



Discussion meeting on enforced disappearance at Chittagong  
**Social movement and mass awareness stressed to combat disappearance.**  
**Campaign for the accession to the International Convention for the Protection**  
**of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.**

The speakers at a discussion meeting organised by Odhikar in Chittagong on 15 October 2011 expressed their concern that the crime of ‘disappearance’ is increasing as the State is losing its democratic character. Speakers stressed on mass awareness to prevent enforced disappearances. They also emphasized that national and international organisations could play a vital role against such crime. Enforced disappearance is a grave form of human rights violation. It is a deprivation of life and freedom and a furtive manner of taking away a person without learning a trace.



*Moyeen Uddin Khan Badal, Member of Parliament, speaking at the meeting as special guest.*

Odhikar in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland organised a discussion meeting on a campaign for the accession of the government to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, at Hotel Agrabad in Chittagong on 15 October 2011; as part of Odhikar’s programme. Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar, moderated the discussion while Sazzad Hussain, Programme Coordinator of the Organisation presented the keynote paper that highlighted the present status of the crime of enforced disappearance in Bangladesh. Moyeen Uddin Khan Badal, Member of Parliament was present as special guest.

Those present at the meeting gave the following observations:

- The State has no authority to cause any person to disappear even if he was a criminal.
- A criminal should be punished following a due process of law based on specific information.
- The justice delivery system and extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced disappearance cannot function together.
- The human rights, democracy and rule of law will collapse if such heinous crimes are not prevented.
- In order to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, pressure on government was needed so that Bangladesh ratifies the Convention immediately.

Moyeen Uddin Khan Badal, MP said, “In my electoral area, I saw the wife of a man who had disappeared, eager to get her husband back. I understand the pain of those families whose members have disappeared. I could not come to her aid even after using my Parliamentary power.” He said that forced disappearance is a crime against humanity; and that it is necessary to raise our voice against it. He observed that it is very difficult to get rid of the practice of enforced disappearance when the State is involved in such acts or patronizes such crimes. The crime of disappearance occurs in all the States. In the western countries of the modern world, such crime also takes place. He said that no one should be subjected to punishment without a fair trial. Those who were ‘disappeared’; one third of them did not come back. Mass awareness has to be created against enforced disappearance. He promised to keep working against disappearance and extra judicial killing as a Member of Parliament. He urged the government to ratify the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance.

He said that a ‘Frankenstein monster’ had been created by those in power in the past in the form of the RAB and now the present government is continuing to keep this ‘Frankenstein monster’. An elite force like RAB was formed in Brazil. That force was given enormous power by the government to kill people extra judicially; and they became a killing squad. He hopes that RAB is transformed into such a force. If any force goes beyond law, it becomes dangerous for establishing rule of law and democracy.

“In our country, the parliamentary committees and media have an important role to play in rooting out the crime of disappearances”, stated lawmaker Moyeen Uddin Khan Badal while addressing the meeting. Moyeen Uddin Khan Badal expressed solidarity with Odhikar’s campaign for the ratification of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance. He assured that he would take this issue to the Parliament and also pledged to extend his support to Odhikar in this campaign.

Naim Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Chittagong city unit Vice-President of Awami League; Dr. Shahadat Hossain, General Secretary of the city unit of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP); Shah Alam, General Secretary of the Chittagong unit of Communist Party of Bangladesh; Abu Hanif, Chittagong unit Secretary of Workers Party of Bangladesh; Belayet Hossain, Advisor of the central committee of Jatiyo Somajtantrik Dal; Raja Mia, Chittagong unit President of Revolutionary Workers Party; Dr. Mahfuz Parvez, Professor of the Department of Political Science, Chittagong University; Morshedul Islam, Chairman at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Chittagong University; Advocate Saleh Uddin Haidar Siddiqui, President of Chittagong Bar Association; Sanchona Chakma, Organising Secretary of Hill Women Federation; Nazim Uddin Syamol, General Secretary of Chittagong Union of Journalists; Masuda Bilkis, President of Trust of Human Rights Bangladesh; and Hasan Maruf Rumi, Chittagong unit Coordinator of Gonosonghati Andolon were among the participants who took part in the discussion.



