RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Questions
**1. Please provide basic information on the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church
with particular attention to the meaning and significance of the sacraments.**
**2. Is it likely or possible that a lay person who is a member of a Catholic congregation in
Bangladesh would be able to perform a private baptism of a Muslim convert?**
3. Please provide an update since August 2007 on Christian converts in Bangladesh.

RESPONSE

**1. Please provide basic information on the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic
Church with particular attention to the meaning and significance of the sacraments.**

Basic information on the Roman Catholic Church was located from a variety of sources
available on the internet. An overview of general source material on the Roman Catholic
Church is provided below under the sub-heading *Catholic Beliefs and Practices*. More
detailed information on the Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church is provided below
under the sub-heading *Sacraments*.

Catholic Beliefs and Practices
An article published on the Believe website provides a general introduction to the belief
system of the Roman Catholic Church:

> **The basic religious beliefs of Roman Catholics are those shared by other Christians** as
> derived from the New Testament and formulated in the ancient Creeds of the early
> ecumenical councils, such as Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). **The central belief is
> that God entered the world through the Incarnation of his Son, the Christ or Messiah,
> Jesus of Nazareth.** The founding of the church is traced to the life and teachings of Jesus,
> whose death is followed by resurrection from the dead after which he sends the Holy Spirit to

assist believers. This triple mission within the Godhead is described doctrinally as the divine Trinity, **God one in nature but consisting in three divine persons**.

Roman Catholics attach special significance to the rites of Baptism and Eucharist. Baptism is sacramental entry into Christian life, and the Eucharist is a memorial of Christ's death and resurrection in which he is believed to be sacramentally present. The Eucharist is celebrated daily in the Roman Catholic church. **Catholics also regard as Sacraments the forgiveness of sins in reconciliation with the church (Confession), ordination to ministry (Holy Orders), marriage of Christians, postbaptismal anointing (Confirmation), and the Anointing of the Sick.**

Catholic ethical doctrines are based ultimately on the New Testament teachings but also on the conclusions reached by the church, especially by the popes and other teachers. In recent times the pope and bishops have formulated guidelines regarding social justice, racial equality, disarmament, human rights, contraception, and abortion. The official opposition to artificial contraception is not accepted by a large number of practicing Catholics. The Roman Catholic church's prohibition of remarriage after divorce is the strictest of the Christian churches, although the church does admit the possibility of annulments for marriages judged to be invalid (Fahey, Michael A. (undated) 'Roman Catholic Church, Catholicism: General Information', Believe website http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/rcatholi.htm – Accessed 27 February 2008 – Attachment 1).

The entry on the Roman Catholic Church in the 2007 Encarta Online Encyclopedia provides a basic description of the beliefs, practices, and history of the Roman Catholic Church ('Roman Catholic Church' 2007, Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia http://encarta.msn.com/text_761573737___0/Roman_Catholic_Church.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 2).

An article on the Sacraments from the Christianity in view website provides a basic guide to the order of the Roman Catholic Mass ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7). Chapter Two of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* provides a more detailed step-by-step description of the Roman Catholic Mass (United States Catholic Conference 2003, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/GIRM.pdf – Accessed 3 March 2008 – Attachment 42).

The Christianity in View website provides brief discussions of Catholic morality, and Catholic beliefs concerning death and the afterlife ('Sin & Moral issues' 2007, Christianity in View website, 23 January http://catholic.christianityinview.com/morals.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 3; 'Last Things' 2007, Christianity in View website, 23 January http://catholic.christianityinview.com/lastthings.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 4).

Sacraments
The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* indicates that there are 7 sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony ('The Seven Sacraments of The Church' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1210- 1211 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 5).

An article on Roman Catholicism located on the Believe website provides information regarding the meaning and origin of the sacraments:

