

# Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

הוועד הפועל של  
יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative  
Organisation of  
Australian Jewry

2nd Floor  
146 Darlinghurst Road  
Darlinghurst NSW 2010  
Australia  
Tel (+61 2) 9360 1600  
Fax (+61 2) 9331 4712  
Web www.ecaj.org.au  
Email info@ecaj.org.au

#### PRESIDENT

Robert M. Goot A.M., S.C.

#### DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Jillian Segal A.M.

#### HON. TREASURER

Peter Wise

#### HON. SECRETARY

Peter Wertheim A.M.

#### VICE PRESIDENTS

Robin Margo S.C. (NSW)

John Searle (VIC)

Dr Keith Shilkin A.M. (WA)

Norman Schueler (SA)

David Paratz (QLD)

Daniel Albert (TAS)

Dr Anita Shroot (ACT)

#### CONSTITUENTS

New South Wales Jewish

Board of Deputies

Jewish Community Council

of Victoria Inc

Jewish Community Council of

Western Australia Inc

Queensland Jewish Board of

Deputies

Jewish Community Council

of South Australia

Hobart Hebrew Congregation

ACT Jewish Community Inc.

#### AFFILIATES

Australasian Union of

Jewish Students

Australian Federation of WIZO

Union of Progressive

Judaism - Australia

Federation of Jewish Aged

and Community Organisations

Maccabi Australia Inc

National Council of Jewish

Women of Australia

#### OBSERVERS

B'nai B'rith of Australia/NZ

Council of Progressive Rabbis

Federation of Australian Jewish

Ex-Service Associations

Jewish National Fund

New Zealand Jewish Council

Zionist Federation of Australia



22 July 2009

The Hon Stephen Smith MP  
Minister for Foreign Affairs,  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister, *Stephen,*

I write on a matter of some urgency.

As noted in media reports this week, the Bangladeshi journalist and peace activist Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, faces court this week after having been investigated by Bangladeshi authorities on charges of sedition, treason and insulting religious belief, since 2003.

He is accused of insulting Islam and harming the state's reputation abroad, charges which, when couched as "sedition," carry a possible death penalty.

On 27 February 2007, the Australian Senate, on the motion of Ursula Stephens, adopted general business notice of motion no. 717, as follows:

"That the Senate -

(a) notes:

- (i) the plight of Mr Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, a Bangladeshi journalist who is on trial for sedition, an offence punishable by death, because as editor of an English-language newspaper he has been critical of Islamic extremism and has expressed his belief in interfaith dialogue, particularly between Christians, Muslims and Jews,
- (ii) that Mr Choudhury was detained in Dhaka Central Jail in November 2003 for passport violation, was charged with sedition, interrogated and was held in prison for 17 months without legal recourse until April 2005 when he was released on bail after intervention by the United States Department of State,
- (iii) that on 6 July 2006 Mr Choudhury's newspaper offices were bombed by an Islamic extremist organisation after the newspaper published articles in support of the Ahmadiyya Muslim minority,

- (iv) that on 18 September 2006 a Bangladeshi judge ruled that Mr Choudhury would stand trial for sedition and that his trial commenced, only to be suspended when a state of emergency was declared in Bangladesh on 11 January 2007 and a caretaker government was installed by the military on 22 January 2007,
  - (v) that Mr Chouldhury's trial has been suspended while the new government is established, and
  - (vi) that the previous government admitted that there was no basis for the charges against Mr. Choudhury and the Public Prosecutor testified that there was no evidence against him; and
- (b) calls on the Government of Bangladesh to:
- (i) ensure a fair trial for Mr Choudhury,
  - (ii) ensure his confiscated possessions are returned, and
  - (iii) investigate those responsible for his harassment and intimidation".

Mr Choudhury was also the subject of US House Resolution 64 of March 13, 2007, which objected to continued "harassment and intimidation" and his incarceration in 2004 for 17 months without legal recourse, during which he was placed in solitary confinement and "suffered harsh interrogation techniques and received no treatment for a debilitating case of glaucoma," according to the resolution.

The US House resolution called on the Bangladeshi government to "immediately drop all pending charges against Bangladeshi journalist Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury ... and take steps to protect Mr. Choudhury."

The Resolution also noted that the "US Commission on International Religious Freedom visited with Mr. Choudhury on their trip to Bangladesh in February and March 2006... and identified Mr. Choudhury as one of those voices that should not be silenced."

In the past, Mr Choudhury has recorded his gratitude to the Australia for its activities in making it clear to the Bangladeshi authorities that we take this matter seriously and regard the legal persecution of Mr Choudhury as completely unacceptable.

The ECAJ implores the Australian Government to do all in its power to protect Mr Choudhury's basic human rights as he faces trial.

Yours faithfully,

*Kind regards*

*Robert M Goot*

Robert M Goot AM SC

President