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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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BGD41744.E

29 July 2003

Bangladesh: A group called the Sahaba Soldiers; the goals and activities of the group; treatment of those who hold progressive religious and social views by the Sahaba Soldier members (1990-2003)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Information on a group called the Sahaba Soldiers was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. The South Asian Women's NETwork (SAWNET) reported that the Sahaba Soldiers bombed the home of Sultana Kamal, a women's rights activist and lawyer in Bangladesh (Oct. 1996). The same article reported that the Sahaba Soldiers issued a fatwa, or Islamic decree, against author Taslima Nasrin for her position on women's rights in Bangladesh (ibid.).

Although no reports consulted by the Research Directorate confirm that the Sahaba Soldiers are the same group as the Sahaba Sainik Parishad, or the Council of Soldiers of Islam<sup>3/4</sup> who are allegedly linked to the Muslim political party Jamaat-e-Islami (PEN International 5 Nov. 1993)<sup>3/4</sup> several reports discuss the Council of Soldiers of Islam and their fight against Taslima Nasrin (ibid.; American Atheists 6 Oct. 1998; Amnesty International 14 Oct. 1998; *Frontline* 30 Mar.-12 Apr. 2002; *The Nation* 18 Nov. 2002). Taslima Nasrin is a trained medical doctor, however, she also wrote feminist newspaper columns in Bangladesh and a controversial novel that Islamic fundamentalists considered blasphemous (PEN International 5 Nov. 1993). According to *The Nation*,

On September 16, [1993] 500 members of the Bangladesh Sahaba Sainik Parishad, or Council of Soldiers for Islam (CSI), a militant group based in a madrassah [religious school] in Sylet, held a rally calling for Nasrin to be executed for "blasphemy and conspiracy against Islam, the Holy Koran and its prophet." On September 23 they offered a bounty of \$1,250 for her death within fifteen days. On October 2 they staged another march, this time threatening a general strike unless she was arrested by October 7 (18 Nov. 2002).

In 1994 Nasrin fled to Sweden where she remains in exile still (*Frontline* 30 Mar.-12 Apr. 2002). For Taslima Nasrin's complete story, please consult the attached *Frontline* document.

No further information on the goals and activities of the Sahaba Soldiers or the Sahaba Sainik Parishad could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

American Atheists. 6 October 1998. "Muslims Continue Death Calls for Nasrin, Rushdie." <<http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/nasrin2.htm>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

Amnesty International. 14 October 1998. "Public Statement Bangladesh: Government Should Ensure Safety of Taslima Nasrin." <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGASA130011998>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

*Frontline*. 30 March-12 April 2002. "Of An Ongoing Battle: Taslima Nasreen Speaks Out." <<http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1907/19070810.htm>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

*The Nation* [New York]. 18 November 2002. Meredith Tax. "Taslima's Pilgrimage." <<http://www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20021118&s=tax>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

Poets, Essayists and Novelists (PEN) International. 5 November 1993. Meredith Tax. "Taslima Nasrin: A Background Paper." <<http://www.wworld.org/archive/archive.asp?ID=151>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

South Asian Women's NETwork (SAWNET). October 1996. "Canada Honors Bangladeshi Woman Activist." <<http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/kamal.html>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

#### **Internet sites, including:**

Amnesty International

Bangladesh International Community News

*Country Reports*

Dhaka.com

Human Rights for Bangladesh Minorities

Human Rights Watch

Nation Online

Rediff

Virtual Bangladesh

World News Connection

#### Attachment

*Frontline*. 30 March-12 April 2002. "Of An Ongoing Battle: Taslima Nasreen Speaks

Out." <<http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1907/19070810.htm>> [Accessed 21 July 2003]

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