



23 years of Odhikar: the struggle continues, despite persecution

Statement from Odhikar

Dhaka, October 09, 2017: Odhikar commemorates its 23rd founding anniversary on 10th October. It was established on this day in 1994 with the vision of a society based on the rights and responsibilities of State and citizens. Odhikar is striving to achieve this goal through human rights activities, based on the foundations established by principles of justice and rule of law, international declarations, conventions and treaties. For 23 years, has been diligently working to protect and promote the rights of the people through awareness, documentation, monitoring, research and advocacy.

Odhikar, being an organisation of human rights defenders in Bangladesh, has always been consistent in creating mass awareness of human rights by several means, including reporting violations perpetrated by the State and advocacy and campaigns to ensure internationally recognised civil and political rights of citizens. Odhikar stands by the victims of oppression and maintains no prejudice with regard to their political leanings or ideological orientation. Odhikar firmly believes that all victims of human rights violations are in dire need of protection and deserve justice.

Odhikar consistently monitors the human rights situation of Bangladesh and releases a status report every month, based on its own fact finding and information collection, reports sent by associated local human rights defenders across the country and information published in different media. It relentlessly campaigns for the rights to freedom of speech and expression, of peaceful assembly and of association – and for the right to vote. It also campaigns to put an end to enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture and degrading treatment. The Organisation has earned the reputation as a steadfast watchdog of people’s rights. Its vocal activism and persistence; and its refusal to bow to government repression, has gradually made the working conditions of Odhikar more challenging.

The present government continues to harass Odhikar for being vocal against human rights violations and for campaigning to stop them. The government, after assuming power in 2009, started the harassment on Odhikar for its reporting on the human rights situation of the country. In August 2013, Odhikar’s Secretary was picked up by some

men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch of Police (DB) and after that he and Odhikar's Director were detained in prison for 62 and 25 days respectively for documenting and reporting on extrajudicial killings perpetrated by security forces, before being freed on bail. Human rights defenders in all over the country associated with Odhikar, who are working fearlessly to gather information and carry out their profession impartially, are harassed and victimised. Furthermore, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) has, for more than three and half years, barred the release of all project and programme related funds of Odhikar and has also withheld the renewal of its registration, in order to stop its human rights activities.

Despite being persecuted and under surveillance, Odhikar keeps functioning with very few staff¹ and tremendous financial constraints and continues its human rights activism. As a human rights organisation, it is Odhikar's duty to highlight violations, with no discrimination whatsoever; and make appropriate recommendations and create awareness to prevent future violations. The Organisation is still operating due to the volunteer services of grassroots level human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and its members and staff and their commitment to human rights activism.

Odhikar would like to express heartfelt gratitude to all the human rights defenders, organisations, networks, supporters and well-wishers who have stood by the Organisation for the last 23 years; that have expressed solidarity with it and that have vocally, actively and continuously campaigned against the persecution it faces. Odhikar will continue to fight against State repression and will continue its struggle until democracy and human rights are fully established in Bangladesh.

Odhikar believes that a democratic state needs to be constituted based on equality, human dignity and social justice which were the main perceptions of the Liberation War of Bangladesh; and there is no alternative way other than people's mobilization and the fight against injustice. On this day, Odhikar urges the people of Bangladesh to be organised in order to restore their rights, including their voting rights. It urges every human rights defender to unite with the families of the victims and the people, as one and take a stand against human rights abuses as one voice.

In Solidarity,
The Odhikar Team

¹ Between September 2013 and September 2016, nine members of staff have left Odhikar due to security and financial reasons.