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BANGLADESH: The 1971 Bangladesh Genocide, an issue for the EU

The Bangladesh Genocide, an issue for the EU Member States

On 3 July, MEP Fulvio Martusciello (Christian Democrat) hosted a conference about the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide with a number of experts. I was invited as a guest speaker and presented an introductory paper urging the Members of the European Parliament to examine the claims of Bangladeshis to recognize the genocide perpetrated by Pakistan 52 years ago.

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers
(<https://hrwf.eu>)

HRWF (15.07.2023) – On 25 March 1971, Pakistan army began its fateful Operation Searchlight with the intention to eliminate all Bengali opposition in Bangladesh.

Ten million people were displaced, more than 1.5 million people were murdered, and some 300,000 women were raped. The international community knew about these crimes and this genocide but ignored them.

How did it start?

On 14 August 1947, the Dominion of Pakistan was created. East Bengal, with Dhaka as its capital, was then the most populous province of the 1947 Pakistani Federation which was then led by [General Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#). He promised freedom of religion and secular democracy in the new state.

In March 1948, a few months before he died, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, considered as the father of modern Pakistan, visited East Bengal and proclaimed Urdu the sole national language of the country.

However, the inhabitants wanted the Bengali language to be acknowledged as one of Pakistan's national languages. There were protests.

In 1952 the [Bengali Language Movement](#) was the first serious sign of friction between the country's geographically separated wings.

In 1956, Pakistan adopted a new constitution. Three Bengalis were its Prime Minister until 1957 but none of the three completed their terms and resigned from office. In 1958, the [Pakistan Army](#) imposed military rule.

Ethnic and linguistic discrimination was common in Pakistan's civil and military services, in which Bengalis were under-

represented. Cultural discrimination also prevailed, making East Pakistan forge a distinct political identity. Authorities banned Bengali literature and music in state media.

After the December 1970 elections, calls for the independence of East Bengal became louder; the Bengali-nationalist Awami League won 167 of 169 East Pakistani seats in the National Assembly. The League claimed the right to form a government and develop a new constitution but was strongly opposed by the Pakistani military.

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Recognition of the genocide

The issue whether Bangladesh's independence was accompanied by genocide is hardly controversial. Three renowned institutes come to that conclusion: [Genocide Watch](#), the [Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention](#) and the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#).

Those three institutes call on the international community, and by extension to the UN, to recognize the genocide of Bangladesh in 1971. The Dutch House of Representatives, and other Parliaments in the world are requested to join this plea and formally declare that there was genocide in Bangladesh.

On 21 May of this year, The Netherlands envisaged to recognize the role of Pakistan in Bangladesh Genocide. Notably, a Dutch politician and former Member of the Parliament, Harry van Bommel, stated that the role of the Pakistani Army in committing in 1971 Bangladesh Genocide was obvious and would get global recognition.

It would be to the credit of the Netherlands to strengthen its early involvement in the fate of the Bangladeshis with recognition of the genocide.

The Netherlands would not be the first Western country to pay political attention to the genocide of Bangladesh. In October 2022, U.S. Congressmen Steve Chabot (Republican) and Ro Khanna (Democrat) submitted proposals for recognition of genocide. Earlier that year, it was proposed in the British Parliament to come to recognition.

It would be to the credit of the European Union and its member states to recognize this forgotten genocide and to transmit its souvenir to the over 400 million European citizens.

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