



Odhikar organises a discussion meeting at Rajshahi
Campaign for the accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

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 a trace. Its traumatic effects extend to the victims' next of kin, as it produces severe anguish of not knowing the fate and whereabouts of the victims because of the continuous refusal of the State to acknowledge the disappeared.

Odhikar in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland organised a discussion meeting on the campaign for the accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in Rajshahi on 18 September 2011 as part of Odhikar's programme. The goal of the programme is to initiate awareness and dialogue at local and national level for the ratification and implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The meeting was presided over by Odhikar Advisor, Farhad Mazhar and moderated by Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar. Adilur Rahman Khan delivered the welcome speech. Two parliamentarians, Mohammad Shahriar Alam from the ruling Bangladesh Awami League and Syeda Ashifa Ashrafi Papiya from the Opposition, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), were present as special guests.



Mohammad Shahriar Alam, MP said, forced disappearance is very serious crime and a violation of human rights. It cannot be acceptable under any consideration. 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 incidents of enforced disappearances occur when democracy is not sustainable in a country. After the liberation war, such heinous crimes occurred under all the governments, but thousands of people were disappeared during the autocratic regimes. He said that on 14 December 1971 many intellectuals had been victims of enforced disappearances; whose fate or whereabouts could not be known.

He also said that the Awami League government will not patronize any crime against humanity and will not support any activity which is against the people. Mohammad Shahriar Alam 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 hands to support Odhikar in this campaign.



Syeda Ashifa Ashrafi Papia, MP said that enforced disappearance is a crime against humanity. When rule of law and democratic systems become ineffective, human rights violations, corruption, irregularities and injustices are patronized by the State. The brave and protesting people become victims of enforced disappearance. “We talk about civilization but in reality we are moving towards barbarism”, she added. She also commented that the State agents and pro-government elements are involved in enforced disappearances and the figures are increasing day by day.

Farhad Mazhar said that enforced disappearance is deeply rooted in an exploitation and oppressive system that breeds social injustices and violation 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 said, “The State must ensure the right to life of its citizens. Everybody wants to be protected; but the prevailing situation has created panic among the people. There is no environment to live with basic human rights. Anybody can be a victim of enforced disappearance at anytime. Therefore, we need to raise our voice against enforced disappearance.” He also stated that Odhikar is working to establish the rights of the people. The people have also to be united and vocal against all sorts of human rights violations and injustices.



The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is an international human rights instrument of the United Nations and intended to prevent forced disappearance. The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 December 2006 and entered into force on 23 December 2010 after Iraq became the 20th State party to this Convention. To date, 88 States are signatories and 29 are States Parties with only 7 that recognize all the competences of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

Sazzad Hussain 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, 32 people were allegedly disappeared by law enforcement agencies during the last 20 months from January 2010 to August 2011.

The crime of disappearance in Bangladesh is not a new one. Large numbers of disappearances took place during the country's liberation war in 1971. It also continued immediately after the independence. Now it has re-emerged and needs to be reversed immediately, or it could herald the onset of yet another serious crime trend.

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.

The Convention reiterates basic principles in customary international law with respect to the obligation of States to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of enforced disappearances and to provide measures of reparation and redress to the victims.

The Convention includes an optional complaints system whereby citizens of parties may appeal to the Committee for assistance in locating a disappeared person. Parties may join this system at any time, but may only opt out of it upon signature.

The incident of enforced disappearance, which is internationally recognized as crime against humanity, is practiced in Bangladesh. This can not be acceptable at all in a civilized society. Speakers at the meeting commented that the democratic system will collapse if such heinous crimes are not prevented. They opined that 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.



Speakers included the following persons: Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, Member, Central Committee of BNP; Aftab Hossain, General Secretary, Communist Party of Bangladesh; Advocate Nazrus Sadat, President, Rajshahi District Bar Association; Advocate Abul Kashem, former President, Rajshahi District Bar Association; Professor Rafiqul Islam, former Vice-Chancellor, Islamic University; Professor Asma Siddiqua, Rajshahi University; Selim Reza Newton, Associate Professor, Rajshahi University; SMA Kader, President of Rajshahi Reporters Union; Goutam Das, Member, Editorial Board of the fortnightly Chintaa; Liakat Ali, President, Rajshahi Rokkha Songram Porishod; Murad Morshed, Rajshahi District Coordinator, Gonosonghoti Andolon; and Bimol Chandra Rajoar, President, Jatiyo Adibasi Porishod, Rajshahi unit.