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## **Bangladesh: Human rights defender and union leader Shahidul Islam killed in an attack in Gazipur**

On 25 June 2023, human rights defender and union leader **Shahidul Islam** was attacked by a group of men at the Prince Jacquard Sweaters factory in Gazipur while resolving a worker payment dispute. He died the same day from the fatal injuries sustained during the attack.

[Shahidul Islam](#) was the president of the Gazipur unit of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers' Federation (BGIWF). He advocated for workers' rights throughout his 25-year-long career as an organiser. As a former garment worker, Shahidul Islam noticed the lack of transparency regarding workers' rights and began working as an organiser and later a union leader. From 1999 to 2002, he worked with the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers' Union Federation (BIGUF). From 2003 to 2006, the human rights defender worked for the civil society organisations Nari Uddog Kendro and Bangladesh Krishi Federation. In 2006, he joined the Bangladesh Centre for Workers' Solidarity (BCWS) as a senior organiser and worked there until 2012. In the same year, he became a senior organiser at the BGIWF, and later became president of the Gazipur district committee. Throughout his career, Shahidul Islam successfully mobilised thousands of workers and factory-level leaders to join trade unions. He also supported thousands of workers to receive arrears and severance pay that they had been wrongfully denied by their employers. Shahidul Islam's work and contributions to the labour movement were significant in raising awareness about the human rights situation of factory workers in Bangladesh.

Shahidul Islam died after sustaining fatal injuries in an attack that took place outside the Prince Jacquard Sweaters factory in Gazipur on 25 June 2023. The human rights defender and his colleagues were resolving a dispute over salaries and the Eid bonus owed to the factory workers, when a group of men arrived and began violently beating them. Three other union leaders were severely injured in the attack which left Shahidul Islam unconscious. He was later taken to Tairunnessa Memorial Medical College Hospital where he was pronounced dead. The human rights defender is survived by his wife and two sons. He was the sole breadwinner of his family. His wife is a former organiser battling cancer and her husband's killing has added to their already challenging circumstances.

On 26 June 2023, Kalpona Akter, president of the BGIWF, filed a case with the Tongi West Police Station, alleging that the attack was carried out on the orders of the factory owner. According to sources, the officer in charge stated that the police had already arrested the key suspect in the case, adding that the killing stemmed from a feud with another labour organisation.

The killing of Shahidul Islam is indicative of the violations and unjust treatment faced by garment workers in Bangladesh. His death also reflects on the vulnerability and dangers faced by human rights defenders who raise their voices on the lack of transparency regarding workers' rights and work to safeguard labour rights in Bangladesh.

Front Line Defenders condemns the killing of human rights defender and union leader Shahidul Islam as it believes it is directly related to his work in defence of human rights, especially labour rights of people in Bangladesh. Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned about the mistreatment and threats facing human rights defenders working to improve the labour conditions of garment workers in Bangladesh. Front Line Defenders is also seriously concerned about the physical and psychological wellbeing of the human rights defender's family and colleagues.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Bangladesh to:**

1. Strongly condemn the killing of Shahidul Islam;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Shahidul Islam, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Shahidul Islam's colleagues at the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers' Federation (BGIWF), as well as that of his family members.