in pursuit of a more equitable justice system. Throughout the day's programme, the dialogue would focus on three strategic and interrelated themes central to criminal justice reform. The first involved access to legal aid. Mr Ramos underscored the urgent need of ensuring individuals who are arrested, detained, or charged, victims and witnesses receive timely, effective, rights-based legal assistance. He highlighted access to legal aid was not only a fundamental human right, but also a cornerstone of fair trial guarantees. In particular, he stressed the importance of ensuring legal aid services were accessible to those in vulnerable situations, including women, children, people with disabilities, and members of marginalised communities. The second thematic focus would centre on strengthening prosecution services to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability. He spoke on the need of adopting institutional policies, standards, and practices that would uphold independence of prosecutors, promote professional ethics, and enhance their capacity to handle complex cases; a robust and impartial prosecution service is essential for building public trust in the criminal justice system and ensuring justice is delivered without bias or delay. The third area would explore ways to improve cooperation between investigators and prosecutors. Effective coordination during criminal investigations was crucial for building strong, evidence-based cases that would uphold due process and human rights. Improved police-prosecution cooperation would contribute not only to more effective case outcomes,

but also to the broader legitimacy and efficiency of the criminal justice system as a whole. These three areas were not isolated pillars but rather interlinked components of a broader vision, one that aimed at building an inclusive, transparent, and accountable criminal justice system aligned with both national aspirations and global standards. He reaffirmed that the work of UNODC in Asia and in Bangladesh was firmly guided by the principles of justice for all, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which advocates for peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Against this backdrop, Mr Ramos reiterated that justice systems must put people at the centre. In his words, an effective and equitable justice system is one that actively works to dismantle barriers to access, especially for those most frequently excluded, such as women, children, individuals with disabilities, and socially marginalised groups. He reaffirmed UNODC's commitment to supporting legal aid expansion, non-discriminatory practices, and institutional capacity building in Bangladesh, grounded in its mandate to promote justice, human rights, and the rule of law globally. He concluded by emphasising this dialogue was more than just a technical event, but rather reflects a shared commitment to building better justice systems through cooperation, knowledge exchange, and sustained engagement. He hoped the discussions would yield not only practical recommendations, but also strengthen partnerships among national and global stakeholders, who were united by a common goal: justice for all.

SPEECH BY CHIEF GUEST



Dr Asif Nazrul

Honourable Adviser

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs

Dr Asif Nazrul, began by expressing his profound satisfaction and sense of purpose in participating in the day's important event. Speaking as Chief Guest, he began by acknowledging the central theme of the dialogue: criminal justice reform, which, in his view, aligns perfectly with the fundamental priorities of the present government. From the inception of its tenure, the government, under the leadership of the Chief Adviser, has committed to undertaking bold reforms in the legal and justice sectors. These reforms are framed around three core pillars: ensuring transparency and accountability, facilitating timely and fair trials, and addressing transitional justice issues that continue to challenge the justice system.

Dr Nazrul reaffirmed that the government has already formed several committees and working groups to oversee these reforms. Contrary to public scepticism about the slow implementation of reform proposals, he clarified that many of the recommendations being pursued now are those that are not only immediately implementable but also long overdue. These are reforms that do not require constitutional amendments and already enjoy broad political consensus, sometimes for years. One key area of focus is the reinforcement of judicial independence, which remains central to ensuring the credibility and legitimacy of the justice system. He went on to note that the political landscape is now witnessing renewed momentum and serious engagement from political parties. Intense dialogues are underway to build national consensus on some of the most pressing issues facing the legal and judicial systems. These efforts, Dr Nazrul emphasised, reflect a collective political will to move forward with a shared vision for justice sector reform. Focusing on the justice sector in particular, he outlined three top priorities currently being advanced by the Ministry: first, ensuring timely and fair adjudication of cases; second, reducing the staggering backlog in the courts; and third, reinforcing the independence and efficiency of the judiciary. These goals are being operationalised through concrete legal reforms, many of which are already in advanced stages.

One of the most transformative legal initiatives that is underway involves amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC). Dr Nazrul described these proposed changes as forward-looking and transformative. Among the reforms is a provision for affidavit-based hearings, which would significantly reduce delays. Further, the incorporation of mechanisms for summary service and execution of decrees is expected to expedite proceedings. Based on feedback from experienced legal practitioners and ministry officials of whom many possess two to three decades of experience, Dr Nazrul noted

that these reforms could save up to one-third of the time currently required to dispose of civil cases. The final draft of these amendments has already been prepared and is likely to be placed before the Cabinet for approval in the upcoming meeting. These reforms are not developed in isolation, Dr Nazrul emphasised. The government has closely reviewed recommendations from the Supreme Court and legal scholars to ensure alignment between judicial precedents and statutory frameworks. Dr Nazrul expressed optimism that codifying these improvements into the CPC would not only provide clarity but also increase public and professional confidence in the judiciary.

Turning to criminal law reforms, Dr Nazrul highlighted key provisions being introduced in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). These include mandatory medical examinations in specific cases, enhanced legal protections for women, and ensuring the presence of defence counsel at critical stages of the legal process. Although there have been some objections from stakeholders regarding the presence of lawyers before and during remand, a balanced approach has been adopted. For the time being, the law will require the presence of lawyers both immediately before and after remand hearings, which marks a step forward in safeguarding legal rights without hampering investigative efficiency.



Another area of serious concern addressed by Dr Nazrul was the widespread problem of harassment through false or politically motivated cases. Recognising the deep social and psychological toll such cases have on ordinary citizens, he disclosed that the government has already initiated steps to reduce this burden. Confidential but significant legal amendments are being drafted to reduce the abuse of arrest powers and arbitrary filing of cases. Although such measures carry political risks and will likely draw criticism from multiple quarters, the government is determined to proceed in the greater interest of justice and rule of law.

Furthermore, Dr Nazrul underscored the importance of revisiting legislation, such as the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act. A mechanism is being developed to facilitate faster trials, and for the first time, sexual abuse of male children will be legally recognised as a punishable offence. Similarly, the government is in the final stages of drafting legislation on enforced disappearances, with the aim of aligning national law with the International Convention for

the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. This is particularly urgent given recent national and international concerns regarding this issue.

The second core objective of the government's justice reform agenda is to reduce case backlog and expand access to justice. Dr Nazrul pointed out that the state-run Legal Aid Services Organisation (LASO) has traditionally been underutilised, handling only around 25,000 cases annually. To address this gap, the government has made substantial changes to strengthen the institutional capacity of LASO. Previously, each district had only one Legal Aid Officer; this number has now been tripled to ensure broader coverage and quicker services. Moreover, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms are being aggressively promoted. Mandatory mediation has been introduced for family disputes and small financial claims such as negotiable instrument cases involving amounts under BDT 5 lakh. These cases must first undergo mediation before proceeding to litigation. Based on conservative estimates, this measure alone could lead to the disposal of between 100,000 and 200,000 cases annually.

Dr Nazrul explained that legal aid mediation processes generally take one-tenth of the time required for court trials, and in over 90 per cent of the cases, parties are satisfied with the outcomes, rarely seeking judicial review. This practical efficiency is why legal aid services are now receiving unprecedented attention and investment from the government. The government is also proactively addressing politically motivated or frivolous cases. So far, recommendations have been made for the withdrawal of nearly 12,000 such cases, impacting over 300,000 individuals. Dr Nazrul expressed confidence that this number would significantly increase over the next six months, further freeing the justice system from unnecessary burdens and restoring public faith.

On the matter of transparency and judicial accountability, Dr Nazrul announced a series of institutional reforms. These include mandatory asset declarations for judges, revised training curricula for judicial officers, and the establishment of a centralised recruitment system for court staff through the Public Service Commission. One major source of corruption in the subordinate judiciary has been linked to non-transparent staff recruitment, which the new system is designed to eliminate.



Digitalisation is also a core priority. From e-filing to online case management systems, the government has already implemented key components and is now working to streamline the broader Judiciary Digitalisation Project. The ultimate goal is to create a fully digitised justice delivery system that is more accessible, efficient, and transparent. Dr Nazrul was keen to acknowledge that these reforms are being undertaken not just by the government alone, but also under the close guidance of the Honourable Chief Justice, who remains deeply committed to the transformation of the judiciary. Other branches of governance, such as the police and public administration, are similarly engaged in parallel reform initiatives.

Most importantly, these reforms are consultative in nature. Every step taken by the Ministry has been backed by discussions, expert consultations, and public input. Draft laws are frequently shared with stakeholders and civil society organisations for feedback. This participatory approach, Dr Nazrul noted, ensures that the reforms are not only legally sound but also socially accepted and practically implementable.

In conclusion, Dr Asif Nazrul expressed his sincere appreciation to BIISS, UNODC and other development partners for providing a valuable platform for dialogue and collaboration. He acknowledged that while the journey towards a fair, transparent, and accountable criminal justice system remains long, the government has already taken significant steps in the right direction. With continued cooperation, expertise, and national resolve, he voiced his firm belief that a just and equitable system can be built, a system that truly serves the people of Bangladesh.

SPEECH BY THE CHAIR



Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng
Director General
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

Major General Md Iftekhar Anis, Director General of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), acknowledged the distinguished participants gathered for the dialogue. He noted that Bangladesh, at this particular juncture in its history, is standing at a critical and transformative crossroads. The nation is witnessing what he described as a renewed and intensifying national conversation concerning justice, systemic reform, and the broader demand for institutional accountability.

He highlighted that this national discourse is not occurring in a vacuum but is catalysed by recent international attention, specifically the findings of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) fact-finding mission, which brought to light several critical human rights concerns in the country. These findings, he observed, have served as a compelling reminder of the urgent and non-negotiable need for reform in the criminal justice system of Bangladesh. They have prompted reflection not only among state institutions but also among civil society, legal professionals, and the general public.

Major General Anis further remarked that these concerns, when viewed alongside the persistent and long-standing challenges such as systemic corruption, the misuse of authority by law enforcement actors, and the lack of timely legal remedies for victims, have deeply strained the foundational relationship between the criminal justice system and the communities it is intended to serve. It is, therefore, clear—he emphasised—that comprehensive reform of the criminal justice sector is essential to restore public trust, uphold the rule of law, and ensure equitable access to justice for all citizens.

In this context, he noted that the interim government of Bangladesh has taken several notable steps by initiating a number of reform commissions. Among these, he made particular reference to the Judicial Reform Commission and, significantly, the Police Reform Commission, which submitted its report in January of the current year. These commissions, he explained, are part of a wider institutional effort to modernise, humanise, and professionalise the justice sector of Bangladesh.

Referring to the Police Reform Commission specifically, Major General Anis stated that it had put forward vital and timely recommendations aimed at bringing about substantive change in the structure and functioning of law enforcement agencies across the country. Importantly, he pointed out that the Commission's findings were grounded in robust public engagement and consultation processes. One such initiative, the public survey titled “Kemon Police Chai” (translated as “*What Kind*

of *Police Do We Want?*”), provided crucial empirical insights into public perceptions and expectations.

According to the data gathered through this survey, over 95 percent of respondents called for an immediate end to “ghost cases”—that is, cases based on fabricated charges. This overwhelming public demand reflects widespread concern over abuses of the legal process and arbitrary criminalisation of individuals, often used to harass dissenters or vulnerable groups.

He also noted that there were strong calls for reforming Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), a legal provision frequently cited in connection with arbitrary arrests and custodial abuse. The public’s plea for reform in this area, Major General Anis suggested, is indicative of deep dissatisfaction with current arrest practices and the lack of procedural safeguards for detainees.

