

CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE



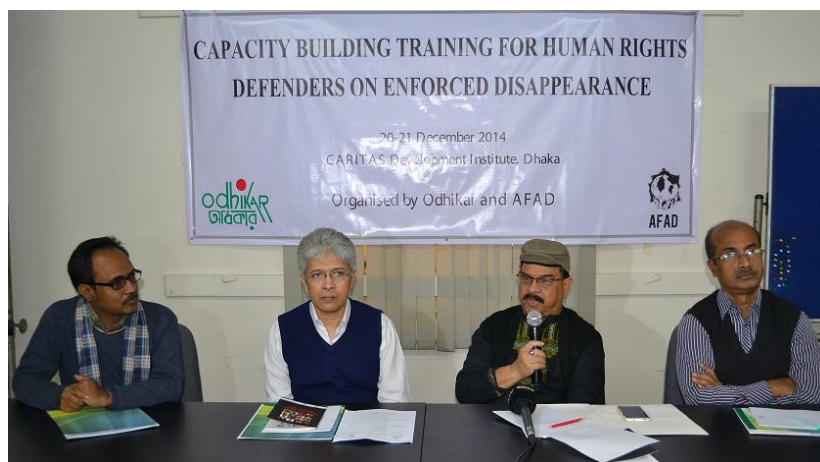
20-21 December 2014
CARITAS Development Institute, Dhaka

Organised by Odhikar and AFAD



Introduction:

Enforced disappearance is a particularly heinous human rights violation, which is considered a crime against humanity as defined in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The crime of enforced disappearance is deeply rooted in an exploitative and oppressive system that breeds poverty and violates basic human rights. It is an instrument of repression resorted to 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’.



In order to prevent this crime, Odhikar, being a member of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), has been working against enforced disappearance and consistently campaigning for the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. As part of this campaign

Odhikar, in collaboration with the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) organised a two-day capacity building training course for human rights defenders on enforced disappearance. The training programme was held in the CARITAS Development Institute in Dhaka on 20-21 December 2014. Twenty participants, mainly human rights defenders from different districts of Bangladesh; and members of the victim families attended the training. The training programmes were aimed to equip human rights defenders on the methods and techniques necessary for working on this issue.

Aims and objectives of the training:

The training on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICED) was aimed at enabling local human rights defenders interested in working against enforced disappearances; and for members of the families of the disappeared victims who are not familiar with international standards. It aims at empowering the local human rights defenders and the families of the disappeared by enhancing their skills and by recognising their important contribution to human rights.

The objectives of the training were to –

- i. empower human rights defenders on the tools and techniques required to work against enforced disappearance;
- ii. education on the Convention on Enforced Disappearance; and
- iii. enhance documentation and fact finding skills on cases of enforced disappearances.

Summary of the training:

On December 20, 2014 the inaugural session of the training was presided by Odhikar’s Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan, where the Convener of the Citizen Platform Nagarik Oikya, Mahmudur Rahman Manna; Jatiya Mukti Council Secretary, Faiezul Hakim; and Odhikar Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan also spoke. Furthermore, amongst the families of the disappeared, Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, the father of SM Adnan Chowdhury and Sanjida Islam, the sister of Mohammad Sajedul Islam Sumon also spoke at the session.



In the inaugural session of the training, the families held the state agencies responsible for the abduction and enforced disappearance of victims involved in Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and demanded that the government identify the persons involved in the crime and bring them to justice.

Speakers urged the government to find the whereabouts of 40 persons picked up in the run-up to the controversial January 5 elections. ‘The government knows everything...if it fails to find out our dear ones, then what type of duty is the government discharging,’ said Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, the father of SM Adnan Chowdhury, who was picked up allegedly by Rapid Action Battalion on December 4, 2013.

Nagarik Oikya convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said that we do not need to seek justice or remedy from such a government which did not acknowledge incidents of enforced disappearances. He also said that we have to build resistance against enforced disappearance. He

was critical of the ruling Awami League for continuing in power through a ‘farical election’ held on January 5, 2014. He stated that the present government proved through the controversial elections, that they are not dependent on the people, but exist in power depending on security forces.

Manna alleged that he was barred from attending television talk-shows for being critical on human rights issues, especially on enforced disappearance and that some selected persons were seen ‘propagating’ in those talk-shows.

Adilur Rahman Khan, expressing solidarity with the disappearance of Laos Developmental worker Sombath Somphone, said that all persons including political activists and professionals who were disappeared in Bangladesh will have to be returned to their families. He said, mass prevention needs to be created through a democratic movement in order to stop gross human rights violations like enforced disappearance, by creating mass awareness.

