‘Peaceful transition a key opportunity to address child protection gaps in Bangladesh’

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, Najat Maalla M’jid, on Friday called on the new interim government in Bangladesh to seize the current transition as an opportunity to address existing gaps in laws and methods to protect children from all forms of abuse and exploitation, and from arbitrary detention.

“Youth and children in Bangladesh have been at the forefront of the recent protests in the country. They have achieved a lot, but they have also paid a huge price,” said Maalla M’jid.

According to the latest verified figures by UNICEF, more than 65 children were killed during the crackdown on peaceful demonstrations.

“I add my voice to those of the UN Secretary-General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights underscoring the need for a full, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation into all acts of violence. In particular, I would like to stress the importance of ensuring adequate safeguarding mechanisms for children and young people who have been victims of violence, arbitrary arrests and detention,” said Maalla M’jid.

The UN Special Representative encouraged the interim authorities to expand and strengthen institutions and social programs so that they are easily accessible to all children.

Maala M’jid also recalled the critical importance of a child-friendly justice system, including independent courts for

minors, even more so considering the high number of children and youth that were detained during the recent protests.

“I welcome that the release of children has begun, and call for the swift release of all children,” she said. “It is critical that all charges against them are lifted, especially under the cybercrime and anti-terrorist legislation, and that there are guarantees of no further prosecution.”

Maalla M’jid further said that it is essential that these children and their families receive appropriate support, including legal assistance, psychosocial care and reintegration services to safeguard their well-being and future.

The UN Special Representative also called on the authorities to protect youth and children’s right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

“Youth and children were at the forefront of the struggle and need to be at the forefront of change. I acknowledge the important steps taken to ensure their advisory roles in the interim Government. It is essential that youth and children continue to be actively and meaningfully involved.”