Additionally, the survey highlighted a clear demand for the establishment of transparent interrogation rooms in every police station. These rooms, he stated, must be designed in a manner that ensures access to legal counsel and civilian oversight, thereby preventing custodial torture, coercion, and other forms of abuse. Such facilities, he argued, would not only align policing practices with international human rights standards but would also serve to increase public confidence in law enforcement institutions.

Major General Anis made the broader point that criminal justice reform cannot be viewed in isolation as a matter of policing only. Rather, reform must be holistic—addressing police, prosecution, judiciary, and correctional institutions collectively—and should ultimately seek to guarantee equal access to justice for all citizens, irrespective of socio-economic status.

Turning to the international dimension, he acknowledged the important role of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in supporting justice sector reform globally. He emphasised that the core objective of the UNODC’s Global Programme on People-centred Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform, as well as its Regional Programme for South Asia, is to promote a people-centred approach to justice—one that prioritises the dignity, rights, and needs of individuals over bureaucratic or punitive imperatives.

He further highlighted that the UNODC has, in the past, initiated several important regional activities in South Asia aimed at strengthening justice institutions. These initiatives have sought to make justice delivery more efficient, effective, humane, and inclusive. In the specific case of Bangladesh, the UNODC has extended support for community-oriented policing and has worked to promote the use



of alternatives to imprisonment, such as non-custodial measures during prosecution. These efforts, he observed, have contributed meaningfully to rethinking punitive justice approaches and advancing rights-based models.

Major General Anis then turned to the institutional role of BIISS, which is a statutory research institute operating under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh. He noted that while BIISS has traditionally focused on foreign policy and security issues, it also maintains a strong legacy of research on human security concerns. He argued that access to justice is a fundamental element of human security, as it directly affects the safety, dignity, and rights of individuals. In this way, BIISS's engagement with the present dialogue is not only appropriate but fully aligned with its broader research and policy mandate.

He underscored that the primary objective of the present activity was to support criminal justice sector reform through the facilitation of dialogue and exchange. Specifically, the dialogue aims to bring together national and international experts to share knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned from reform initiatives in Bangladesh and beyond.

Major General Anis reiterated that the discussion unfolding at this event is not merely academic in nature. Rather, it carries the potential to result in tangible improvements—improvements that can directly impact the lives of ordinary citizens and bolster the institutional integrity of the justice system in Bangladesh. He argued that such practical outcomes are what lend this dialogue its profound significance.

In closing, he expressed his deep appreciation for the extraordinary combination of expertise present in the room. The gathering included UN experts, national lawyers, prosecutors, civil society representatives, and policy actors, all of whom bring valuable perspectives to the table. He encouraged all participants to contribute actively by offering specific, actionable recommendations. These contributions, he emphasised, would not only advance access to justice but also inform the effective implementation of the recommendations made by the Judicial and Police Reform Commissions. Major General Anis concluded his remarks by reiterating the critical importance of the moment, and by reaffirming the commitment of BIISS to continue its support for justice sector reform efforts, in partnership with national and international stakeholders.

ROUNDTABLE I

Strengthening access legal aid services to those detained, arrested or imprisoned, suspected or accused of, or charged with a criminal offence and for victims and witnesses.



Tanim Shawon,
Barrister-at-Law, Advocate
Bangladesh Supreme Court and Member
Judiciary Reform Commission

This session was moderated by Mr Tanim Shawon, Barrister-in-Law, Advocate, Bangladesh Supreme Court, and Member of Judiciary Reform Commission. Roundtable one explored the strategies to enhance the quality and availability of legal aid, with particular attention to addressing the diverse needs of individuals and groups in vulnerable situations. Emphasis will also be placed on advancing a sustainable and multi-stakeholder approach to legal aid, service delivery, involving legal professionals, civil society organisations, paralegals, and other justice sector actors, to ensure equitable and timely outcome.



PRESENTATION BY UNODC EXPERT



Anna Giudice

*Team Leader,
Access to Justice, UNODC, HQ Vienna*

Ms Anna Giudice, began by explaining her role at UNODC, where she leads a global team dedicated to advancing access to justice. Her team operates across numerous countries and legal systems, addressing a wide array of challenges within the criminal justice framework. Her work had long been guided by core values and mandates established by the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (UNCCPCJ), international legal standards set forth in various normative instruments. These mandates provide a robust foundation for their engagement with member states on legal reform, policy development, and implementation of effective justice mechanisms. Access to justice remains a deeply complex issue, and one that intersects with multiple components of criminal justice systems and social development. She reaffirmed that legal aid is not merely a technical service, but rather a foundational pillar of a fair and inclusive justice system. Legal aid, she emphasised, plays a critical role in remedying systemic issues such as the overuse of pre-trial detention, human rights violations during arrest and investigation, and procedural delays. In essence, legal aid serves as an essential enabler of justice for all.

She provided a global overview to contextualise the discussion in Bangladesh. Referring to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16.3, she highlighted that member states pledged to promote the rule of law at both national and global levels, and ensure equal access to justice. Yet, the data presented a sobering reality. Drawing from recent reports by UNHCR and UNODC released in July 2024, Ms Giudice said less than 50 per cent of crime victims globally reported incidents to competent authorities. Even more alarming, 31 per cent of the world's prison population is currently in pre-trial detention, highlighting systemic delays and inefficiencies. About 61 per cent of countries report facing serious prison overcrowding. She pointed to the disproportionately growing incarceration of women, especially in relation to non-violent offences such as drug-related crimes. Research showed women often received harsher sentences for such offences compared to men, underscoring the need of addressing the gender dimensions of justice; these challenges reflected not only individual barriers, but also deep structural inequalities which demanded institutional reforms.

To further illustrate the complexity of criminal justice systems, she referred to the UNODC Criminal Justice Assessment Toolkit. This tool demonstrates how legal aid interventions are required at multiple decision-making points throughout the criminal justice process from the moment of arrest through trial and sentencing. At each stage, whether it is the yellow “decision points” or the green “intervention points,” there was a distinct and necessary role for legal aid providers to safeguard

procedural fairness, enhance efficiency, and uphold rights of the accused. Ms Giudice shared updates on key developments at the global level. She referenced the 2021 UN Crime Congress, where member states renewed their commitment to equal treatment before the law, effective access to legal aid, and establishment of national sentencing policies. Moreover, in December 2023, the UNGA adopted *Resolution 78/227*—titled “Access to Justice for All”, following the recommendation of the UNCCPCJ. This resolution mandates UNODC to convene global consultations and support Member States in strengthening justice systems. A major milestone in this regard was the global meeting held in Brazil in December 2023, which focused on addressing systemic discrimination, exclusion, and promoting evidence-based, inclusive legal frameworks. She suggested the emphasis must now shift from individual-level interventions to addressing structural and institutional barriers which hindered access to justice. These included exclusions based on gender, disability, poverty, and ethnicity, as well as insufficient public investment in justice services. The work of UNODC in access to justice was firmly anchored in global standards, including the UN’s Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the UN Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems (2012), and other human rights instruments. Focusing specifically on the 2012 Guidelines, Ms Giudice explained they remain the only dedicated international framework which defines, clarifies the concept and scope of legal aid. They provide comprehensive definitions, outlining legal aid not only as legal representation, but also encompassing legal advice, information, access to legal assistance for all in contact with the law and not just suspects and accused persons, but also victims and witnesses. Unfortunately, despite their adoption, many countries continue to implement legal aid in a limited and traditional manner, offering services to only a small subset of eligible individuals. As per Ms Giudice, legal aid must be integrated at every level of the justice system and must respond to the needs of specific groups. This included women, children, people with disabilities, and other marginalised populations who often faced additional barriers to justice. The UNODC developed a wide range of tools and best practice guidance to support governments in



delivering equitable and high-quality legal aid services. These included handbooks, model laws, and technical assistance packages which draw from lessons learned and successful practices in diverse legal systems

Ms Giudice addressed the issue of sustainable financing for legal aid. She expressed concern that in many countries, legal aid services are still heavily dependent on external donor funding, which is unsustainable in the long term. The 2012 Guidelines explicitly call for national governments to establish independent legal aid bodies, ensure budgetary allocations, and provide autonomy in legal aid governance. She noted that unless countries build nationally owned, adequately funded legal aid systems, the commitment to universal access to justice will remain unfulfilled. One particularly promising area of UNODC's work involves legal aid for victims of crime. Ms Giudice emphasised legal aid should not be limited only to suspects and accused persons, but should be extended also to victims who need legal assistance to navigate the justice system, seek redress, and claim reparations. This approach would require a shift in legal aid policies from reactive, ad hoc models to a more inclusive and victim-centred framework. She also highlighted a recent initiative to strengthen regional networks of legal aid providers. Based on practitioner demand, UNODC launched a platform in 2020 to connect legal aid professionals from different countries and legal traditions. While still in early stages, the platform offered space for knowledge exchange, peer support, and regional collaboration, which Ms Giudice believed were crucial for building resilience and capacity across the legal aid sector.

She introduced an innovative e-learning tool developed by UNODC, focusing on legal aid for women. Although initially developed for West African contexts, the training modules were applicable globally and could be adapted to different legal environments. The course was designed to improve the quality and sensitivity of legal aid services provided to women, particularly those facing gender-based violence, discrimination, or socioeconomic vulnerability. She invited countries and stakeholders to consider translating and localising the course, noting the platform was currently available in English and French, and could be customised at low cost. Ms Giudice hoped the dialogue would inspire renewed commitment and collaboration in strengthening access to legal aid in Bangladesh. With right policies, tools, and political will, it would be possible to ensure legal aid was not a privilege for a few, but a right for all. She concluded by urging all stakeholders to look forward and enhance collaboration in support of building inclusive, accessible, effective justice systems.

PRESENTATION BY NATIONAL EXPERT



Barrister Sara Hossain

Executive Director

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

Ms Sara Hossain, speaking on behalf of a prominent non-governmental organisation with a longstanding engagement in justice sector reform in Bangladesh, delivered a comprehensive and deeply reflective address during the session. Her intervention touched upon a range of systemic issues confronting the legal and judicial framework of the country, with a particular focus on pre-trial detention, access to legal services, rights-based communication, and the need for institutional reform underpinned by innovation and inclusion. At the outset, Ms Hossain acknowledged the diversity of the audience and emphasised the importance of respectful engagement across different stakeholder groups.

A significant portion of Ms Hossain's address was devoted to the pressing crisis of pre-trial detention, which she identified as one of the gravest challenges currently facing the Bangladeshi justice system. Citing the alarming figure that nearly 75 per cent of detainees are held without trial, she characterised this as both a severe human rights violation and a clear breach of constitutional guarantees. She stressed that the prolonged deprivation of liberty without due process not only undermines the fundamental rights of individuals but also erodes public trust in the criminal justice system as a whole.

She called for urgent, coordinated, and measurable action. This included the establishment of clear targets to reduce the pre-trial detention rate and the articulation of a shared sense of urgency across relevant institutions—judiciary, law enforcement, prosecution services, government departments, and non-governmental organisations. In her view, addressing pre-trial detention must become a national priority, supported by practical reforms, political will, and sustained monitoring.

Ms Hossain further noted that the crisis is not new, but its persistence indicates a failure of both legal safeguards and institutional culture. She highlighted the discretionary powers of magistrates and district judges to grant bail in appropriate cases and expressed concern that these powers are often under-utilised or ignored. According to her, bail decisions are routinely denied at the first point

of contact, often when detainees are still under police custody, and magistrates frequently default to denying bail, even when the law permits a more judicious approach.

