

# Let People's Voices be Heard

There is a constant struggle to better the social, economic and governmental structures in Bangladesh. Sometimes, however, the means of fighting against the injustices in our country are counterproductive, and end up exacerbating the situation rather than helping it. Every now and then, hartals, riots, bomb blasts, killings and muggings, all integrate into the main issue at hand -- society's dissatisfaction with the current situation and their irresistible urge to do something about it, no matter what the consequences. But in every struggle for the sake of justice, the biggest challenge for the marginalised and oppressed is to attain the power to speak out. 'Let People's Voices Be Heard' the theme of the recent conference on human rights and governance organised by Manusher Jonno (MJ) summed up this daunting challenge.

Manusher Jonno, a human rights and good governance initiative, has been supporting civil society organisations, NGOs, private sector organisations and state institutions to create conditions for establishing human rights and good governance in Bangladesh. MJ focuses on giving voices to people who are otherwise either denied or violated of their rights. It aims at greater involvement of people in the decision-making processes that affect them. It

catalyses actions that promote human rights and good governance and stresses on challenging factors of society that

perpetuate poverty and social exclusion.

\*The MJ initiative started in July of 2002. Participating NGOs range from local to national and international, who shared their experiences and learning at the conference. As of June 2004, MJ has 61 funded partners, some of which are Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, Mass-line Media Centre, Resource Integration Organisation, Save the Children UK and Steps Towards Development.

We live in an era of dramatic change and transition, in a world that is being transformed by complex financial systems and revolutionary information technologies into a vast global marketplace. Globalisation is creating new patterns of interaction among people and nations, promising extraordinary opportunities for material progress in larger and freer communities. But it is also threatening to bring about many existing challenges before the international community while deepening the economic divide.

There is now near-universal recognition that respect for human rights is essential to the sustainable achievement of the three agreed global priorities of peace, development and democracy. This includes the rights of political choice and association, of opinion and expression, and of culture; the freedom from fear and from all forms of discrimination and prejudice; the right to employment and well-being and, collectively, to development.

It is with this in mind that many of Bangladesh's activists, civil society and intellectuals spoke out against injustice by advocating human rights and good governance. Presenters, panelists and moderators cumulatively worked towards creating awareness by speaking about and sharing their experiences not only in their work environment, but also on a personal level. The result was an intensive, but successful three-day rapport on how to make Bangladesh a better place for all.