*Sanchona Chakma, Organisational Secretary of the Hill Women Federation, speaking at the discussion.*

Sanchona Chakma, Organisational Secretary of the Hill Women Federation, said that the Government has failed to provide information about the fate and whereabouts of Kalpana Chakma. The people of the Hill Tracts are oppressed by governmental forces. The neglectful behaviour of the State has created racial differences. She demanded Constitutional rights for the ethnic minority people. The impunity of the governmental forces has to be stopped in order to prevent enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture.

Naim Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Vice-President of Chittagong City Awami League, said that the act of disappearance was not always carried out by the state or on government order. Personal, professional, social, economical, and political factors were also related to the crime. Awareness and moral values of the people involved in disappearances have also to be built. He agreed that the State needed to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance to ensure the security of all people against disappearances. He called for electing political persons, rather than businessmen, at the time of elections in Bangladesh. Moreover, truthfulness, honesty and inclusive education have to be introduced in all spheres of life to prevent torture, extrajudicial killings and instances of enforced disappearances. The country's morality needed a boost, he observed.



*Dr. Shahadat Hossain, General Secretary of Chittagong City unit BNP and Naim Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Vice-President of Chittagong City Awami League, speaking at the meeting.*

Dr. Shahadat Hossain, General Secretary of Chittagong City unit BNP, said that we are victims of human rights violations because of political supremacy; and that we have to come out of confrontational politics. Enforced disappearances have reached an alarming stage akin to extrajudicial killings. He added that many people, including Chowdhury Alam, Ward Commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation; Bacha Mia, Chairman of Chittagong; Jamal Uddin; Kalpana Chakma were reportedly 'disappeared' by the state agencies. The government has not taken any steps to find them or provide any exact information about their fate.

Shah Alam, Chittagong unit General Secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said that the State always stands against democracy but in this case, apart from social, religious, racial and biological power, there are other reasons for enforced disappearance. Our Governments formed Special Forces for their protection and to hold on to their power, they use these forces to perpetrate torture, disappearances and killings without trial. He said the enforced disappearance

was the result of clashes of different classes in society. He added that the crime of disappearance was the by-product of political instability, economical imbalance and social insecurity.

Hasan Maruf Rumi, Chittagong District Coordinator of the Gonosonghoti Andolon, said that there was corruption in all spheres of the administration so that the law and order situation and human rights condition have become very sensitive issues. If extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearance, abduction cannot be stopped, then rule of law and democracy will not be established. He said that capitalist countries were mainly responsible for the crimes like enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and politicians in these countries were losing their appeal. Pulok, an activist of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad, headed a movement in protest of the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma and he was tortured to death. The workers movement has to be accelerated and more effective for establishing democracy, he added.



*Hasan Maruf Rumi, Chittagong District Coordinator of the Gonosonghoti Andolon and Advocate Abu Hanif, Chittagong District unit Secretary and member of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Bangladesh, speaking at the meeting.*

Advocate Abu Hanif, Chittagong District unit Secretary and member of the Central Committee of Workers Party of Bangladesh, said that the state character is itself fascist. Instances of disappearance, extrajudicial killings are entrenched in the direction of the State. Such crimes occur through the consent of the government. People are being killed extra judicially under the lies of ‘crossfire’ and ‘encounter’. The special forces of the government are involved in these incidents of disappearances and thus they are personally working against the general people. The profiteers and ‘mafia’ are doing this to serve their own interests. Social and mass movements have to be formed to demand the establishment of fundamental principles of a democratic state.

Advocate Saleh Uddin Haidar Siddiqui, President of the Chittagong Bar Association, said that we cannot say the country is civilized and democratic where acts of enforced disappearances

exist. He commented that the government claims to be a force that supported the liberation war and on the other hand they violate human rights. Many laws contrary to the Constitution and against the will of the people have been enacted, but there is no specific law for combating the crime of disappearance. He opined that there should be a law against such crime.