She underscored that legal reform alone will not suffice unless accompanied by a transformation in practice and mindset. She advocated for a shift in the professional culture of decision-makers within the criminal justice chain and reiterated that any sustainable reform must be rooted in both law and lived practice. Turning to the issue of access to quality legal services, Ms Hossain expressed concern about the deep communicative divide between legal service providers and the communities they serve, particularly marginalised and low-income groups. Many individuals, she explained, approach legal institutions with little to no understanding of their rights, entitlements, or the procedures involved. This lack of knowledge often results in disempowerment and disengagement.

She stressed the need to demystify the legal process and provide clients with basic, rights-based information—such as the expected duration of a case, the nature of legal representation, likely costs, and available remedies—paralleling the professional standards observed in private legal practice. Such transparency, she argued, would not only empower clients but also enhance accountability within the system.

To address these informational gaps, she proposed a greater role for students, volunteers, and paralegals in the justice ecosystem. Drawing on international best practices and local experience, she suggested deploying university students—particularly those studying law or social sciences—to assist at legal aid desks, thereby facilitating legal literacy, documentation support, and follow-up services. This model, she emphasised, offers a dual benefit: it provides much-needed assistance to underserved communities while cultivating a sense of public service and legal consciousness among young professionals.

On the issue of gender and mediation, Ms Hossain raised important concerns about the inappropriate use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms in cases involving women, particularly those related to violence or coercion. She warned that women are often pressured into mediation processes that are neither voluntary nor in their best interest. This, she noted, contradicts the principle of consent and may result in the denial of justice in serious cases. She therefore called for the establishment of clear criteria and procedural safeguards to ensure that mediation is employed only when truly appropriate and with the informed and voluntary participation of all parties.

Ms Hossain then turned to the institutional framework of service delivery, calling for the expansion and integration of one-stop service centres, particularly those that offer multi-disciplinary support to victims of violence and other vulnerable populations. She praised the role of victim support centres in Bangladesh, which have pioneered collaborations between government agencies and civil society organisations. She suggested further strengthening these partnerships, ensuring that legal, psychosocial, financial, and protective services are delivered in a holistic and survivor-centred manner.

She also welcomed recent legislative amendments, including the expansion of compoundable offences and the enactment of new provisions under the Violence Against Women Act. However, she issued a note of caution, observing that legal reform must be implemented with vigilance to prevent unintended consequences—such as the misuse of mediation in cases that warrant formal prosecution.

Another area of focus in her remarks was monitoring and evaluation. Ms Hossain advocated for the establishment of robust monitoring mechanisms for legal aid services, ideally involving multi-stakeholder participation. She proposed that civil society organisations be granted a more active role

in monitoring, data collection, and feedback provision, thereby creating a feedback loop that could enhance service quality and responsiveness.

She also discussed the demographic makeup of the service providers and clients, noting a need for greater inclusivity across age, gender, and community lines. She suggested drawing more heavily on the enthusiasm and talent of youth, including university graduates and community-based volunteers, to build a more inclusive and dynamic support structure.

In terms of innovation, Ms Hossain drew attention to successful technological adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the implementation of remote hearings and digital case management. She encouraged stakeholders to build upon these experiences to institutionalise digital innovations—such as audio-visual recording of interrogations—which can safeguard rights, enhance transparency, and reduce abuse.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Hossain acknowledged the complexity of the challenges facing the justice system but reiterated the transformative potential of inclusive, coordinated, and participatory reform. She emphasised that the recommendations she had outlined were not abstract ideals but stemmed from years of practical experience, research, and collaboration with a wide array of actors present in the room. She called upon all stakeholders—governmental and non-governmental alike—to use the current moment as a catalyst for meaningful change and sustained engagement in justice sector reform.



PRESENTATION BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERT



Nicolas Laino

Former UNODC Consultant, Argentina

International expert Nicolás Laino from Argentina emphasised that this represents a pivotal moment for Bangladesh, particularly regarding the movement and justice system reform. He noted that implementing new principles and guidelines for legal aid and establishing a reformed justice system requires considerable time to become fully effective and reach those who need it most.

Mr Laino highlighted a critical issue: when no lawyer is present during criminal justice proceedings, individuals face significantly higher costs and poorer outcomes. He referenced extensive evidence from various countries worldwide demonstrating that the absence of legal representation during the initial detention review period severely disadvantages defendants. Those who have legal representation at this crucial stage are far more likely to be released. He argued that establishing high-quality legal aid services is not merely essential for protecting individual rights, it also strengthens democracy, safeguards fundamental freedoms, supports vulnerable populations, reduces excessive detention rates, and improves access to justice for the most marginalised groups who face discrimination. Laino outlined what he believed to be the five fundamental pillars that should guide Bangladesh through legal aid reform:

In the first pillar, Mr Laino stressed that independence should be the foremost consideration, requiring several essential components. Firstly, legal aid institutions must have functional and financial autonomy, operating independently without interference from government bodies, courts, or prosecutors. Additionally, dedicated budget allocation through separate funding lines ensures financial independence. Finally, institutional credibility and constitutional recognition must be established through legal frameworks that protect the independence of legal aid providers. He further acknowledged that various models exist worldwide, but emphasised that regardless of the specific approach adopted, legal aid providers must maintain complete independence. He noted that historically, many countries had placed legal aid offices under ministries of justice or Supreme Court oversight, with some operating under military councils, arrangements that created serious concerns about neutrality and public trust. Therefore, he argued, independence must be the primary consideration.

The second pillar focused on creating accessible qualification processes. Laino emphasised the need for simple and dynamic eligibility procedures that avoid bureaucratic obstacles. He advocated for a presumption of qualification for serious offences, meaning defendants in serious criminal cases



should be assumed to qualify for legal aid. Furthermore, preliminary legal aid should be provided during application processes to offer immediate support while eligibility is being determined. He also highlighted the importance of technology integration through mobile applications and online platforms to facilitate access.

Laino explained that eligibility criteria should be particularly flexible in criminal cases, with a presumption favouring the applicant. He emphasised the critical importance of the initial application period, noting that modern technology, including mobile applications and online platforms already used globally, can significantly simplify application processes and improve accessibility.

The third pillar addressed the scope of legal aid provision. Legal aid must be available at every stage of the criminal justice process, beginning with police custody and initial questioning, continuing through first formal statements, pre-trial proceedings, trial proceedings, appeals processes, and extending to post-conviction matters, including execution of sentences.

Laino stressed that comprehensive coverage throughout all procedural stages is essential to prevent wrongful convictions and coerced confessions. He argued that legal aid should be guaranteed from the very first intervention, including at police stations before any formal proceedings begin. This early intervention is crucial because violations of rights can occur at any stage, and individuals must understand their legal protections from the outset.

The fourth pillar recognised that certain populations require additional protection. This includes targeted support for women, children, and other vulnerable groups, acknowledging their particular vulnerabilities within the justice system. Legal aid should also extend to victims and witnesses, providing protection beyond defendants to include those affected by crimes. Furthermore, these measures must address systemic and intersectional discrimination, recognising how multiple forms of disadvantage can compound legal vulnerabilities.

Laino referenced international principles and guidelines (specifically Principles 10 & 13, and Guidelines 9 & 11) that establish rights for victims of crime and armed conflict, emphasising that some groups require enhanced protection due to their particularly vulnerable positions within society and the justice system.

The final pillar addressed what Mr Laino described as the fundamental issue of maintaining high standards. This requires merit-based selection of legal aid providers to ensure qualified and competent representation. Continuous professional development through ongoing training in rights advocacy and litigation skills must be supported by dedicated training units within legal aid institutions. Fair compensation for legal aid lawyers is essential to attract and retain quality practitioners. Finally, monitoring and evaluation systems with performance standards and quality control mechanisms must be implemented.

Laino emphasised that quality control represents a major topic encompassing multiple dimensions. He advocated for implementing meaningful oversight mechanisms, including mentoring and supervision systems, peer observation of lawyers' performance, random monitoring of court hearings, and review of written submissions in specific cases. He noted that such peer review systems ensure accountability whilst maintaining professional standards.

Laino presented these five pillars as a comprehensive framework that Bangladesh could adopt to guide its legal aid reform efforts. He stressed that successful implementation would require careful attention to each pillar whilst recognising the interconnected nature of these reforms in creating an effective, fair, and accessible justice system.

PRESENTATION BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERT



Christopher Decker

UNDP Expert on Digitalization in Judiciary

Mr Christopher Decker delivered an address centred on the critical role of technology in enhancing access to justice. He began by acknowledging the vital intersection of digitalisation with human rights and emphasised that technological transformation must be guided by principles of justice, inclusivity, and human dignity. Speaking with a sense of urgency, Mr Decker articulated the pressing need to move beyond rhetoric and towards concrete digital reforms in the justice sector, particularly in countries like Bangladesh where structural challenges persist.

He reminded the audience that digitalisation is no longer a luxury or an abstract concept. Rather, it is an imperative for strengthening justice delivery mechanisms. As earlier speakers in the session had highlighted, technology has an indispensable role in resolving long-standing issues in the criminal justice system, including delays, inefficiencies, and barriers to equitable access. The access to justice deficit, he noted, is not new, and that it has been building up for years. However, he noted that the digital era offers a momentous opportunity to reverse this trend.

Drawing from his recent field assessment on justice sector digitalisation in Bangladesh, Mr Decker shared stark findings that underscored the urgency for reform. He reported that there are currently over three million pending cases in the justice system, which is an overwhelming backlog that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable. The reality is grim: those with financial means can often navigate around the delays through private counsel and procedural manoeuvring, while the poor, marginalised, and legally underserved remain stuck in prolonged legal limbo. Behind these statistics, Mr Decker reminded the audience, are real human stories, which involve individuals in pre-trial detention for years, families torn apart, and rights denied.

He shared a particularly sobering personal account of visiting the sixth floor of a court building in Dhaka, where he witnessed towering stacks of paper files, some dating back many years. He was informed that approximately one-fourth of those files were bail applications still awaiting resolution. This, he said, was not only inefficient but deeply disheartening. Such systemic stagnation undermines public trust and perpetuates injustice, especially for those least equipped to bear it.

Bangladesh's position is ranked 127 out of 140 countries in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, which is indicative of the structural hurdles confronting its justice sector. These include

widespread perceptions of corruption, lack of coordination between courts, legal aid offices, and prisons, and limited digitisation of processes. The burden of these inefficiencies falls heaviest on poor communities, women, and children, which are groups that continue to experience disproportionate exclusion from justice mechanisms. Continuing this line of discussion, Mr Decker cited troubling statistics to illustrate the digital divide: only around 31 per cent of the population in Bangladesh regularly use smartphones, and internet access remains uneven, especially in rural areas. This presents a major obstacle for tech-driven legal service delivery. He also noted that many legal aid beneficiaries are either unaware of the services available to them or face bureaucratic hurdles that discourage them from seeking help. Even some lawyers, he revealed, remain uninformed about available state-sponsored legal aid programmes. The scale of unmet legal need far exceeds current service capacity.

However, Mr Decker stressed that this is not a uniquely Bangladeshi challenge. Around the world from developing nations to advanced economies, legal systems are grappling with similar issues. He recalled accompanying the Chief Justice of Nepal on a judicial tour to the US state of Arizona, where he was surprised to find that nearly 90 per cent of tenants and defendants in eviction and minor criminal cases lacked legal representation. The lesson was clear: digital transformation and access to justice are global challenges, not limited by geography or income.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Decker noted, catalysed a remarkable shift in justice service delivery worldwide. Virtually overnight, many courts adopted digital tools such as virtual hearings, remote consultations, and document submission platforms. These rapid adaptations demonstrated the immense potential of technology to overcome physical and bureaucratic barriers. However, such transformations should not be seen as temporary crisis responses. Rather, they should be institutionalised as permanent elements of a modern, rights-based justice system.