> The sacramental system worked out especially in the Middle Ages by the schoolmen and subsequently at the Council of Trent envisaged sacraments primarily as causes of grace that could be received independent of the merit of the recipient. Recent Catholic sacramental theology emphasizes their function as signs of faith. Sacraments are said to cause grace insofar as they are intelligible signs of it, and that the fruitfulness, as distinct from the validity, of the sacrament is dependent on the faith and devotion of the recipient. Sacramental rites are now administered in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, to increase the intelligibility of the signs.
>
> Conservative Catholicism connected sacramental theology to Christology, stressing Christ's institution of the sacraments and the power of the sacraments to infuse the grace of Christ, earned on Calvary, to the recipient. The newer emphasis connects the sacraments to ecclesiology. We do not encounter Christ directly, but in the church, which is his body. **The church mediates the presence and action of Christ.**
>
> **The number of sacraments was finally fixed at seven during the medieval period** (at the councils of Lyons 1274, Florence 1439, and Trent 1547). In addition Roman Catholicism has innumerable sacramentals, e.g., baptismal water, holy oil, blessed ashes, candles, palms, crucifixes, and statues. Sacramentals are said to cause grace not ex opere operanto like the sacraments, but ex opere operantis, through the faith and devotion of those using them (Piggin, F.S. (undated) 'Roman Catholicism: Advanced Information', Believe website http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/rcatholi.htm – Accessed 27 February 2008 – Attachment 6).

An overview of references to detailed information on the Sacraments is provided below under the following sub-headings: *Baptism*, *Confirmation*, *The Eucharist*, *Penance*, *The Anointing of the Sick*, *Holy Orders* and *Matrimony*, and *Sacramentals*.

Baptism
An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of Baptism:

> Alongside Confirmation and the Eucharist, Baptism is seen as one of the sacraments of initiation into the church. It is also considered necessary for Salvation. Baptism results in forgiveness of all sins (including 'Original Sin' – the predisposition to sinfulness, inherited as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God). It also confers sanctifying grace and is known as a sacrament of regeneration. The grace received at Baptism is lost when a person commits their first mortal sin. To restore it, the sacrament of Reconciliation is used.
>
> …Baptism also confers a special mark or seal upon the soul (known as a *sacramental character*).
>
> The usual mode of Baptism is by pouring water on the head (*affusion*), though sometimes Baptism by immersion is also used.
>
> Baptisms carried out by non-Catholic churches are considered valid, providing the correct Trinitarian formula is used (i.e in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on baptism is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('The Sacrament of Baptism' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website,

no. 1213-1284 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a1.htm – Accessed 28
February 2008 – Attachment 8).

Confirmation

An article on the Believe website provides the following summary of Confirmation:

> A theology of confirmation was not developed until the Middle Ages. Confirmation was said
> to be the gift of the Spirit for strengthening (ad robur) while baptismal grace is for forgiveness
> (ad remissionem). This distinction has no basis in the Scriptures or the fathers, but has been
> retained to the present following ratification by the Council of Trent. Today, however, the rite
> is sometimes administered at the same time as baptism and by the priest, not the bishop, to
> emphasize that both are really aspects of the one sacrament of initiation (Piggin, F.S.
> (undated) 'Roman Catholicism: Advanced Information', Believe website http://mb-
> soft.com/believe/txc/rcatholi.htm – Accessed 27 February 2008 – Attachment 6).

More detailed information on confirmation is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic
Church* ('The Sacrament of Confirmation, 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
Vatican website, no. 1285-1321 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a2.htm –
Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 9).

The Eucharist

An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of the
Eucharist:

> The Eucharist (Greek: 'Thanksgiving') is the centre of Catholic life and spirituality. Other
> names used for it include **Holy Communion** and **Holy sacrifice of the Mass**, often
> abbreviated to 'Mass'. The word Mass derives from the Latin phrase *Ite, missa est* ("Go, it is
> finished") spoken at the end of the service.
>
> The Eucharist is also the 'Sacrament of Sacraments' and the 'Blessed Sacrament'. Frequency
> of attendance is encouraged and is obligatory on Sundays and certain other days in the
> liturgical calendar (known as Holy days of obligation). A typical parish church would have
> one Mass each weekday and several more at the weekend. The normal practice is to fast for at
> least one hour before attending.
>
> … Catholic belief states that Christ is truly ('really') present in the elements (the bread and
> the wine). In 1079, Hildebert of Tours described this 'Real Presence' using the term
> **Transubstantiation**, meaning the bread and wine, once consecrated by the Priest, change into
> the actual body and blood of Christ. Christ is said to be present 'Body, Blood, Soul and
> Divinity'.
>
> … Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), one of the greatest of the medieval Catholic theologians,
> wrote an explanation of transubstantiation. Aquinas distinguished between the **Accidents** of
> an object, i.e. what the senses perceive (e.g. its size and shape etc.) and the **Substance**, i.e.
> what an object actually is, in and of itself. Thus in the Mass, the consecrated bread and wine
> change substantially, but not accidentally into Christ's body and blood.
>
> Outside of the Mass, the Eucharistic bread (known as the **Host**, from the Latin *Hostia* –
> 'Victim') is consecrated by a Priest or Bishop and displayed in a **Monstrance**. As it is
> believed Christ is physically present in the Host, this can act as a focus of prayer and worship.
> The process is called **Eucharistic Adoration** or **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament**. Some
> churches perform the Exposition on a weekly basis, others do so for a full 24 hours a day
> (known as perpetual adoration) ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4

November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on the Eucharist is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('The Sacrament of the Eucharist, 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1322-1419 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 10).

