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Human rights advocates demand release of journalist Shahriar Kabir

Ansar Ahmed Ullah:: A press conference held on 3 December 3 East London saw human rights experts and advocates calling for the immediate release of journalist and human rights defender Shahriar Kabir. The event, organised by the European Bangladesh Forum, brought together prominent speakers who raised serious concerns about his ongoing detention and the state of human rights in Bangladesh.

Abbas Faiz, a former senior researcher at Amnesty International and current lecturer at the University of Essex, delivered the keynote address. Speaking passionately about Kabir's case, Faiz highlighted the journalist's long history of facing legal persecution for expressing critical views. He noted that Amnesty International had previously declared Kabir a "prisoner of conscience" in 2001 after his initial detention for writing articles and documenting human rights violations.

Faiz emphasised that Kabir's current arrest appears to be based on fabricated charges, likely stemming from his critical writings about political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami. The speaker stressed the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, pointing out that both international human rights law and the Bangladesh Constitution protect an individual's right to express their views without fear of persecution.

The press conference also drew attention to disturbing reports of mob violence during Kabir's court appearance, which Faiz condemned as illegal and requiring immediate investigation. He presented a four-point recommendation to the Interim Government of Bangladesh: provide urgent medical attention to Kabir, bring those responsible for the mob attack to justice, drop the fabricated charges and ensure a fair legal process by consolidating multiple charges.

Other speakers at the event, including Pushpita Gupta from the Secular Bangladesh Movement, freedom fighter M A Hadi from the Ahmadiyya community, diplomatic correspondent Duncan Bartlett and Barrister Tania Amir, shared their concerns about the current human rights situation in Bangladesh and expressed solidarity with Kabir's cause.

The conference serves as a significant call for justice, highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by journalists and human rights defenders in Bangladesh who dare to speak out against perceived injustices.



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