To this end, Mr Decker laid out a comprehensive vision for how digitalisation can revolutionise access to justice. He listed a range of technological innovations that can be tailored to meet the needs of Bangladesh's justice sector. These include real-time tracking systems for detainees, which prevent administrative errors and ensure statutory timelines are met; virtual consultation platforms that enable clients to connect with legal counsel regardless of location; electronic bail application processes that reduce unnecessary pretrial detention; SMS-based case tracking systems, offering updates to clients and legal aid providers; digital support services, such as counselling for victims and vulnerable witnesses; evidence management systems that preserve the integrity of testimonies and sensitive data; integrated case management software, eliminating duplication and improving efficiency; mobile applications that connect legal aid services to remote communities, police stations, and correctional facilities; AI-assisted legal research tools, empowering overburdened legal aid lawyers with quicker access to jurisprudence, and data analytics dashboards that help justice administrators identify bottlenecks and allocate resources more effectively.

He praised ongoing pilot efforts under the UNDP-UNODC Legal Aid Digitisation Project in Bangladesh, which aims to develop digital platforms and case management tools across eight pilot districts. These tools are being built with an eye toward scalability and long-term sustainability. However, Mr Decker cautioned that technology is not a magic bullet. Successful digitalisation, he emphasised, hinges on more than just hardware and software. Human engagement is essential. Court staff must be trained, and their concerns must be addressed through robust change management strategies. Judges and legal professionals must be included in the design and rollout of new systems, ensuring that digital tools complement, and do not replace their work.

He warned against what he called “digital islands”: standalone systems that do not communicate with each other or replicate inefficient paper processes in electronic form. These can undermine the very purpose of digitalisation by reinforcing fragmentation. To truly succeed, technology must be seamlessly integrated with legal and institutional reforms. Mr Decker also pointed to the importance of gender-responsive digital strategies. Women, he noted, face unique challenges in accessing justice services, especially in cases of domestic violence, family disputes, or sexual harassment. Technology can help mitigate these barriers through discreet reporting tools, tailored legal advice platforms, and dedicated virtual support services. However, these innovations must be backed by data, safeguards, and inclusive design processes. Geographic disparities, cultural attitudes towards technology, and concerns about sustainability must all be addressed head-on. Digital transformation, he insisted, cannot be an elite project. It must be inclusive, affordable, and driven by the needs of those it seeks to serve.

In closing, Mr Decker made an appeal to all stakeholders present. Reflecting on his week-long engagement in Bangladesh, he said he was inspired by the country’s readiness for change. He acknowledged recent reform initiatives and the political will expressed by government representatives and judicial leaders. However, the critical question, he said, is not whether the tools exist, because they do indeed exist. Nor is the question regarding whether the knowledge is available, because it is available. The real question is whether there is sufficient commitment, coordination, and courage to translate vision into action.

Scaling digital access to justice, he concluded, requires a concerted partnership among government institutions, development agencies, civil society, and the private sector. It requires sustained investment and the willingness to learn from both successes and setbacks. But above all, it demands that justice be seen not as a privilege for the wealthy or well-connected, but as a fundamental right accessible to all, regardless of income, geography, or social status. The time for action, he stated, is now. With the right investment, policy alignment, and inclusive implementation, digital transformation can become the engine of justice sector reform for not just in Bangladesh, but globally.

OPEN DISCUSSION



A M Jamiul Haque (Faisal)

Advocate

Appellate Division, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Advocate A M Jamiul Haque (Faisal) shared his personal observations regarding the criminal investigation process in Bangladesh. He emphasised the need for substantial improvements within investigative agencies such as the Police, EPI, CID, and DB.

His key recommendation was to establish stronger coordination between investigative agencies and public prosecutors during the investigation phase. He noted that prosecutors are currently not involved in the investigation process, which limits the quality and fairness of outcomes. According to him, the inclusion of public prosecutors would help enhance the overall quality of investigations, reduce the number of fraudulent or unnecessary cases, and contribute to the smoother and fairer delivery of justice.



A E M Ismail Hossain

District and Sessions Judge

Director (Administration)

Judicial Administration and Training Institute

Mr Hossain reflected on the current structure of judicial training in the country, noting that training facilities are primarily dedicated to judges. At present, approximately 60 judges and magistrates are undergoing training. Emphasis has been placed on the decision-making responsibilities of magistrates, particularly concerning the sentencing of individuals to prison. He highlighted ongoing efforts to engage judicial officers in discussions related to prison systems and the institutional challenges they pose. It was noted that these individuals are still undergoing foundational or provisional training. Mr Hossain further referred to the importance of maintaining a balanced approach in policy and practice, indicating that relevant training modules continue to be delivered.

In conclusion, he suggested that there is potential to further strengthen training frameworks by integrating them more effectively into the academic history and curriculum of the judiciary.

ROUNDTABLE II

Supporting the establishment of impartial, professional and accountable public prosecution service

Ms Romana Schweiger, Senior Rule of Law, Justice and Security Advisor, UNDP, Bangladesh was the session chair of this Roundtable. The second session of the Roundtable focus on institutional approaches to promote professionalism, integrity, transparency, and public trust, including frameworks for recruitment, career development, and internal oversight in public prosecution services. The session emphasised on the role of prosecutors in protecting human rights and contributing to a fair and effective criminal justice system.



PRESENTATION BY UNODC EXPERT



Anna Giudice

Team Leader

Access to Justice UNODC HQ Vienna

Ms Anna Giudice, Team Leader for Access to Justice at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), delivered a comprehensive presentation on international standards and norms relevant to the development of impartial, professional, and accountable public prosecution services. Her intervention drew upon both United Nations (UN) and International Association of Prosecutors (IAP) frameworks, as well as lessons derived from global practices and ongoing normative work in the field of criminal justice.

At the outset, Ms Giudice laid the normative foundation by referencing a suite of United Nations instruments that underpin the ethical and professional conduct of prosecutors, and more broadly the architecture of justice systems worldwide. Among these, she highlighted the *Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors* adopted during the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Havana, 1990). These guidelines set out essential duties, rights, and safeguards to ensure prosecutorial integrity and autonomy. Complementing this instrument, she referred to the *United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders* (the Bangkok Rules, adopted in 2010), the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures* (the Tokyo Rules, 1990), and the *Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters* (2002). These frameworks collectively promote a more holistic, rights-based, and rehabilitative approach to criminal justice. She also acknowledged the importance of other UN standards concerning victims, child victims, violence against women and children, and the role of prosecutors in safeguarding these vulnerable groups. These instruments have become critical in shaping inclusive justice reform policies.

Turning specifically to prosecutorial standards, Ms Giudice underscored the significance of the IAP's *Standards of Professional Responsibility and Statement of the Essential Duties and Rights of Prosecutors*. She explained that while these standards do not carry the force of international treaties, they are nonetheless widely accepted and respected as authoritative professional guidelines. Importantly, they are co-endorsed by the UNODC and the IAP and have been used to develop practical booklets to support member states in evaluating and enhancing their prosecutorial systems. These materials provide not only a framework of norms but also comparative examples illustrating how different legal systems address various prosecutorial functions.

Ms Giudice paid particular attention to the principle of prosecutorial independence, describing it as a foundational element of any credible and effective justice system. Citing Guideline 4 of the *UN*

Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors, she noted that states are obliged to ensure that prosecutors are able to perform their duties free from intimidation, harassment, interference, or undue liability. Similarly, the IAP standards articulate that prosecutorial discretion—where permitted by national legal systems—must be exercised independently and without political influence. She elaborated that any instructions issued to prosecutors by non-prosecutorial authorities must be transparent, lawful, and regulated by guidelines that preserve both the actuality and perception of prosecutorial autonomy.

Ms Giudice emphasised that prosecutorial independence should be interpreted not solely as institutional separation from the executive branch, but also as operational and internal integrity. She acknowledged that different countries have diverse legal traditions, with some situating the prosecution service within the judiciary, while others place it within the executive branch. Despite this structural variation, what remains non-negotiable is the need to prevent direct political interference in individual cases. External instructions, she clarified, may be appropriate when addressing general prosecutorial policy or case management protocols, but must never apply to specific decisions in individual prosecutions.

She drew attention to systemic risks that may arise in countries where police officers are also empowered with prosecutorial authority. In such configurations, independence may be compromised if officers are subject to command chains within security services. She stressed that this issue has sparked global debate, as countries navigate the tensions between institutional impersonality and the practical need for legal independence.

Ms Giudice further observed that the threat of undue pressure on prosecutors does not arise solely from formal state institutions. Media scrutiny, public opinion, and community-based influence can also jeopardise prosecutorial impartiality. Consequently, she argued that prosecution services must build robust internal cultures of ethical conduct, legal transparency, and decision-making based on evidence and the rule of law. These protections are especially critical in politically sensitive or high-profile cases, such as those involving corruption, organised crime, or cases with political ramifications. She cited the example of several Western European jurisdictions where, despite mature legal systems, prosecutors continue to face political pressure in certain high-stakes cases—demonstrating that this is not an issue confined to a particular region or level of development.

In the second half of her presentation, Ms Giudice explored how prosecution services can assume leadership in advancing structural and penal policy reform. Citing paragraph 50 of the *Kyoto Declaration* (adopted at the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice), she emphasised the importance of promoting national sentencing policies that ensure penalties are proportionate to the seriousness of the offence. Prosecutors, she argued, can contribute meaningfully to addressing systemic challenges such as excessive use of pre-trial detention, prison overcrowding, and the over-criminalisation of minor offences.

Ms Giudice noted that prosecutorial guidelines can play a decisive role in reducing the number of unnecessary prosecutions—for instance, by deprioritising minor non-violent offences, or by recommending alternatives to imprisonment such as diversion, treatment, or restorative justice. These approaches, she said, must remain consistent with international legal standards and aim to alleviate pressure on already overburdened criminal justice systems. She added that these policy decisions are not only operationally efficient but also socially impactful, particularly for vulnerable groups such as individuals with drug dependency, young offenders, and first-time offenders.

Another area of prosecutorial responsibility identified by Ms Giudice was the assurance of victim protection and support. Prosecution services are often the gateway for ensuring that victims—especially in gender-based or child-related cases—receive appropriate assistance, witness protection, and access to justice. This, she stated, requires dedicated institutional measures and victim-sensitive case management approaches.

Case prioritisation and strategic case management were further identified as critical domains where prosecution services can exercise significant influence. Ms Giudice suggested that when properly resourced and guided by professional standards, prosecution services could serve as pivotal actors in fostering systemic accountability. This includes the oversight of investigative processes carried out by law enforcement, scrutiny of pre-trial detention conditions, and ensuring the legality and proportionality of criminal proceedings. Furthermore, she highlighted the vital role of prosecutors in leading the fight against serious organised crime, trafficking, corruption, and transnational offences.

In concluding her presentation, Ms Giudice reminded the participants of the upcoming United Nations *Crime Congress*, held every five years and gathering criminal justice experts from around the world. This global forum provides a rare opportunity for dialogue, peer learning, and agenda-setting on emerging challenges and best practices. She encouraged delegates and member states to engage with the process, noting that the Congress serves both a formal function in setting normative priorities and an informal one in fostering exchange among practitioners and scholars.

Through her presentation, Ms Giudice provided a detailed and principled account of the global standards and practical mechanisms required to support the establishment of independent, professional, and accountable prosecution services. Her intervention offered both conceptual guidance and operational insights, affirming the central role of prosecutors not only as enforcers of justice but also as architects of fairer and more effective criminal justice systems.



