

Bangladesh 'drug-offender' killings must stop, says UN human rights chief

The alleged extra-judicial killing of suspected drug offenders must be "immediately halted" and their perpetrators brought to justice, UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said on Wednesday.

Amid reports that 130 people have been shot dead by security services across the country since the "zero-tolerance" policy began on 15 May, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that he was "gravely concerned" that "such a large number of people" have been killed.

In his appeal to the government of Bangladesh, Zeid described official declarations that none of the victims was innocent as "dangerous...and indicative of a total disregard for the rule of law".

Everyone has the right to life, the High Commissioner continued in his statement, and people "do not lose their human rights, because they sell drugs".

In addition to those allegedly killed in the anti-narcotics drive, 13,000 people have also been reportedly arrested.

Such a high number of detentions indicates "a high likelihood" that many have been detained arbitrarily, the top UN official said.

Every person has the right to life. People do not lose their human rights because they use or sell drugs – *UN human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein*

In his statement to the government of Bangladesh – where elections are to be held later this year – Zeid noted that there was "no doubt" that drug sales and trafficking caused "tremendous suffering for individuals and entire communities".

And while commending the country for its "tremendous support" for hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled violence in neighbouring Myanmar since August last year, the UN High Commissioner insisted that "extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and the stigmatization (of drug-users) cannot be the answer".

The High Commissioner urged the authorities to investigate the alleged extra-judicial killings, stressing that there must be no impunity for human rights violations in the name of drugs control policies.

His comments follow Bangladesh's participation in a scheduled review of the country's human rights record at the UN in Geneva in early May.

At that Universal Periodic Review meeting, Bangladesh's minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs said that official inquiries would take place into other alleged extrajudicial killings in the country.