Penance
An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of the Penance:

> Now more commonly known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Penance is used as a form of forgiveness from post-baptismal sin. All Catholics are required to use this Sacrament at least once a year, though many do so more regularly. Penance usually involves 'Auricular confession', that is confession of sins privately to a Priest. The penitent must express sorrow for their sins and exhibit a genuine desire to turn away from them by making an **'Act of Contrition'**. The Act of Contrition is followed by an absolution by the Priest and assignment of a penitential act such as prayers (including the Rosary), fasting or some other work of charity ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on Penance is available in the Catechism of the Catholic Church ('The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1422-1498 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c2a4.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 11).

The Anointing of the Sick
An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of the Anointing of the Sick:

> This Sacrament is usually performed when a person is seriously ill and forms one of the 'last rites' of the church (The others are Confession and the Eucharist). The anointing is usually carried out by a Priest, using oil that has been consecrated for this purpose ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on the Anointing of the Sick is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('The Anointing of the Sick' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1499-1532 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c2a5.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 12).

Holy Orders
An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of the Holy Orders:

> Three degrees of ordination are given: Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The first two are given *Sacerdotal* authority, i.e. the power to act in the apostolic tradition. For example, only a validly ordained Priest or Bishop can undertake the sacrament of Reconciliation. Similarly, ordination confers the power to consecrate the elements at the Mass. All three orders are

undertaken by men only ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on the Holy Orders is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('The Sacrament of Holy Orders' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1536-1600 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a6.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 13).

Matrimony
An article on the Christianity in View website provides the following summary of the meaning of Catholic marriage:

> Marriage is a union between a man and a woman that signifies the union between Christ and the church. A validly consummated marriage can never be terminated, i.e. Divorce is not allowed. For the marriage to be sacramental, both parties should be validly baptised. Marriages between Catholics and non-Christians are said to be "non-sacramental", but are accepted ('The Sacraments' 2007, Christianity in View website, 4 November http://catholic.christianityinview.com/sacraments.html – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 7).

More detailed information on Matrimony is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('The Sacrament of Matrimony' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1601-1666 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 14).

Sacramentals
Information on Sacramentals is available in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ('Sacramentals' 2003, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, no. 1667-1679 http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c4a1.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 15).

2. Is it likely or possible that a lay person who is a member of a Catholic congregation in Bangladesh would be able to perform a private baptism of a Muslim convert?

Specific information on Catholic baptismal practices outside the established churches in Bangladesh was not found. Information was found to indicate that lay baptism is permissible in certain circumstances under Catholic law, and is considered valid if basic procedures are followed. Limited information was found to suggest that some underground or home churches of various denominations in Bangladesh may be led by laypersons, and may operate with a degree of independence from official religious institutions.

Canon 861§2 of the Catholic Code of Canon Law, available through the Vatican website, indicates that lay baptism is sanctioned in cases of necessity:

> When an ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or another person designated for this function by the local ordinary, or in a case of necessity any person with the right intention, confers baptism licitly. Pastors of souls, especially the pastor of a parish, are to be concerned that the Christian faithful are taught the correct way to baptize ('The Minister Of Baptism' 2003, in *Code of Canon Law*, Vatican website, 4 November, Canon 861 –

Canon 863 http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P2W.HTM – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 16).

Canon 860§1 of the Catholic Code of Canon Law indicates that baptism in a private house is permitted only in cases of necessity:

> Apart from a case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private houses, unless the local ordinary has permitted it for a grave cause ('The Celebration of Baptism' 2003, in *Code of Canon Law*, Vatican website, 4 November, Canon 850 – Canon 860 http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P2V.HTM – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 17).