PRESENTATION BY NATIONAL EXPERT



Dr Aminul Islam

Deputy Solicitor (Writ-1)

Solicitor Wing, Law and Justice Division

Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs, Bangladesh

Dr Aminul Islam began by putting his comments within the broader national imperative of reinforcing the rule of law, advancing justice, safeguarding fundamental rights, and restoring public confidence in the criminal justice system. At the outset, he expressed gratitude to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), and other partners for organising the forum, noting its timeliness and relevance for the country's legal reform agenda.

Dr Islam provided a critical overview of the historical and structural deficiencies characterising Bangladesh's current public prosecution system. He underscored that while the idea of a permanent government attorney service has been long discussed by academics, legal practitioners, and policymakers, meaningful institutionalisation has been persistently absent. Currently, the process for appointing public prosecutors is fragmented, legally inconsistent, and vulnerable to political influence. Appointments of the Attorney General and his deputies are made under Article 64 of the Constitution and governed by the Attorney General's (Terms and Conditions of Service) Rules, 1973. Meanwhile, other law officers including additional, deputy, and assistant attorney generals working primarily in the Supreme Court, are appointed under the Bangladesh Law Officers Order, 1972. At the district level, government attorneys operate as Public Prosecutors and Government Pleaders, governed by the outdated Code of Criminal Procedure, particularly Sections 492 to 495. This scattered legal framework, he argued, is insufficient for ensuring institutional accountability, performance consistency, or service professionalism.

Highlighting the systemic weaknesses in the current system, Dr Islam pointed to the absence of a transparent recruitment mechanism, lack of training and career development pathways, poor terms of service, limited oversight, and inadequate infrastructure. He noted that government law officers, particularly those in lower courts, remain at constant risk of arbitrary dismissal without cause and receive meagre remuneration which is approximately US\$125 per month. This demotivates legal professionals and encourages reliance on private legal practice. He asserted that this allowance of dual practice, although permitted under current laws, significantly undermines the commitment of public prosecutors to state interests. These deficiencies result in poorly represented state interests, violations of victims' rights, and widespread public distrust in government lawyers, all of which contribute to an erosion of public faith in the justice system.

Dr Islam then traced the policy history of attempted reform. He recalled that in 2008, the

then caretaker government promulgated an ordinance to establish a Government Attorney Service comprising two branches: a Supreme Court Branch and a District Court Branch. However, this effort was ultimately diluted following the exclusion of the Supreme Court branch via a second ordinance issued in December of that year. The elected government that took office in 2009 declined to ratify either ordinance, effectively discontinuing the initiative. However, in the wake of the recent mass civic mobilisation in July 2024, which led to the installation of the current interim administration, new momentum for reform emerged. In response, the government established several commissions to examine governance failures, including one Commission of Inquiry focused on prosecutorial integrity and reform. That commission, chaired by a senior Supreme Court judge and comprising eight members, released its findings in 2025. Chapter 7 of its final report offered a comprehensive proposal to establish a permanent, accountable government attorney service which was referred to as the Government Attorney Service (GAS). This section was based on principles drawn from the earlier 2008 model but expanded in scope and ambition.

Dr Islam described the proposed GAS structure as a unified, pensionable, and permanent cadre service analogous to other government services, with clearly defined career progression pathways, duties, powers, and accountability mechanisms. The service would consist of a national hierarchy inclusive of additional, deputy, and assistant attorney positions operating under the oversight of a newly created Department of Government Attorneys. At the district level, District Attorneys and their assistants would have clearly demarcated responsibilities. Prosecutors would be entrusted with the discretion to decline prosecutions based on insufficient evidence or lack of public interest—powers currently unavailable under the present system. They would also be empowered to supervise police investigations for indictable offences and engage directly with matters of victim protection, timely trial proceedings, and safeguarding due process. Dr Islam stressed that prosecutorial independence from executive interference would be a cornerstone of the new framework, a move intended to boost credibility and shield prosecutions from political manipulation.

Among the most transformative features of the proposed model, Dr Islam highlighted the abolition of private practice for prosecutors, thereby ensuring their undivided attention to state responsibilities. Moreover, the GAS would establish an institutional culture grounded in meritocratic recruitment through the Judicial Service Commission. Training and professional development would be central, with the Department of Government Attorneys responsible for continuous capacity-building, curriculum design, and integration of emerging legal practices, particularly in complex areas such as cybercrime, gender-based violence, and transnational crime. A strict disciplinary code would be enforced, with prosecutors subject to oversight and periodic evaluations. Reports would be submitted to Parliament to ensure public accountability.

He further elaborated on the systemic benefits of the GAS model. Independence from executive influence and the elimination of private legal practice would remove conflicts of interest and restore prosecutorial neutrality. A clearly defined structure with job security and promotional opportunities would attract talented legal professionals and enhance morale. Greater professionalism and oversight would improve trial efficiency, reduce case backlog, and ensure better protection of victims' rights. Dr Islam argued that all of this would, in turn, enhance public trust, establish a credible rule of law framework, and positively affect economic development by strengthening investor confidence in legal institutions.

Turning to the necessary implementation roadmap, Dr Islam proposed a two-phase strategy: legal-institutional and operational. Legally, an ordinance would be needed in the short term to establish the GAS, given that the Parliament is currently not in session. This ordinance would define service terms, structure, recruitment, powers, duties, and disciplinary provisions. Transitional clauses would allow current law officers to be absorbed into the new system subject to performance assessments. Existing laws such as the Bangladesh Law Officers Order 1972 and the Attorney General's Terms and Conditions Rules of 1973, would be repealed or amended. The Code of Criminal Procedure and related statutes would require alignment to recognise and integrate the powers and roles of GAS prosecutors.

Operationally, the Department of Government Attorneys would be formed under the Law and Justice Division, possibly by restructuring the existing Solicitor Wing. This department would oversee recruitment, training, human resource development, and day-to-day service administration. Dr Islam proposed leveraging the institutional knowledge already housed in the Solicitor Wing to streamline the transition. External development partners, such as UNODC, could be instrumental in supporting capacity-building, particularly during the foundational years. Professional development initiatives including on-the-job training, legal ethics, and victim-sensitive handling of cases, would be essential in establishing a service culture rooted in fairness, competence, and accountability.

Acknowledging the political and bureaucratic challenges inherent in such an ambitious reform effort, Dr Islam called for sustained political commitment and inclusive stakeholder engagement. He noted that one of the most formidable obstacles would be resistance from vested interest groups within the legal community, particularly those benefiting from the status quo. Some dissenting views, including those expressed by a few commission members, would need to be addressed with evidence-based dialogue and consensus-building. To that end, he underscored the importance of strategic communication, legal awareness campaigns, and judicial endorsement to build cross-sectoral support for the initiative. Dr Islam also flagged the need for a cultural shift in prosecutorial philosophy, moving away from patronage-driven appointments to merit-based service and from adversarial confrontation to service-oriented public engagement. This transformation would require motivational efforts, peer mentorship, and an internalisation of the prosecutorial role as a public good rather than a political instrument.

He concluded with a reaffirmation of Bangladesh's readiness to embrace institutional reform in the justice sector. Describing the post-uprising context as a window of opportunity, Dr Islam emphasised that Bangladesh is at a historical juncture where institutional credibility must be rebuilt on the basis of justice, equity, and rule of law. He reiterated that the introduction of a permanent, impartial, and professional Government Attorney Service would be a defining achievement in that journey. For such a reform to succeed, it must be approached with legal rigour, operational clarity, and political honesty. He called upon the judiciary, the legal fraternity, civil society, and development partners to stand united in supporting this transformation.

PRESENTATION BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERT



Dr Madhawa Tennakoon

*Deputy Solicitor General of the Attorney General's Department
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*

Mr Madhawa Tennakoon, Deputy Solicitor General of the Attorney General's Department, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri-Lanka, began his address by drawing from his own experience as a legal practitioner from South Asia and as someone who lived through complex episodes of political unrest and reform; he also highlighted the value of regional dialogue in shaping effective, accountable, and inclusive justice institutions. Having witnessed significant political turbulence and violence over the past three decades in Sri Lanka, he could deeply relate to the reform challenges being confronted by Bangladesh. The recent reform initiatives being undertaken in Bangladesh, particularly concerning prosecutorial accountability and the impartiality of public institutions, resonate with similar experiences in Sri Lanka. Reflecting on public protests, shifts in government, and intense public scrutiny in his own country, he stressed that moments of crisis can often act as catalysts for long-overdue structural reform. Mr Tennakoon refrained from offering evaluative comments on the Bangladeshi government's responses to past uprisings, acknowledging that such analyses must be left to national stakeholders and experts. However, he emphasised one universal truth that cuts across borders: large-scale public unrest is almost always rooted in either the perception or in the reality of institutional injustice, and any serious reform must begin by addressing these public grievances in a credible and accountable manner.

Citing previous international missions and recommendations, including those undertaken by the United Nations, Mr Tennakoon mentioned that strong suggestions had been made regarding the need for impartial prosecutorial services and enhanced oversight of prosecutorial discretion. These recommendations, particularly following political crises, carry weight not just because they come from international bodies but because they often reflect the voices and concerns of the people. Referencing a prior fact-finding visit to Bangladesh by a high-level international mission, Mr Tennakoon noted that the establishment of an impartial, professional, and accountable prosecution service had featured prominently in their findings. These recommendations should not be viewed as mere technical advice since they represent the institutional embodiment of the public demand for fairness and rule of law. He acknowledged his task was made easier by speakers who had come before him, particularly those who outlined the global legal standards and normative frameworks that could guide reforms in Bangladesh. Mr Tennakoon then presented his own proposals, prefacing them with a reminder that reforms must

first be grounded in values. Before institutionalising any new prosecutorial structure or mechanism, it would be imperative to identify and safeguard the core principles on which such institutions would operate. In this regard, he reaffirmed the centrality of impartiality, professionalism, and accountability which were stated themes of the dialogue. However, he proposed an additional, often neglected yet crucial pillar: integrity. According to him, allegations of prosecutorial misconduct or bias often stem from breaches in integrity. Across the region and in Bangladesh too, questions about ethical conduct of prosecutors remained a persistent issue. Therefore, he argued, no prosecutorial reform could be deemed complete unless it would include mechanisms that would promote, preserve, and monitor integrity. The credibility of public prosecution services, in his view, rests as much on the ethical character of their officers as on the structure of institutions themselves.

He then outlined five key areas of reform which, in his view, should guide Bangladesh's efforts to establish a modern, independent, and respected prosecution service. The first area was the adoption of global standards. Globally accepted legal and procedural norms were essential not only to ensure high professional standards, but also to build public confidence. When national systems would align themselves with global principles and best practices, it would signal to both national and global observers that the state was committed to transparency, fairness, and due process. The existence of recognised standards would in turn, help create a consistent reference point for performance evaluation, both internally within the prosecution service and externally by oversight bodies. These would also help prosecutors themselves by providing a clear framework to guide their decision-making. While acknowledging it might not always be possible to meet every global benchmark in practice, Mr Tennakoon argued the mere presence of these benchmarks would act as a motivational and regulatory tool to elevate institutional behaviour. On evaluative function of global standards, he said, when a prosecution office would face criticism, whether from national watchdogs, human rights bodies, or global partners, adherence to known global standards would provide a rational and defensible basis for institutional actions. For instance, if questions were raised about why a certain individual was or was not prosecuted, officials could cite or reference documented guidelines and procedures aligned with global norms. This kind of transparency was essential for maintaining legitimacy and resisting political pressure.

