

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women observed. Odhikar organised roundtable meeting and rallies.



Odhikar, in collaboration with the May 18 Memorial Foundation of South Korea, organised a roundtable on 25 November 2009 at the VIP Lounge of the National Press club on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Odhikar also carried out rallies in five districts to observe the day with the slogan “We can stop violence against women”.

Odhikar’s treasurer and eminent women’s rights activist, Farida Akhter presided over the meeting where various human rights activists, including Shammi Akhter, Member of Parliament; Former Ambassador Nasim Firdaus, Executive Director, Bangladesh Alliance for Women Leadership; Abu Sayeed Khan, Managing Editor, The Daily Shamokal; Advocate Fahima Nasrin, Vice President of the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers’ Association (BNWLA); Advocate Farida Yeasmin, Deputy Director (Legal), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST); Kazi Jesin, Executive Director of Think 306 Media Relation Agency; Sumaiya Islam of Bangladesh Overseas Women Workers’ Association (BOMSA); and Shahinur Begum of Sromo Bikash Kendro spoke on the occasion.

Taskin Fahmina, Programme Coordinator of Odhikar, mentioned in a keynote paper that according to Odhikar documentation, a total of 5087 women and girls had been raped from the year 2003 to October 2009. During the same period, 1380 persons fell victim to acid attacks, of which 805 were women. She mentioned 2052 acts of dowry related violence were committed across the country during that period while 1,417 women were killed, 382 were tortured and 253 committed suicide. She said that 25 women were also raped by members of the law enforcement agencies during that time. She also said that in many cases law enforcing agencies were unwilling to lodge complaints-being motivated or bribed by the accused when women go to police stations to complain. Police are seen reluctant to investigate the cases relating violence against women. Furthermore, there is no protection mechanism or security for victims and witnesses. Perpetrators are not properly punished due to a poor justice delivery system, Taskin Fahmina added.

Speaking at the roundtable, Shammi Akhter, MP, said women are not only the victims of physical abuse, they often fall victim to mental/psychological abuse. In regard to enacting a law relating to domestic violence, she said, it will not be effective if there is no implementation of such law. Shammi Akhter also said, women are not aware of their rights, they need to be educated and the government has to take the initiative. She

emphasised that a constant social movement is needed for eliminating violence against women. Perpetrators escape after committing heinous crimes due to lack of implementation of existing laws. The Members of Parliament for the reserved seats in the Parliament have nothing to do as they have no power.

Former Ambassador Nasim Firdaus said, a common platform amongst various organisations needs to be formed in order to stop violence against women. She emphasised that every police station should have at least one female officer to lodge the complaints relating to violence against women. Moreover, equal rights are to be ensured in the decision making process, she added.

Abu Sayeed Khan, Managing Editor of the daily Shamokal (one of the leading Bengali daily newspapers) said that the incidents of violence against women are continuing in our society. Superstition and a patriarchal mindset are the hurdles for women rights. He said women are the most vulnerable group in Bangladesh, urging all to change the mentality that causes violence against women. He also focused on the necessity of creating a pleasant cultural environment and that the collective movement irrespective of gender, caste and religion must also be strengthened.

He further said that despite having specific laws to stop violence against women, the incidents of violence against women are taking place indiscriminately. Although there are laws, implementations are very poor.

Advocate Farida Yeasmin said, it has become a tendency to neglect women in the society. Women are victims of violence and torture due to lack of implementation of laws. She also said, no compromise would be granted for acts of violence against women and the perpetrators must be punished. Women are also deprived of getting wages for their work. She emphasised that women workers should get equal wages for equal work.

Fahima Nasrin, vice president of the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association, said that women and children are the most disadvantaged group in our society. A large number of incidents of violence against women takes place but in most cases no complaints are lodged. Around 97 per cent of the cases of repression against women were not filed.

The Executive Director of the Think 306 Media Relation Agency, Kazi Jesin said that violence against women not only hampered the family security, but also hampered the social and economic development of a country. In order to stop violence against women, social values need to be enshrined and at the same time struggle for women rights to be strengthened, she added.

Odhikar is monitoring and carrying out fact-finding missions on violence against women and it is also creating awareness at different levels through its advocacy programmes, in order to eliminate violence against women across the country. Odhikar believes that the security of victims and witness should be ensured and a women friendly justice delivery system be established.

While presiding over the session, Farida Akhter said that women have been victimized and repressed during all government regimes. Women have to be more empowered and conscious so that they can unite against all sorts of violence.

Apart from this round table meeting in Dhaka, Odhikar brought out rallies in Munshigonj, Tangail, Sirajgonj, Satkhira and Patuakhali district headquarters organised by its grassroot level human rights defenders on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The rallies got a lot of attention in the areas they went through.



Human rights defenders at Patuakhali District brought out a rally on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. – Odhikar



Human rights defenders at Tangail District brought out a rally on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. – Odhikar



Human rights defenders at Munshigonj District brought out a rally on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. – Odhikar



Human rights defenders at Sirajgonj District brought out a rally on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. –Odhikar