The entry on baptism in the Catholic Encyclopedia, available online on the *New Advent* website, provides information on baptism in extraordinary circumstances:

> In case of necessity, baptism can be administered lawfully and validly by any person whatsoever who observes the essential conditions, whether this person be a Catholic layman or any other man or woman, heretic or schismatic, infidel or Jew.
>
> The essential conditions are that the person pour water upon the one to be baptized, at the same time pronouncing the words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Moreover, he must thereby intend really to baptize the person, or technically, he must intend to perform what the Church performs when administering this sacrament.
>
> …The main reason for this extension of power as to the administration of baptism is of course that the Church has understood from the beginning that this was the will of Christ. St. Thomas (III:62:3) says that owing to the absolute necessity of baptism for the salvation of souls, it is in accordance with the mercy of God, who wishes all to be saved, that the means of obtaining this sacrament should be put, as far as possible, within the reach of all; and as for that reason the matter of the sacrament was made of common water, which can most easily be had, so in like manner it was only proper that every man should be made its minister (Fanning, William H.W. 1907 'Baptism', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume II* New York, Robert Appleton Company, New Advent website http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm – Accessed 28 February 2008 – Attachment 18).

Information was found to indicate that an "underground" or "house" church movement exists in Bangladesh, and has some degree of autonomy from existing public churches. Information was found to indicate that the congregation of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Dhaka had been subject to threats and intimidation in 2005. An article published on the Modern Jesus Army website in 2004 provided the following information:

> In Bangladesh, several tens of thousands of Muslims have changed religion in the past few years, and now follow Jesus. New 'Jamats' – Christian house churches with ex-Muslim members – are being formed across the nation, reports the Swiss missions agency Kingdom Ministries. The movement is by far the fastest-growing Christian group in the country. In 1997, the Bible was translated into a form understood by the rural population. The movement's most important characteristics are its house church form with 15-25 members per group, flat hierarchies and the emphasis on a lay movement with very few mobilisers; evangelisation and church leadership are in the hands of laypeople. The new converts call themselves 'followers of Jesus', and keep their old names. Around 10% of them have seen Jesus in a dream or vision, or have experienced healing in his name ('Tens of thousands of Muslims find Christ' 2004, Modern Jesus Army website

The *Open Doors* website provided the following information on Christianity in Bangladesh:

> There are two types of churches in Bangladesh: the Underground Church (consisting of converts from Islam) and the Visible Church, consisting nearly entirely of converts from Hinduism. The Underground Church can be further divided into a group who worship in secret, and a group meeting openly (this happens when whole villages turn to Christ). The following information is all about the Visible Church.
>
> The largest single church is the Roman Catholic church with about 200,000-250,000 members. Apart from the Roman Catholic church, there is also a slightly bigger Protestant group in Bangladesh. The most remarkable characteristic about them is their division: they are divided into more than 30 denominations.
>
> The Roman Catholic church is hardly involved in evangelism. Protestants are more involved (some churches more than others), but despite this the number of converts remains small ('Bangladesh in Brief'(undated), Open Doors website http://sb.od.org/index.php?supp_page=bangladesh – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 20).

Undated information on the *Open Doors* website also indicated that there is minimal co-operation and communication between Christian converts from Hinduism, and Christian converts from Islam, that existing churches do not have established outreach programs targeted at Muslims, that there is a lack of full-time pastors and lay leaders, and that there is a lack of training materials and Christian literature ('Problems and Needs' (undated), Open Doors website http://sb.od.org/?supp_page=bangladesh_2#pn – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 21).

With regard to the existence of disincentives for converts to Christianity to openly attend church in Dhaka, an article published on the *AsiaNews IT* website provided information to indicate that the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Dhaka had been subject to bomb threats in December 2005, which caused the parish priest to issue a warning to the congregation, and to cancel some services ('Christmas vigils cancelled in Dhaka' 2005, *AsiaNews IT* website, 10 December http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=4844 – Accessed 27 February 2008 – Attachment 22).

A story republished on the Tidens Tecken website (where it was cited as having been originally sourced from the Christians Unite website at http://www.christiansunite.com), provides information regarding the case of a Bangladeshi man who converted from Islam to Christianity after meeting a Baptist missionary. This article indicates that the man was initially rejected by his family because of his conversion; however, some family members later converted to Christianity, and the man baptized them ('Muslim Convert Describes Hardships in Bangladesh' 2001, Tidens Tecken website http://www.tidenstecken.se/islbang1.htm – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 23).

An article published on the *AsiaNews* website contains information to indicate that some people who are introduced to the Christian faith outside of established churches in Bangladesh may have syncretic beliefs and practices (Islam, Nozrul 2007, 'Loneliness and isolation drive one family to suicide', *AsiaNews IT* website 17 July

http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9840&geo=12&theme=8&size=A – Accessed 27 February 2008 – Attachment 24).