His second point concerned establishment of predetermined criteria for prosecution and non-prosecution decisions, including formal withdrawal of cases. He referred to remarks made earlier in the dialogue about Bangladesh's plan to withdraw around 12,000 politically motivated or faulty cases, with a potential future withdrawal of up to 20,000 cases. While he welcomed this initiative, he also cautioned that such steps must be governed by a clearly defined, transparent, and publicly available set of criteria. Otherwise, decisions to withdraw cases could be viewed with suspicion, possibly leading to fresh allegations of bias or political influence in the future. Integrity of a justice system was measured not only by whom it chose to prosecute, but also by whom it chose not to. Withdrawal of a case must be justified in terms of objective criteria, whether it involved evidentiary weaknesses, procedural irregularities, or public interest considerations. These criteria must be codified, standardised, and applied uniformly. By doing so, the government could avoid future accusations of selective justice, build a reputation for procedural fairness and legal neutrality.

The third area was the importance of institutionalising impartiality and independence through structural reform. Drawing from Sri Lanka's own experience and referencing comparative models, he noted that prosecutorial services must be structurally insulated from both political interference and internal corruption. One effective way of achieving this was through separation of the prosecutorial

function from the executive branch of government. This included ensuring operational autonomy, independent budgetary control, and oversight mechanisms that report to Parliament or an independent judicial council rather than to the executive. Without such safeguards, the public perception of partiality, even if unfounded, could severely damage the credibility of the justice system.

On the fourth area, Mr Tennakoon spoke about professional development of prosecutors, which he described as a critical yet often overlooked component of reform. A competent, well-trained, and ethically grounded prosecutorial corps is the backbone of any credible justice system. He advocated for continuous legal education, exposure to comparative legal systems, and specialised training in areas such as gender-based violence, cybercrime, terrorism, and international human rights law. Such investments were not optional, but instead essential to ensure that public prosecutors could meet modern legal challenges while upholding the rule of law. The fifth and final recommendation centred on institutional accountability and public trust. Mr Tennakoon urged that mechanisms for internal accountability such as disciplinary boards, performance audits, and complaints review systems be institutionalised within the prosecutorial service; he also underscored the importance of public engagement and transparency. Prosecutors must not only be accountable to their superiors, but also to the communities they serve. This might include publication of annual reports, data on case outcomes, and public consultations on prosecutorial guidelines. Transparency is a precondition for trust, and without this trust, even the most technically sound institutions would struggle to command legitimacy.

Mr Tennakoon then acknowledged the progress being made in Bangladesh and praised the ongoing dialogue among national and international actors. However, the path to meaningful prosecutorial reform must be both principled, practical, and rooted in values, e.g., impartiality, professionalism, accountability, integrity, and guided by global standards. It must also be responsive to the specific historical, political, and cultural contexts of the country. He emphasised that the credibility of any justice system would be reliant not just on its legal frameworks, but the trust it commands from the people. For that trust to be earned and retained, the prosecutorial service must be a model of fairness, competence, and integrity. Bangladesh, he suggested, had a unique opportunity in this moment of transition to build a prosecution service worthy of the public's confidence and aligned with the highest ideals of justice.

Mr Tennakoon spoke on contextual similarities of South Asian legal systems. Most judicial systems in the region including those of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were rooted in the English common law tradition. As a result, prosecutorial decisions had also historically been guided by evidentiary considerations, often framed around whether there is a “reasonable prospect of securing a conviction.” While this evidentiary standard remains foundational, he suggested prosecution services in the region must also increasingly take broader public interest considerations into account. In certain cases, even where evidentiary thresholds were technically met, the public interest might not be served by pursuing prosecution. Conversely, there might be occasions where prosecution was warranted not solely due to the sufficiency of evidence, but because of compelling public policy concerns. As such, he urged a re-evaluation of the traditional standard and advocated for adoption of predetermined, transparent criteria to guide both decisions to prosecute and decisions to withdraw or discontinue prosecution. The absence of such criteria would risk ad hocism and opens prosecutorial decision-making to perceptions of arbitrariness or political motivation. Elaborating further, Mr Tennakoon emphasised the need for a comprehensive and publicly accessible set of prosecution guidelines. These guidelines, he argued, would serve multiple purposes. First, they would improve internal consistency and transparency in prosecutorial decisions. Second, they would signal to the public that such decisions were based on

established principles rather than discretionary or opaque reasoning. Drawing attention to the regional legacy of treating prosecutorial information as privileged or confidential, he asserted that such approaches were no longer acceptable in the age of democratic accountability. The public, including those not directly involved in litigation, had a right to understand how and why key legal decisions were made.

Transparency is not merely a matter of good governance, but also a necessary condition for public trust. Transparency is not merely a matter of good governance, but also a necessary condition for public trust. In transitional contexts such as those Bangladesh may currently be experiencing, this is especially important. Introduction of clear and coherent prosecutorial guidelines could help dispel suspicions of selective justice, especially when large numbers of politically sensitive cases were being reviewed or withdrawn. By institutionalising a standardised and publicly justifiable framework, states could pre-empt future allegations of bias or retribution, thereby strengthening public confidence during politically volatile periods. He also noted prosecution guidelines helped ensure consistency across cases and jurisdictions, addressing a common public concern: why certain individuals were prosecuted while others, facing similar charges, were not. With written guidelines in place, prosecutors, defendants, and the general public alike could better understand and predict outcomes, reducing confusion and suspicion. On institutional design, he advocated for creation of a full-time, professional prosecution service, especially at senior levels. Recruitment of prosecutors should be based strictly on merit, competence, integrity and not political allegiance, religious affiliation, tribal identity, or any other extraneous factor. While recognising the diversity of backgrounds in South Asia, he insisted public prosecutors must be demonstrably free from all forms of undue influence. Regardless of personal affiliations or beliefs, prosecutors must be selected through transparent, merit-based processes and held to high standards of professional detachment and impartiality. To ensure this level of professionalism is sustained over time, there should be rigorous and continuous training. Given the backlog of cases that numbered around 3 million as cited by previous speakers, he argued that now was not the time for incremental or symbolic reform. Instead, states must invest substantially in capacity-building programmes to ensure prosecutors were well-equipped for handling the complexity and volume of cases, particularly in transitional or post-crisis environments. Training should not only focus on legal knowledge, but also on ethics, communication, evidence handling, gender sensitivity, and emerging issues like cybercrime and global cooperation. He also focused on importance of speed in prosecution, linking it directly to public confidence. Delayed justice is tantamount to denied justice. Speedy prosecution is not merely an administrative objective, it is a core component of institutional legitimacy. In this context, he recommended streamlining and modernisation of prosecutorial decision-making processes. This would include faster case intake procedures, clearer lines of communication between investigative bodies and prosecutors, better tracking of case progression. He cited examples from other countries where reforms in these areas had led to measurable improvements in case clearance rates and public trust.

He also emphasised strongly on endorsing the use of technology in justice delivery. Referring to remarks by Mr Decker and other experts, he underscored that digital tools including electronic document systems, digital case tracking, and virtual case conferencing should be urgently adopted across South Asian prosecutorial and judicial systems. He described common scenarios where critical legal documents or responses were delayed under the excuse that mail did not arrive or that paper files were inaccessible. These problems could be readily addressed through simple digital interventions, many of which already had a legal basis for adoption in countries like Bangladesh. He did not delve into more advanced uses of artificial intelligence or predictive analytics, but made it clear that the

digitisation of basic processes such as evidence submission, case scheduling, and inter-agency communication should be prioritised. Not only did these technologies enhance efficiency, but would also promote transparency and limit scopes for corruption or manipulation. He concluded the speech by saying political will, institutional collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to justice were prerequisites for meaningful reform; the moment was ripe for transformation, and incumbent upon all stakeholders to seize it.



OPEN DISCUSSION



Syed Ejaz Kabir

Deputy Attorney General for Bangladesh

Barrister-at-Law, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Mr Syed Ejaz Kabir started his remarks by mentioning his background as one of the Jury and appreciated that the morning session had been filled with beautiful presentations and meaningful discussions. He raised a question about how one could judge something as failing, noting that the second law they referred to emphasises learning from others' experiences. He highlighted the importance of experience, especially when discussing impartial approaches and working with people in sensitive contexts.

According to the speaker, many new professionals often overlook the definitions and steps involved in impartial processes, focusing instead on general experience. He stressed that professions such as law and medicine demand experience from the very beginning, as one cannot become a prosecutor or a legal professional without first gaining practical exposure. The speaker added that while professionals aim to become prosecutors, how quickly they reach that position depends on multiple factors, such as personal motivation, cultural influences, and regulatory frameworks, which can vary across countries.

They suggested that further discussion was needed to strengthen the understanding and implementation of impartial approaches. Moving on, the speaker briefly touched on the digitalisation of justice systems. He also shared that our country was among the first in the region to use digital tools in the justice sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, with support from the United Nations. However, he pointed out that the current system falls short of true digitalisation. In practice, he explained, documents are still drafted physically, printed, signed via affidavit, scanned, and then taken to people, which does not reflect a fully digital process. The speaker argued that if proper digitalisation were in place, he would be able to access and process justice through a simple mobile app. Mr Kabir concluded by asking what could be done to improve the current digital justice system and thanked everyone for the opportunity to speak.



Mohammad Faruque

Director

Judicial Administration and Training Institute

Mr Faruque began by highlighting several challenges in the implementation of current services within Bangladesh. He pointed out that both the police and the judiciary at the district level face considerable difficulties. One of the key challenges, he noted, is the transition from temporary to permanent services. This change would come with significant financial implications, as the required public expenditure is substantial for the full implementation of permanent services. Furthermore, he raised concerns about the relationship between the police and judiciary, stressing the need for clear, fundamental principles to guide their collaboration. Md. Faruque concluded by suggesting that the government should work towards overcoming these challenges to establish a sustainable, permanent service for Bangladesh's justice system.



Serra M Tsethlikai

Resident Legal Advisor

US Department of Justice - OPDAT

Ms Serra M. Tsethlikai, a federal prosecutor with the US Department of Justice, shared her perspective on the need for reform in Bangladesh's criminal justice system. She stressed that while the path to true justice may be challenging, the rewards, specifically equal access to justice and the rule of law, are invaluable. According to Tsethlikai, the establishment of an ethical prosecution service would be a key step toward achieving these goals. She emphasised that prosecutors play a critical role in the justice system, as they are responsible for determining the charges and the severity of charges an individual faces. While she acknowledged the challenges in implementing such reforms, she expressed confidence that these obstacles could be overcome and that the ultimate benefits would greatly improve the justice system in Bangladesh.

Mr Tsethlikai also discussed the importance of maintaining high ethical standards in the prosecution process. She highlighted the accountability mechanisms available for prosecutors, including the possibility of losing their position if they fail to uphold these standards. She spoke about

her commitment to ensuring justice, noting that while she may not always win a case, she must always believe in her conviction that the evidence supports the charges. The role of judges and juries, she noted, is to assess the case independently, but her responsibility as a prosecutor is to be certain that she can prove the charges beyond a reasonable doubt. In her view, ethical integrity is essential to the credibility of the justice system.



S M Aktaruzzaman

*Senior Directing Staff (Academic)
Police Staff College*

Mr Aktaruzzaman raised a concern regarding cultural and ethical dimensions of public service, which he described as sensitive and complex. He reflected on how, in the context of Bangladesh, public service functions within a broader system involving the state and the market. He noted that while the state is typically viewed as non-profit-oriented and the market as profit-driven, there remains a confusing and persistent scarcity of resources. Using the example of healthcare, he pointed out that although hospitals have been established to serve the poor, much of the healthcare service can now be purchased from the private market, while the state often fails to provide adequate support. He emphasised that public prosecution, as a component of the state system, is similarly affected by this contradiction. Although the state system is designed to serve the poor, he observed that state servants frequently do not operate with this objective in mind. He concluded by asking how this cultural gap between the intent of state service and the conduct of its servants could be addressed.

