

(English)

Bilkis Yakub Rasool's Statement
January 8, 2024

As the Supreme Court bench of Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan quashed the remission granted to the 11 men convicted of gang-raping Bilkis Bano and murdering 14 members of her family in 2002

Today is truly the New Year for me. I have wept tears of relief. I have smiled for the first time in over a year and half. I have hugged my children. It feels like a stone the size of a mountain has been lifted from my chest, and I can breathe again. This is what justice feels like. I thank the honourable Supreme Court of India for giving me, my children and women everywhere, this vindication and hope in the promise of equal justice for all.

I have said before, and I say again today, journeys like mine can never be made alone. I have had my husband and my children by my side. I have had my friends who have given me so much love at a time of such hate, and held my hand at each difficult turn. I have had an extraordinary lawyer, Advocate Shobha Gupta, who has walked with me unwaveringly for over 20 long years, and who never allowed me to lose hope in the idea of justice.

A year and half ago, on August 15, 2022, when those who had destroyed my family and terrorised my very existence, were given an early release, I simply collapsed. I felt I had exhausted my reservoir of courage. Until a million solidarities came my way. Thousands of ordinary people and women of India came forward. They stood with me, spoke for me, and filed PIL petitions in the Supreme Court. 6000 people from all over, and 8500 people from Mumbai wrote appeals; 10,000 people wrote an Open Letter, as did 40,000 people from 29 districts of Karnataka. To each of these people, my gratitude for your precious solidarity and strength. You gave me the will to struggle, to rescue the idea of justice not just for me, but for every woman in India. I thank you.

Even as I absorb the full meaning of this verdict for my own life, and for my children's lives, the *dua* that emerges from my heart today is simple – the rule of law, above all else and equality before law, for all.

Bilkis Bano, Jan 8, 2024
(Issued through Adv. Shobha Gupta)