Masuda Bilkis, Chairman of the NGO Trust of Human Rights Bangladesh, said that we have to realise the pain and suffering of the families of the disappeared. It was known from the media that, the government machinery abducted Abu Zafar, Chairman of Raujan. Public opinion has to be formed in all spheres of human rights and their violations.

Belayet Hossain, Advisor of the Central Committee of the Jatiyo Somajtantrik Dal, said that the government has failed to provide any information about many victims of disappearance in Chittagong, including Jamal Uddin, Zakir Hossain and Kalpana Chakma. He addressed the respected Members of Parliament to make a proposal for a new law regarding disappearance by taking these incidences into account. He said that the people have to raise awareness and form mass movements.

Professor Morshedul Islam, Chairman of the Journalism and Mass Communication Department of Chittagong University, said that no disappearance can take place without the support of the State and the State can prevent this crime. In many civilized nations of the world the incidence of enforced disappearances take place too. For its own interest, the government should stop the practice of enforced disappearances.

He also stated that a few people have become very rich very quickly. To maintain those assets and to control the government, they embark in disappearances and killings. Mass awareness has to be created to stop all crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and torture. The crimes will not be eradicated from society without the willingness of the State and people will lose their ability to protest against illegal activities if the crimes continued. The political parties have to come out of their set format to lead and accelerate the social movement.

Nazim Uddin Shyamol, General Secretary of the Chittagong Journalists Union, said that it is wrong that media is working independently. Repressive laws are being enacted in the Parliament. This has to be stopped. He stated “I am worried about the security of the journalists. We can publish only 30% of the facts. We have difficulty understanding whether a democracy exists in our country. Even during the Caretaker government, the Head could not be elected without controversy and bickering among the political parties. It will be beneficial for the State if political personalities are brought into politics and not corrupt, vested interest businessmen.” The main politicians have failed because of the businessmen. The Ministers have become helpless because of the Advisors. In this situation, democracy and fundamental rights are left behind. All the criminals have to be brought under trial. He stated that the State has failed to ensure

accountability and the rights of the people, which he perceived as the reason of increasing number of crimes against humanity.

Alhaj Hakim Mahmud Ullah, Secretary of the greater Chittagong Development Committee, said that the Government needs a special force to carry out its activities but the public should be aware of their rights. The State has to be a well-wisher of the public. He said that according to the Right to Information Act 2009, there has to be information about disappearances and public security. Incidents of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings are all fascist behaviour of the State; in this era of globalization a democratic and supportive state is highly expected. He opined that there is no alternative but to mobilise social movements against crimes against humanity. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the UN, has to be ratified by Bangladesh and a law regarding this crime has also to be enacted.

Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar, commented that enforced disappearances is deeply rooted in an exploitative and oppressive system that breeds social injustices and violations of basic human rights. “It is an instrument of repression used by a government whose policies are opposed or assailed by critical members of society. It is often committed on the pretext of maintaining peace and order and protecting national security from those conveniently labeled as “enemies of the State”, he added.

Sazzad Hussain, Programme Coordinator of Odhikar, discussed the Convention and why it was important to ratify. He said that ‘enforced disappearance’ is a particularly cruel human rights violation; a violation of the person who has disappeared and a violation to his family. The disappeared person is often tortured and in constant fear; removed from the protection of the law; deprived of all rights; and at the mercy of the captors. It is a continuing violation which persists often for many years after the initial abduction. According to information gathered by Odhikar, 17 people were victims of enforced disappearance in 2010 and another 17 persons were allegedly ‘disappeared’ by law enforcement agencies during the last nine months of 2011.

The Convention is governed by a Committee on Enforced Disappearances elected by its parties. The Committee on Enforced Disappearances is the body of independent experts which monitors the implementation of the Convention by the States Parties. Parties are obliged to report to this Committee on the steps they have taken to implement it, within two years of becoming subject to it. The Committee examines each report and shall make such suggestions and general recommendations on the report as it may consider appropriate and shall forward these to the State Party concerned.