RESPONSES FROM THE PANELLISTS

In response to the questions raised by the floor, beginning with a discussion on the need for experience and technology in public prosecution. The panellists stated that they fully agreed on the importance of experience for improving the quality of public prosecution, noting that the Judicial Reform Commission had proposed recruiting experienced lawyers, including additional attorney generals, from outside the government structure. They highlighted that the Attorney General, in particular, should be appointed from outside the service. Additionally, he pointed out that digitisation and access to information were also crucial, although Bangladesh, being in a transitional phase, may face challenges in fully implementing these reforms.

The panellists also addressed the importance of strengthening relationships among lawyers, public prosecutors, and government legal representatives, noting that these relationships must be improved through consultation with both the judiciary and the wider legal community.

Turning to the ethical dimension, they expressed their agreement that ethics must be a foundational concern if public prosecution services are to improve. Panellists emphasised that without ethical standards, reforms would lack legitimacy.

Finally, they acknowledged the concern raised by Mr Aktaruzzaman regarding the cultural issue, stating that this was a persistent challenge that affects the behaviour of public servants. Referring to his earlier presentation, one of the panellists reiterated that cultural barriers often render state mechanisms inactive or unresponsive. Dr Islam stressed that addressing such issues would require sustained efforts through dialogue, communication, training, and motivation.

ROUNDTABLE III

Strengthening police-prosecution cooperation for more efficient, human-rights based investigations



The last session was moderated by Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng, Director General of BIIS. The discussion of this session highlighted the enhancing cooperation between police and prosecution services to ensure efficient and coordinated criminal investigations. The session reviewed institutional and procedural framework that promoted effective communication and case building between investigators and prosecutors. Emphasis was placed on fostering mutual trust, improving the quality for evidence, providing essential victim and witness support and protection and ensuring that investigative practices upheld due process and human rights standards.

PRESENTATION BY UNODC EXPERT



Edwin Cantu

*Access to Justice Specialist
UNODC HQ, Vienna*

Mr Edwin Cantu, Access to Justice Specialist at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Headquarters in Vienna, delivered an insightful and detailed presentation during Roundtable 3 on strengthening police-prosecution cooperation for more efficient, human rights-based investigations. His remarks drew upon both international normative frameworks and on-the-ground experiences, particularly from Pakistan and Mexico, to illustrate how coordination between police and prosecutors can be enhanced to ensure fairness, effectiveness, and compliance with legal safeguards.

He began by referencing the UN *Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors*, particularly the provision concerning cooperation with other government agencies and institutions. The guidelines state that “in order to ensure the fairness and effectiveness of prosecution, prosecutors shall strive to cooperate with the police, the courts, the legal profession, public defenders and other government agencies or institutions.” Mr Cantu emphasised the direct correlation drawn in this standard between fairness, effectiveness, and coordinated action among key actors within the criminal justice system. He posed the central question of how to operationalise this standard in practice, acknowledging the diversity in prosecutorial functions across legal systems.

The functional role of prosecutors, Mr Cantu noted, varies significantly from one jurisdiction to another, shaped by legal traditions and institutional structures. In some countries, prosecutors have the authority and duty to lead investigations, directing law enforcement officers and even initiating investigations independently when a violation of the law comes to their attention. In others, prosecutors do not possess supervisory authority over police; instead, the police conduct investigations and subsequently submit case files to the prosecution, which then evaluates the sufficiency of evidence and decides whether charges should be brought. Some legal systems also involve judicial review mechanisms as an additional safeguard to ensure that investigations are conducted lawfully and that the rights of suspects are upheld. Mr Cantu stressed that in practice, many countries employ hybrid or mixed systems that incorporate aspects of both models, tailored to their specific contexts.

Mr Cantu then elaborated on UNODC’s extensive engagement in Pakistan. He described the country’s criminal justice system as facing considerable challenges, particularly in ensuring fair and effective investigations. Despite some promising reforms such as the creation of specialised investigative units and the integration of modern forensic techniques, institutional capacity remains constrained. A key issue, he noted, is the continued over-reliance on confessional evidence, often obtained through

coercive means. This concern, which had also been raised by other participants at the event, was being addressed by UNODC through the promotion of investigative interviewing methodologies. These techniques, designed to build rapport rather than rely on force or pressure, provide a rights-based and evidence-informed alternative to traditional interrogation practices. Mr Cantu highlighted that UNODC has developed tools, training manuals, and resources on this topic, including guidance on the role of memory in investigations and how it can affect the reliability of evidence.

Turning back to the situation in Pakistan, Mr Cantu explained that although prosecutors are legally responsible for reviewing investigations and ensuring adherence to evidentiary rules, they are often brought into the process only after police investigations are completed. This lack of early engagement limits their ability to influence the direction and quality of evidence collection. Furthermore, there is no uniform framework of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that defines the modalities of police-prosecutor collaboration across provinces. In response, UNODC has supported several key initiatives in Pakistan.

First, UNODC has assisted in the development of SOPs that formalise the process of early prosecutorial engagement, joint case reviews, and structured feedback mechanisms. Second, capacity-building initiatives were implemented for both investigators and prosecutors, with particular emphasis on the handling of forensic evidence, addressing sexual and gender-based violence, case management, and upholding fair trial standards. Third, stakeholder consultations were organised involving police, prosecution services, and the judiciary to facilitate mutual understanding and institutional coordination. Fourth, UNODC has supported legal and policy reform efforts to strengthen provisions related to police-prosecutor cooperation and evidentiary integrity. Finally, the Office has helped to establish Serious Crime Investigation Units in certain provinces, including a model facility that co-locates investigators and prosecutors to jointly handle high-priority offences such as homicide, violent robbery, and gender-based crimes. This integrated model has proven successful, and the Government of Balochistan has formally requested assistance in replicating similar units in other districts. Mr Cantu characterised this model as a promising practice that could be further scaled and studied for wider regional application.

Mr Cantu then shifted focus to a second case study, highlighting UNODC's engagement in Mexico. He shared a personal connection to this initiative, having participated directly as a trainer and technical advisor. Mexico's justice system has undergone a profound transformation, transitioning from an inquisitorial system, based largely on written procedures, to an adversarial and oral model that requires a more proactive role for prosecutors. In this context, state prosecution offices are responsible for directing criminal investigations and working collaboratively with various actors to present coherent and well-substantiated cases in court.

In Mexico, prosecutors lead investigations but must coordinate closely with a range of professionals including police officers, forensic specialists, victim support staff, legal aid providers, and witness protection personnel. To better understand and address coordination challenges, UNODC implemented a series of context-sensitive activities. The first step involved reviewing case files of high-impact crimes to identify recurring procedural gaps and coordination failures. These findings were then used to inform the development of a tailored diagnostic methodology to explore the root causes of inefficiencies in investigation practices.

Subsequently, UNODC facilitated stakeholder roundtables, bringing together a wide spectrum of criminal justice actors. These roundtables provided a platform for dialogue between prosecutors, investigative police, intelligence analysts, victim assistance professionals, and others. Mr Cantu

underscored the importance of involving frontline personnel in such consultations, as they are best placed to identify practical solutions and generate ownership of the process. The insights from these roundtables were then used to develop SOPs to be adopted by state prosecution services, standardising procedures for joint investigations and inter-agency communication.

The final phase of the project in Mexico involved simulation-based training for all relevant criminal justice personnel. These four-day training sessions focused on applying the new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) through scenario-based exercises, aimed at improving coordination, communication, and victim-centred approaches. Mr Cantu noted that for many participants, this was their first opportunity to engage in joint training alongside colleagues from other agencies. The sessions were designed not only to build skills, but also to foster mutual respect and understanding across institutional lines. A documentary video was produced to commemorate the initiative and document the collaborative process, which Mr Cantu described as a challenging yet highly rewarding experience.

In conclusion, Mr Cantu reiterated that effective police-prosecution cooperation is essential for delivering justice and protecting human rights. He emphasised that while institutional contexts may vary, the principles of early engagement, trust, mutual understanding, and a clear legal framework are universally applicable. The case studies from Pakistan and Mexico demonstrated that such cooperation is not only possible, but can be transformational when approached with the right combination of normative guidance, practical tools, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Mr Cantu offered to share further materials—including UNODC’s investigative interviewing manuals and memory reliability modules—with interested participants, and encouraged continued cross-country learning and collaboration. His presentation provided a compelling case for placing police-prosecution cooperation at the centre of modern, rights-based criminal justice reform.



PRESENTATION BY NATIONAL EXPERT



Md Tareq Jubayer

*Deputy Commissioner (Criminal Intelligence and Prosecution)
Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)*

Mr Md Tareq Jubayer, Deputy Commissioner (Criminal Intelligence and Prosecution), Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), commended the collaborative nature of the discussions, acknowledged importance of placing the public at the heart of justice system. Referring to the evolving legal and institutional landscape, he noted shifting paradigm towards a more effective and coordinated prosecution framework that aligned with principles of rule of law and human rights. In particular, he highlighted recent policy declarations by the Attorney General as indicative of an institutional commitment to transforming the justice system.

In the aftermath of the 2024 popular uprising, Mr Jubayer emphasised that state institutions including the police, prosecution services, and judiciary responded to the demand for reform. A key aspect of these reforms must be the human rights-based approach to investigation and prosecution. He outlined essential components of such a rights-based framework, including adherence to constitutional safeguards, compliance with international human rights standards, humane treatment of detained persons, need for fair, transparent investigative procedures, and integration of institutional mechanisms that would facilitate access to justice. Drawing attention to legal obligations, he pointed out that Article 33 of the Constitution of Bangladesh mandates the production of any arrested person before a magistrate within 24 hours of detention. This constitutional provision aligns with international legal norms, including Article 9(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which underscores importance of timely judicial oversight following arrest. Additionally, Section 61 of the CrPC reiterates no individual may be detained without judicial authorisation beyond the prescribed 24-hour period. In this regard, the prosecution division has an instrumental role in issuing reminders and working in close coordination with relevant police stations to uphold this requirement. Highlighting commendable efforts already underway, he described the creation of a centralised control room in DMP, equipped with real-time communication tools and closed-circuit television (CCTV) monitoring. This initiative would enable authorities to ensure timely and lawful production of arrestees in court. Following the July 2024 uprising, this technological infrastructure was strengthened further to promote transparency and accountability.

Mr Jubayer elaborated on practical initiatives taken to ensure humane treatment of detainees. The DMP introduced SOPs to guarantee the dignity and welfare of individuals during court appearances. These included provision of helmets and protective equipment in high-risk situations, and logistical support for detainees with physical disabilities; steps had been taken to provide primary medical care

during detention. He announced establishment of a mobile medical unit staffed by trained professionals under the Ministry of Health, aimed at delivering medical assistance to detainees, particularly those who have been injured or are in vulnerable physical condition. There were protocols introduced to prevent acts of public humiliation, such as shielding detainees from projectiles like rotten eggs or other objects sometimes thrown by crowds. Introduction of a clean water treatment van was cited as another example of improved detainee welfare, ensuring all individuals have access to safe drinking water during legal proceedings. On remand and custodial abuse, Mr Jubayer referred to Sections 167 and 200 of the CrPC, which govern procedures relating to remand. While courts may authorise police custody for up to 15 days during an investigation, this must occur within the initial 24-hour window following arrest. He proposed mandatory medical certification before and after remand be institutionalised, thereby reinforcing safeguards against torture and ill-treatment; he acknowledged that reforms to this end had already been announced and suggested their integration into future amendments to the law. Concerning witness and victim protection, Mr Jubayer highlighted the establishment of dedicated help desks within the premises of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Courts. These desks, jointly managed by the police and prosecution services, provide legal assistance, procedural guidance, and psychological support to victims and witnesses. This initiative, would enhance public trust in the justice system and facilitate transparency. Additional facilities, including rest areas for male and female witnesses and dedicated breastfeeding spaces for female litigants, had been introduced to ensure a more humane and inclusive court environment.

