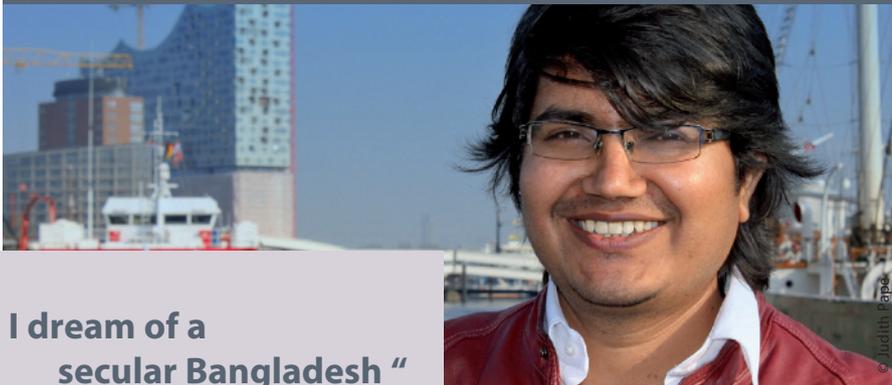


NEWSLETTER JULY 2014



„ I dream of a secular Bangladesh “

Asif Mohiuddin
Blogger und IT expert from Bangladesh

Asif Mohiuddin (30) is fighting for the freedom of speech, for the rights of minorities and against Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh – and was almost killed as a result.

Overlooking tranquil waters and the green shoreland, Asif Mohiuddin can – at least for a few hours – forget about the horrors of the attack on his life: On January 15, 2013, „Islamic extremists hit me over the head with a hammer. Then they stabbed me in the back with a knife 53 times. I remember wondering if I would live through this.“

The young blogger is one of the leading voices of a new generation that will no longer be silenced. For this reason, they are being threatened, persecuted and sometimes even killed.

Nevertheless, on his blog Asif Mohiuddin keeps dreaming „of a new Bangladesh based on secularism and respect for the human rights of women and minorities. I envision a country, where everyone is equal before the law and where the gap between rich and poor grows smaller.“ Such statements have earned Asif several months of custody and criminal prosecution for blasphemy and

defamation of the government. His attorney's efforts to appeal to the right of freedom of expression came to no avail. If convicted, the blogger faces up to ten years in prison upon his return to his home country.

According to Asif, one of the core issues in Bangladesh is the current education system. Mostly poor families send their kids to Islamic schools that are free of charge. „In these Madrasas, more than four million students are being taught and their beliefs manipulated.“ He believes them to be the source of Islamic extremism. „Children are molded into an obedient group of people for the religious leaders, who thus strengthen their power.“

In German schools, Asif Mohiuddin frequently discusses these topics with older students. Then he speaks about his dream of a free society. He also wants to learn how to ride a bike – together with Donny Reyes, another Foundation's guest from Honduras (see page 2).

We highly appreciate the support from amnesty international, the Bangladesh association in Bielefeld and the Cobler Foundation.

is in constant danger, so much that the blogger hardly ever leaves his apartment anymore. In this time of great need, he received the invitation letter. **“Having been granted the fellowship is the greatest gift.”**

Editorial



Martina Bäurle

Natural rights

The right not to confess to any religion ought to be a given. By claiming this right, however, Asif Mohiuddin almost paid with his life. Because the blogger from Bangladesh confessed over the Internet to his being a non-believer; because he described Islam, the main religion in his home country, as backward and misogynist; and because he would not be intimidated by his opponents – for all these reasons powerful imams went so far as to declare he would – literally - be “slaughtered” in public.

It should also be a given that people with a different sexual orientation may also live it out in public if they so choose. In Honduras, social worker and human rights activist Donny Reyes fights for the acceptance of same-sex couples. For this reason, he was beaten up, arrested, raped and eventually threatened with death.

In Afghanistan, courageous journalists still live in constant danger. Farida Nekzad, a female journalist especially dedicated to sponsoring and training young female journalists, almost lost her life because of her commitment.

It has always been a matter of course for the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People to support not only those already in the limelight of the media but also those who are not blessed with a lot of public attention.

We are very pleased to have Farida Nekzad, Asif Mohiuddin and Donny Reyes stay with us in Hamburg this year.

Sincerely

Martina Bäurle

Forms of persecution

When the government officially denounced Asif Mohiuddin and 84 other critics as „enemies of the Islam“, Islamic extremists put up Asif's photograph on streetlights and walls across the entire country. Now his life

Donny Reyes: Human rights activist from Honduras



Donny Reyes

Giving up is not an option.

For years, Donny Reyes (41) has been fighting for the rights of sexual minorities in Honduras and the proper legal investigation of numerous murders of gays, lesbians and transsexuals. In Hamburg, he will primarily focus on expanding his network and regaining his strength in order to continue his valuable work after the return to his home country.

Reyes' commitment to the non-profit organization LGBT Arcoiris (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rainbow) has repeatedly placed him in danger. In 2007, he was arrested in Tegucigalpa and – despite several policemen present – beaten and raped by four men. As early as 2009, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission CIDH ordered protective

measures for Donny Reyes as a result of repeated death threats. However, these measures were never put into practice by the responsible authorities in Honduras. He only barely survived an attack on his life in 2012.

Regarding the situation in Honduras, Reyes explains: „The state pursues a policy of ‘social cleansing’.” He is convinced “that in the majority of cases the murders are committed by members of the national security forces.” And if these cases are investigated at all, „possible results are hidden and obscured. Files are lost.” The coordinator of LGBT Arcoiris says bitterly: “The prevailing culture of misogyny, patriarchy, machismo and homophobia is a deadly mix for Honduran lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender.”

At the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, the human rights activist from Honduras was eventually met with kindness. Donny Reyes is now hoping for practical support for his visionary project from the German LGBT movement: a safe house in Honduras, in which psychologists and counselors give support to LGBT people of all ages. „Especially young people often do contemplate suicide because they are stigmatized by society and their families.”

protest movement

Following the military coup in 2009, the LGBT community was particularly affected by acts of violence. Since then, at least 34 gays and transsexuals have been murdered. In 2010, the movement of “Sexual Diversity in Resistance” (Movimiento de

Diversidad Sexual en Resistencia) was established. In 2011, U.S. president Barack Obama publicly condemned the murder of five members of the Honduran LGBT community that happened within only one month.

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News

Exhibition

The traveling exhibition „5 x Hamburg and Back“ at the Antikriegshaus, Sievershausen from **May 25 to July 31 and Sept. 1 to Oct. 31, 2014**



The traveling exhibition „5 x Hamburg and Back“ was first shown in 2013 at the Hamburg Townhall. It presents five of the Foundation's guests and provides insight into their work. Asif Mohiuddin spoke at the opening held at the Antikriegshaus in May.

Farida Nekzad - Afghanistan

Our third guest is a journalist and the director of „South Asia Women in Media“. We will tell you more about Farida in the next edition of our newsletter.



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