3. **Please provide an update since August 2007 on Christian converts in Bangladesh.**

Information was not found to indicate that there have been, since August 2007, any significant changes in the situation of the Christian community in Bangladesh, or changes in the political situation in Bangladesh such as would have a significant impact on the Christian community. An overview of source material is provided below under the following sub-headings: *Political developments since August 2007*, and *Situation of Christian converts in Bangladesh since August 2007*.

Political developments since August 2007
Information was found to indicate that the state of emergency in Bangladesh, declared in January 2007, is still in effect, and that the caretaker government, with Fakhruddin Ahmed in the position of Chief Adviser, has not yet set a date for national elections. An article published on the *Economist* website in February 2008 provides the following summary:

> More than a year after Bangladesh's generals intervened in the country's failing democracy, they have yet to lift the state of emergency and declare a date for the parliamentary election they have promised by the end of 2008. This week the political parties, the election commission and foreign powers stepped up the pressure on the generals to leave politics.
>
> The two big political parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), called for the poll to be held by June. But the election commission said some 50m voters (out of an estimated 80m) were yet to be registered. The election date would not be set until September. More important, the parties are calling for the release of their detained leaders, Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia, both former prime ministers, known as the two "begums". Corruption allegations against these feuding heads of competing kleptocracies seem to have done little to dent their popular appeal ('Looking for the exit' 2008, *Economist* website, 7 February http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10651866 – Accessed 25 February 2008 – Attachment 25).

A recent media article indicated that as at 27 February 2008, both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were still in detention facing various charges ('Ex-Bangladesh PM faces new charge' 2008, *BBC News* website, 27 February http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7267525.stm – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 26).

A recent assessment of the current situation in Bangladesh published on the South Asia Terrorism Portal website argued that the caretaker government has been successful in its campaigns against corruption and against militant Islamic groups in Bangladesh, but criticised its economic management, pointing to high inflation and food prices, and lower than projected economic growth (Bangladesh Assessment 2008' 2008, South Asia Terrorism Portal website http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/index.htm – Accessed 25 February 2008 – Attachment 27). An article published on the online edition of the February 2008 *Himal South Asian* magazine provides a brief analysis of the current situation in Bangladesh, drawing parallels with General Musharraf's seizure of power in Pakistan in 1999, and reporting rumours about the possibility of martial law being imposed ('The Plus Two Formula' 2008, *Himal South Asian* website Volume 21, No. 2, February

http://www.himalmag.com/2008/february/commentary_bangladesh.htm – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 28).

Media articles were found to indicate that the current administration is facing increasing domestic and international pressure to end the state of emergency, or to limit the restrictions it imposes, and to hold elections. Information was found to indicate that representatives of Amnesty International conducted a trip to Bangladesh in January 2008, and called on the government to relax restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression, and to enforce accountability for human rights abuses by security forces ('Bangladesh should ease some emergency restrictions, Amnesty International chief says' 2008, *International Herald Tribune website,* 5 January http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/01/05/asia/AS-GEN-Bangladesh-Rights.php – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 29). A report by the *United News of Bangladesh* of 15 February 2008 provides information regarding recent comments made by German, British, and U.S. officials in support of ending the state of emergency, and reports on speculations that the state of emergency may be eased in April 2008 in time for municipal elections ('State of Emergency, Elections in Bangladesh in western eyes' 2008, *United News of Bangladesh Limited*, 15 February – Attachment 30). A report from the Bangladeshi *New Age* website on 25 February 2008 quotes a range of Bangladeshi politicians, officials and human rights groups on the negative economic and social effects of the state of emergency (Chowdhury, Shahidul Islam 2008 'Bangladesh "under pressure" to lift emergency – paper', *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, Bangladeshi New Age website, 25 February – Attachment 31). An article was found which provides an overview of a Human Rights Watch report published in early 2008, which contains allegations of arbitrary arrest and torture by Bangladeshi security forces during the state of emergency ('Bangladesh: Tortured Journalist Describes Surviving Military Beatings' 2008, Human Rights Watch website, 14 February http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/02/14/bangla18028.htm – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 32).

Situation of Christian converts in Bangladesh since August 2007
Information was not found to indicate that there have been any significant changes to the situation of Christian converts in Bangladesh since late August 2007.