Mr Jubayer elaborated on procedural reforms aimed at improving the quality of prosecution. Under Rule 444 of the *Police Regulations of Bengal 1943*, core inspectors are empowered to scrutinise charge sheets and identify legally or procedurally deficient cases. This process includes verifying the age of accused individuals in juvenile cases and ensuring necessary documentation, e.g., medical certificates in cases of murder or grievous injury, is included. Where errors are found, such as minors being incorrectly listed as adults, concerned officers can request revisions and additional reports. Institutionalising this practice, the Prosecution Division proposed appointment of dedicated child protection officers and women officers in police stations to safeguard vulnerable populations and ensure integrity of the justice process. Mr Jubayer also stressed the importance of institutional coordination. The Prosecution Division could serve as a strategic platform connecting the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and correctional institutions. He advocated for regular coordination meetings to address shared challenges, exchange best practices, and promote consistency in human rights-based investigative procedures. A major innovation he described was the Case Information Management System (CIMS), a data management platform introduced to streamline sharing of case information among prosecutors, police, and the judiciary. He expressed optimism this digital infrastructure could significantly enhance coordination and transparency, especially in high-volume courts such as those in Dhaka. He proposed expansion of this system to include the Supreme Court and advocated for its use in tracking progress of cases, managing schedules, and providing up-to-date information to all stakeholders. Mr Jubayer asserted that human rights-based policing and prosecution must rest on fairness, dignity, and procedural justice. He called for victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches across the justice system, stating all forms of discrimination must be rooted out through institutional reform. Emphasising the need for accountability, he proposed oversight mechanisms be embedded in all operational layers of the justice process. Furthermore, Mr Jubayer proposed a suite of reforms aimed at improving capacity and infrastructure. These would include appointment of officers trained specifically to handle cases involving women and children, expansion of medical facilities in court premises, enhancing physical infrastructure for prosecution offices, and promotion of people-centric

policies. Introduction of dedicated female officers and special training programmes could significantly improve the responsiveness of the criminal justice system.

In conclusion, Mr Jubayer reaffirmed his commitment to transforming Bangladesh's justice system through integrated and collaborative reform. He hoped the police and prosecution services would continue to function as mutually reinforcing institutions working in partnership with the judiciary, civil society, and the public. Meaningful reforms would require sustained commitment, investment in technology, training, and a unified vision centred on the rule of law. Only by taking such comprehensive action, could Bangladesh realise the goal of a fair, accessible, and accountable criminal justice system.



PRESENTATION BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERT



Patrick Stevens

Representatives of the International Association of Prosecutors

Mr Patrick Stevens began with a strong emphasis on global prosecutorial principles, institutional cooperation, and human rights-based justice reform. Drawing on over 24 years of experience in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in the United Kingdom including a decade as Head of the International Division, Mr Stevens provided an informed and nuanced perspective on effective justice delivery. In his presentation Mr Patrick focused on high-level conceptual principles rather than specific prescriptions, making it clear that his intent was not to impose models on Bangladesh. Rather, his aim was to share enduring principles of justice delivery that have proved effective across diverse legal systems globally. He highlighted that it is ultimately the sovereign right of the Bangladeshi people and their government to decide the format and path of reform. However, the core principles such as institutional independence, cooperation among justice actors, and rights-based procedures, remain universal and adaptable to local context.

He then framed the fundamental objective of criminal investigations and prosecutions: not only to secure convictions against the guilty but also to protect the innocent. According to Mr Stevens, these dual responsibilities are of equal importance and central to the legitimacy of any justice system. This balanced approach ensures that the pursuit of justice is not reduced to a mechanism for punishment but rather serves a broader purpose of safeguarding fairness and public trust.

The role of inter-agency cooperation featured prominently in his remarks. Mr Stevens observed that an effective justice system requires seamless collaboration between law enforcement, prosecution services, and the judiciary. While cooperation is vital, he also stressed that each actor within the criminal justice architecture must function as a check and balance on the others. Mutual accountability, he argued, reinforces the integrity of the system and prevents the abuse of power. However, he stressed that this oversight should not come at the expense of collective goals which are cooperation and independence. He maintained that these two collective goals are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

In elaborating on the concept of independence, Mr Stevens invoked the standards set forth by the International Association of Prosecutors, particularly its “Standards of Professional Responsibility and Statement of the Essential Duties and Rights of Prosecutors.” He acknowledged that much had

already been said on the topic by previous speakers but added that independence is more than structural separation and that it is a state of mind and institutional culture. He shared that in the UK, prosecutors were once controversially placed within police stations to offer early advice, a move initially viewed as compromising independence. However, the experience showed that such proximity, when governed by professional integrity and ethical codes, did not erode independence but instead enhanced cooperation and efficiency.

Mr Stevens urged Bangladeshi counterparts to avoid the false dichotomy between independence and collaboration. He explained that placing prosecutors in close proximity to investigators early in the process—while maintaining objective standards—results in more effective case development and avoids costly errors later in the prosecution. He stressed the value of early legal input in complex or transnational cases, noting that the most effective criminal justice responses involve multidisciplinary teams working from the outset.

Turning to human rights, Mr Stevens noted that a rights-based approach should be embedded across all phases of the criminal justice process. He underscored that openness, transparency, and reliability are not abstract ideals but essential attributes of legitimacy. Justice systems gain public trust when decisions are made consistently, evidence is gathered and presented ethically, and accountability mechanisms are robust. He noted that respect for due process and procedural safeguards not only prevents abuse but also strengthens prosecutorial effectiveness by ensuring that evidence is admissible and reliable.

To illustrate how professionalism and human rights compliance can intersect meaningfully, Mr Stevens reflected on a pivotal transformation in the UK's criminal justice system during the early days of his legal career. At that time, he recalled, much of criminal litigation centred on disputed confessions recorded only through handwritten police notes. The lack of objective recording mechanisms often led to protracted trials with contested narratives. However, the introduction of electronic recording devices in interview rooms marked a turning point. By capturing confessions on audio or video, trust in the police and prosecution increased, false confessions were curtailed, and investigatory focus shifted toward forensic and scientific evidence. This seemingly simple procedural change had a profound effect, making criminal proceedings fairer, faster, and more transparent.

Mr Stevens argued that such improvements do not require wholesale institutional overhauls. Incremental but targeted reforms that are rooted in reliability, openness, and consistency, can significantly elevate the quality of justice. He warned against reliance on variable eyewitness testimony, especially when more reliable evidence such as surveillance footage, forensic analysis, or digital records is available. Technology, he asserted, should be leveraged to enhance the reliability of prosecutions and reduce systemic vulnerabilities.

On the subject of witness protection, Mr Stevens took a practical and strategic view. He noted that discussions about witness protection often focus on extreme measures such as safe houses or new identities. However, he stressed that in reality, the best way to protect a witness is to make their in-court appearance unnecessary. By developing strong scientific or circumstantial evidence, prosecutors can reduce dependence on vulnerable or threatened witnesses. This not only mitigates risk but also increases the efficiency and success rate of prosecutions. Should witnesses be required, their safety must be ensured through advance planning, proper handling, and ethical treatment, always bearing in mind their central role in the pursuit of justice.

Mr Stevens also highlighted the need for specialisation within the justice sector. He advocated for dedicated teams and specialised courts to handle complex or high-profile cases. These cases, he explained, often require a different level of expertise, coordination, and procedural rigour than ordinary criminal matters. By assigning such cases to specialist investigators, prosecutors, and judges, the justice system can better manage delays, protect due process, and improve outcomes. Specialisation also facilitates more efficient trials and supports the professional development of personnel.

He also emphasised prioritisation as another critical theme. Mr Stevens cautioned that limited resources necessitate transparent and rational prioritisation of cases. Prosecutors must establish clear, publicly understood criteria for determining which cases warrant special attention. Doing so not only builds institutional credibility but also enables the broader justice sector to align efforts and manage expectations. This transparency fosters trust among law enforcement, victims, and the public, while allowing the prosecution service to focus its resources on matters of highest public interest.

In conclusion, Mr Stevens stressed the importance of continuous learning and internal review. In his view, justice institutions should cultivate a culture of self-reflection. After complex or sensitive prosecutions, internal debriefings and performance reviews should be conducted to assess what was done well, what could be improved, and how future practices might be enhanced. Such honest appraisals, he argued, are essential to institutional growth, public accountability, and improved justice delivery over time.

OPEN DISCUSSION



Afsana Abedin

Deputy Director, JATI

Ms Afsana Abedin raised questions about the interim government's reform activities, with a particular focus on the police sector. She noted that a report published by the interim government on 15 June 2025 detailed reforms in sectors such as power, railways, and the judiciary but lacked specific information on police reform. She sought clarification on the ongoing initiatives to address police reform in Bangladesh, highlighting the absence of clear details in the report.

Additionally, she raised concerns about the role of law enforcement agencies following the July 2024 uprising, questioning what lessons had been learned to prevent extreme politicisation and external influence on police operations. Emphasising the critical role of the police in the criminal in relation to the justice system, she inquired about measures that could ensure public safety and build trust in the police force moving forward.



Tanvir Haider Chowdhury

DIG (Admin), Anti Terrorism Unit (ATU)

Mr Tanvir Haider Chowdhury proposed an additional recommendation to the panel's presentation, advocating for a joint training program for police and prosecutors. He suggested that such a program would enhance coordination between the two groups, thereby strengthening the criminal justice system. He emphasised that collaborative training would improve skills and contribute to the future development of a more effective and humane justice system.



Natasha Ryan

Child Protection Officer (Justice Reform), UNICEF

Ms Natasha Ryan noted that this discussion had been a valuable opportunity, particularly in the context of creating a podcast series focused on children's rights and women's rights. She emphasised the importance of applying a child rights lens, not only in Bangladesh but also in countries like Pakistan. She highlighted the significance of both audience engagement and taking meaningful action in this year's justice reform efforts. Drawing attention to the potential of children, she mentioned that children are certainly agents of change in the justice process.

Referring to the 16 million children in Bangladesh, many of whom fall within a vulnerable age group, she noted that a significant number interact with the justice system. She acknowledged insights from Mr Stevens, who suggested that the best form of witness protection is preventing individuals from needing it in the first place. In that context, she emphasised that for children, the best protection lies in ensuring they do not have to engage with the justice system at all, except through supportive and appropriate responses. She concluded by recognising the opportunity to make meaningful changes that could prevent harmful exposure for children in the first place.



Ismet Jihan

Deputy Director, Anti-Corruption Commission

Ms Ismet Jihan clarified that she is a judicial officer and prior to joining the Anti-Corruption Commission, she had worked in various courts. She pointed out that one of the key issues under this discussion was the significant backlog of cases in the country's courts. Several recommendations had already been made to address this issue, including the involvement of the Legal Aid Office and the introduction of pre-trial mechanisms. She, then, referred to another effective approach known as the legislative justice system, which had shown positive results in several countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand. In light of this, she inquired whether UNODC had any initiative or plan to introduce or support the implementation of the legislative justice system in Bangladesh.

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