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International Women's Day and Violence against Women in Bangladesh

Statement from Odhikar

08 March is International Women's day. Though a hundred years have passed since the declaration of women's day and 39 years have passed since the independence of Bangladesh, the condition of women in Bangladesh leaves much space for improvement.

Violence against women is prevalent in this country especially against women who come from the impoverished sections of society. Dowry related violence; rape; acid throwing; domestic violence; illegal fatwa; sexual harassment; wage discrimination; and social discrimination against women are widespread occurrences.

As per Odhikar's statistics, from 01 January 2005 to 28 February 2011, 1257 women were killed, 348 were ill-treated and 243 committed suicide due to dowry related violence; 526 women were victims of acid violence; and 1876 women and 1598 girl children were victims of rape. The same source also shows that in 2010, 216 girls and women were victims of stalking.

Directives were issued from the High Court about 'stalking'. On January 26, 2011, a Division Bench of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, comprising of Justice Iman Ali and Justice Sheikh Hasan Arif, ordered every incident of eve-teasing (the term given to stalking) to be considered 'sexual harassment' from now on. At the same time, the High Court Division Bench ordered the amendment of section 10 (ka) of the Prevention of Repression on Women and Children Act of 2000, by including the crime of stalking in its provisions.¹

There are laws to protect women of Bangladesh from various forms of violence, including the Acid Crime Control Act 2002, Dowry Prohibition Act 1980, and The Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children Act 2000 etc. However, these Acts are of little use due to lack of proper implementation.

¹ The daily Amader Shomoy, 27/01/2011

Violence against women in Bangladesh is deeply embedded in the patriarchal mindset which leads to social injustices. A weak Judiciary also contributes to the lack of protection of women and many accused persons cannot be brought to justice due to their influential power. This 'power' can be monetary or political or both. Sometimes due to corruption of police or by not preserving evidence properly, women simply do not get justice. When one perpetrator is free, it creates new perpetrators and justice is denied.

In the readymade garments sector, where a majority of the workers are women, they are presently getting a minimum wage of taka 3000 (\$41.899) per month as they were unable to bargain with the authorities that their minimum wage should be taka 5000 (\$69.8) per month. For women garments workers, job security; safety; low cost housing facilities; and day care facilities are still a dream. Moshrefa Mishu, President of the Garments Workers Unity Forum was arrested on December 14, 2010, due to her strong voice against the injustices faced by garment factory workers.

Furthermore, social reasons prevent women from seeking justice against violence such as rape and domestic abuse. Police still consider domestic violence a social, and not a legal, issue and there is no proper investigation into incidents of rape. To add to this, there is no support system or victim/witness protection law for victims and witnesses of acts of violence against women. There are also cases where the rape was perpetrated by a police officer.

Odhikar's recommendations to stop violence against women include the following

1. Massive print and electric media campaign to be ensured in order to create social awareness of violence against women.
2. Police must accept and lodge complaints against perpetrators; preserve evidence properly and work independently. Those who fail to do so must be held accountable and investigated.
3. Judiciary must be strengthened and victims and witnesses should get proper support.
4. Legal aid system must be strengthened for the victims of violence against women.
5. To stop acid throwing, strong monitoring systems should be ensured in order to monitor the licenses needed to sell and buy acid.
6. Garments workers minimum wages of taka 5000 and housing, health and day care facilities for their children should be ensured.

7. Garments workers leader, Moshrefa Mishu should be released immediately.
8. In the school text books and curriculum, violence against women issues and related laws should be addressed to create awareness among the children and generate mutual respect.

Statistics: Violence against Women- 1 January 2005- 31 December 2010

Year	Acid Throwing	Dowry			Rape		Stalking
	Women	Killed	Physical Abuse	Suicide	Women	Children	
2010	84	234	122	22	248	311	216
2009	64	227	81	11	213	243	
2008	73	188	71	10	202	252	
2007	96	138	47	13	213	246	
2006	105	243	8	64	412	227	
2005	104	227	19	123	588	319	
Total	526	1257	348	243	1876	1598	216

