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Excellency,

I have the honour to write to you in my capacity as the Asia Pacific Director of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). The ICJ is an international network of judges and eminent lawyers from all regions in the world, who work to promote the rule of law and human rights.

The ICJ is deeply concerned regarding the NGO Affairs Bureau's decision on 17 August 2009 to terminate Odhikar's project titled 'Human Rights Defenders Training and Advocacy Programme in Bangladesh.' As you know, the project was approved by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and has been in the process of implementation since early 2009. The Ministry of Home Affairs has now cancelled the project without providing any reason, notice and due process of any kind. (No. – ABBU/A-4/Odhikar/15-29/08-688).

The ICJ believes that arbitrary termination of the project aimed at promoting respect and understanding of an important and serious human rights issue of torture, will undermine the fundamental human rights obligations and rule of law principles to which the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is committed.

Torture is one of the most serious violations of a person's fundamental human rights, giving rise to absolute obligations to prevent and eliminate all forms of torture under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture, to which Bangladesh is party.

The work of human rights defenders and groups is vital to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and maintaining rule of law in a democratic society. The UN Declaration on the Rights and Protections of Human Rights Defenders (*UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of the Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*), expressly recognises the rights of human rights defenders, individually and in association with others, "to the lawful exercise of their occupation or

profession,” and “to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights through peaceful means.” These rights flow from the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Covenants, to which Bangladesh is a party.

The ICJ respectfully urges the Office of the Prime Minister to reconsider its decision on this important matter, allowing Odhikar to fulfil its mandate to defend human rights, and ensuring that the Government of Bangladesh upholds its obligations under international law.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Roger Normand
Director
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