

OPEN LETTER - THE OBSERVATORY

OPEN LETTER TO MS. SHEIKH HASINA, PRIME MINISTER, GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH,

Paris- Geneva, September 3, 2009

Re: Concern following the cancellation of a human rights project led by Odhikar

Dear Ms. Sheikh Hasina, Honorable Prime Minister,

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), wishes to express its deepest concern about the recent decision of the Bangladeshi authorities to cancel a human rights project led by Odhikar.

According to the information received, on August 31, 2009, the NGO Affairs bureau sent a letter to Odhikar informing them that they had cancelled the Odhikar project entitled "Human Rights Defenders Training and Advocacy Programme in Bangladesh" due to the objection of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

This project had earlier been approved by the NGO affairs bureau on April 28, 2009, which is under the Office of the Prime Minister, and accordingly Odhikar had already organised district level advocacy programmes on the criminalisation of acts of torture, a tribunal against torture and roundtables on issues relating to torture and organised campaign programmes for the signature of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture by Bangladesh.

The Observatory is deeply concerned by this decision, as no reasons were given except the reference of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Government failed to show any legal basis for this action and seems to merely aim at silencing the human rights activities of this organisation. The Observatory condemns the restrictions placed on the work undertaken by human rights defenders and the exercise of freedom of expression. The Observatory also urges the authorities to immediately withdraw the decision of cancellation of the project.

The Observatory calls upon the Bangladeshi authorities to comply with the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

The Observatory urges the Bangladeshi authorities to comply with international human rights standards included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international law instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

Yours sincerely,

Souhayr Belhassen
FIDH President

Eric Sottas
OMCT Secretary General

Cc-ed : Advocate Sahara Khatun, Ministry of Home Affairs; Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Dr. Dipu Moni, Ministry of Foreign



Affairs; Mr. Abdus Sobhan Sikder, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs; Mr. Mustak Hassan Md. Iftakhar, Director General of the NGO Affairs Bureau