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October 28, 2015

The Honorable León Rodríguez, Director
US Citizenship and Immigration Services
US Department of Homeland Security
425 I Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Director Rodríguez:

We are the Secular Policy Institute, a secular government think tank and human rights advocacy organization. We write to you, along with the below signed organizations, to request a meeting to begin the process of initiating asylum eligibility for a group of writers and other secularists in Bangladesh on a terrorist-published “kill list,” who are being systematically butchered by cleavers and machetes.

The attacks started in January 2013 when Asif Mohuiddin was stabbed, and a month later murdered blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider’s body was said to be so brutalized that it was rendered “unrecognizable” by those who knew him. Sunnyur Rhaman was attacked, but survived. University professor Shafiul Islam was slaughtered in November 2014. On 26 February of this year, two American citizens of Bangladeshi heritage were attacked at a book fair in Dhaka. Writer Avijit Roy and his wife Bonya Ahmed were brutally attacked with large knives killing Roy and though losing the fingers of her left hand, Ahmed survived. One month later another blogger, Washiqur Rahman (30 March 2015) was murdered in the same manner as were bloggers Ananta Bijoy Das (12 May 2015) and Niladri Chattopadhyay “Niloy Neel” Niloy (7 August 2015).

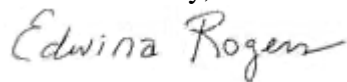
Alongside high-profile coverage in the leading world news-media outlets; UNESCO, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and a host of other organizations have condemned these attacks and have called upon the Bangladeshi government to intervene, with little success. We stress urgency in this matter as nearly 80 individuals remain as targets at this time. Many have gone into hiding, yet that is certainly no guarantee of safety. We ask for assistance in granting asylum referral to those upon the kill list.

Through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and both the UN Status of Refugees Convention (1951) and Protocol (1967) we argue that these writers and advocates deserve the international protection that asylum provides. A well-founded fear of persecution has been realized starting in 1992 on the organized attacks and continued harassment against Bangladeshi-

author Taslima Nasrin (living in exile for 20 years). This has been further supported by the publication of a list and the systematic slaughter of targeted persons. We consider this a clear act of persecution. The Majority of those being targeted consider themselves to be Humanists and their writings an act of religious expression. As the kill list is targeting those in a writing-community, we consider this persecution for participation in a social group. Lastly, as the critique for which they are being targeted includes that of protests and commentary relating to a criminal trial of those alleged to have collaborated in the genocide of Bangladeshis in 1971, as well as that of public policy and social action, this is clearly a persecution based upon political opinions.

We request a meeting with your offices to establish an asylum-eligibility referral, as well as to assign a liaison to expedite the process.

Yours sincerely,



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Signatories

ARP Sociedad para el Avance del Pensamiento - Spain
Atheist Foundation of Australia – Lane Cove, New South Wales, Australia
Canadian Secular Alliance – Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Centrum Humanistische Vorming – Utrecht, Netherlands
Contra Costa Atheists and Freethinkers – Pleasant Hill, California, USA
Freethinkers of the Coachella Valley – Palm Desert, California, USA
Freethought Society – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Humanist Chaplaincy at American University – Washington, DC, USA
Humanist Society of Redding – Redding, California, USA
Humanists of North Central Florida – Ocala, Florida, USA
North London Humanist Group – London, USA
Northern Ohio Freethought Society – Cleveland, Ohio, USA
OMAHA (Omaha Metropolitan Area Humanist Association) – Omaha, Nebraska, USA
Red River Freethinker – Fargo, North Dakota, USA
San Francisco Atheists – San Francisco, California, USA
The Foundation For Critical Thinking – Tomales, California, USA
The Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association – Reykjavik, Iceland
United Coalition of Reason – Washington, DC, USA
Universal Church Triumphant of the Apathetic Agnostic – Nevada, USA
Watford Area Humanists – Watford, Hertfordshire, UK