The 2007 US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* on Bangladesh, released on September 14, 2007, provided the following information on the situation of Christians in Bangladesh:

> There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. Citizens were generally free to practice the religion of their choice; however, government officials, including the police, were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minority victims of harassment and violence. The Government and many civil society leaders stated that violence against religious minorities normally had political or economic motivations and could not be attributed only to religion.
>
> There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence by the Muslim majority
>
> … The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice, profess, and propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of

one's choice. While the Government publicly supports freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem.

While the right to propagate the religion of one's choice is guaranteed by the Constitution, local authorities and communities often objected to efforts to convert persons from Islam.

In general, government institutions and the courts protect religious freedom.

… There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives, religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes, were often unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they were often reluctant to seek recourse from a corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Police were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promotes an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against them. However, persons who practiced different religions often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings.

...Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Bangladesh*, 14 September – Attachment 33).

No significant differences were found between the overall general assessment of religious freedom with regard to Christians in Bangladesh made in the 2007 US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* on Bangladesh , and that made in the previous year's report (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Bangladesh*, 14 September – Attachment 33;
US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 – Bangladesh*, 15 September – Attachment 34).

A paper published by Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, on human rights concerns in Bangladesh in 2007 indicated that there had been 135 reported human rights violations against religious minorities in Bangladesh in 2007, but did not specifically address the issue of attacks on Christian converts (Odhikar 2008, 'Human Rights Concerns 2007: Odhikar Report On Bangladesh', Odhikar website 1 January
http://www.odhikar.org/documents/hr_report_2007.pdf – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 35).

Information was found to indicate that since August 2007, Christian converts in Bangladesh have continued to be subject to attacks by societal actors, and that hostile attitudes to the Christian community continued to prevail amongst sections of the Muslim and Buddhist community. Information was found to indicate that at the level of public discourse, the current caretaker administration continues to express support for the Christian community in Bangladesh.

An article published on the Compass Direct News website in October 2007 reported that rumors were being spread in Bangladesh that Christian organizations were offering financial incentives for Muslims to convert to Christianity, and that these rumours were fuelling violence against Christians, which was perpetrated both by Muslims and Buddhists (Shalom,

Aenon 2007, 'Bangladesh: Anti-Christian Rumor in Bangladesh Helps Fuel Attacks', *Compass Direct News*, 16 October – Attachment 36).

Two reports published on the Compass Direct News website in early 2008 provide information on a fatal attack on a 70 year old woman who had converted from Islam to Christianity in Rangpur district of Bangladesh. One article indicates that the woman, who had intended to be baptised in February 2008, was badly burnt when unknown attackers set fire to her house. The same article quoted a local official of the Isha-E-Jamat Christian church as saying that the area is predominately Muslim, but that the Christian community resides there with the assistance of the government and police ('Bangladesh: Elderly Christian Woman's Home Set Ablaze' 2008, Compass Direct News website, 24 January http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement =5204 – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 37). A subsequent article indicates that the woman later died of her injuries ('Bangladesh: Elderly Convert From Islam Dies From Burns' 2008, Compass Direct News website, 4 February http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement =5211 – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 38).

A news report was found to indicate that on August 20, 2007, a Bangladeshi court passed the death sentence on an Islamic militant convicted of the 2003 murder of Christian evangelist Hridoy Roy ('Bangladesh: Islamic Militant Convicted of Another Murder' 2007, *Compass Direct News* website, 28 August http://compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5004&lang=en&length=sho rt&backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0 – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 39).

Reports were found to indicate that Christian Churches of various denominations in Bangladesh held public services over the Christmas period in December 2007, and that the celebration of the Christmas period was publicly recognised by the government. An article published on 25 December 2007 indicated that Christmas services were held at various churches, and that the government had taken measures to ensure the security of these services. The same article also reported positive public statements made regarding Christianity and the Bangladeshi Christian community, by both the Bangladeshi President and Chief Adviser ('Christmas Day Today' 2007, News from Bangladesh website 25 December http://www.newsfrombangladesh.net/view.php?hidDate=2007-12- 25&hidType=TOP&hidRecord=000000000000000181837 – Accessed 25 February 2008 – Attachment 40). An article published on 26 December 2007 indicated that Bangladeshi Christian leaders had also attended a reception held at Bangabhaban, the official residence of the Bangladeshi President, on Christmas Day ('Christmas celebrated' 2007, News from Bangladesh website 26 December http://www.newsfrombangladesh.net/view.php?hidDate=2007-12- 26&hidType=TOP&hidRecord=000000000000000181932 – Accessed 25 February 2008 – Attachment 41).

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