Odhikar secretary Adilur Rahman Khan also alleged that the Prime Minister’s Office-controlled NGO Affairs Bureau had kept suspended all the foreign funds of Odhikar, resulting in its employees being left without salaries from April 2014.

Statistics of Enforced Disappearance in Bangladesh									Enforced Disappearance 2009-2014				
Year (s)	No. of the disappeared persons	Allegedly disappeared by							Years	Total number of Disappeared persons	Found Dead	Returned Alive	Whereabouts remain unknown
		RAB	Police	RAB-Police	DB Police	RAB-DB Police	Industrial Police	Other					
2014	39	25	2	0	8	3	0	1	2009	3	1	0	2
2013	51	23	1	0	15	0	0	12	2010	18	1	0	17
2012	24	10	0	0	6	2	1	5	2011	31	5	1	25
2011	31	14	2	0	11	0	0	4	2012	24	1	10	13
2010	18	14	2	0	2	0	0	0	2013	51	2	15	34
2009	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2014	39	10	18	11
Total	166	89	7	0	42	5	1	22	Total	166	20	44	102

Odhikar documentation shows that 166 people, mostly political activists, became victims of enforced disappearance during the Awami League rule between January 2009 and December 2014.

Jatiya Mukti Council secretary, Faiezul Hakim said that persons who are responsible for enforced disappearance and killing were not arrested. Rather the state was making its citizens disappear without bringing anyone to justice, by violating the due process of law. He said that there is neither any security nor justice in place in the country. He recalled that many members and leaders of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal were victims of such enforced disappearance in 1972. On behalf of the Jatiya Mukti Council, he condemned such violation of human rights and urged all citizens to continue their fight against enforced disappearance.



In the morning of 20th December, before conducting the inaugural session of the training programme, human rights defenders who are associated with Odhikar and the families of the disappeared made a human chain in front of the CARITAS Building and expressed their solidarity for the return of Ramon Magsaysay Award laureate and Development Worker of Laos, Sombath Samphone, who was disappeared on December 15, 2012.

Facilitator/Resource Persons:

Facilitator and resource persons who conducted such training course were:

- Sazzad Hussain, Programme Coordinator, Odhikar
- Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary, Odhikar
- David Bergman, Journalist, New Age
- ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director, Odhikar
- Samia Islam, Documentation and Research Officer, Odhikar
- Taskin Fahmina, Consultant, Odhikar

Topics covered in the trainings:

- i. Fundamentals of Human Rights
- ii. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- iii. Fundamentals of Fact Finding and Research
- iv. Interviewing Techniques
- v. Documentation and Reporting
- vi. Urgent Action Alerts
- vii. Advocacy strategies and networking
- viii. Strategies for fighting against enforced disappearances
- ix. Communication and lobby at the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance

Expectations of the participants:



Documentation and Research Officer Samia Islam shared the expectations gathered from the participants. Most of the participants expressed the intention to know more about the Convention and how to prevent enforced disappearance.

In the first working session, facilitators highlighted the concept of enforced disappearance. Background and salient features of the Convention were also discussed. Among other topics, ‘enforced disappearance as a continuing crime’ and ‘what is the significance of mandatory universal jurisdiction’ were also discussed in the session.

In the second working session, facilitators focused on why we need to ratify the Convention, where the global context on enforced disappearance, current updates of disappearance, acts of the Commission on Enforced Disappearance; mechanisms aimed to ensure compliance with the Convention; and domestic enforcement of international mechanisms were discussed.



In the third working session, issues relating to fact finding and research were highlighted by facilitators, where the process of investigation, interview, data collection and verification of information were discussed. Participants also shared their experience and thoughts regarding fact finding.



Issues relating to documentation and report writing were highlighted by facilitators in the fourth working session, where gathering and documenting



information on enforced disappearance, methodology of information gathering and structure of report writing were discussed.

On the second day of the training (the fifth working session), participants were asked to review the previous day's work. Participants were divided into four groups and presented their reports. After the debriefing session, participants were given four different cases on enforced disappearance and were told to review the case studies and make group presentation. Participants of the training course discussed the given cases among themselves and prepared a fact finding report based on the given information.



In the seventh working session, a documentary on enforced disappearance titled “UNSILENCED” prepared by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) and the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND), was shown to the participants to understand the consequences of such crime and how it affects the families of the disappeared and the society as a whole.



Issues relating to advocacy and media campaigns were focused on by the facilitators in the eighth working session, where different advocacy tools and mechanisms; how media can play an active role to establish justice; the role of HRDs for the ratification of the Convention; and lobby at the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance (UNWGEID) were all discussed.

The following feedback on the role of human rights defenders for the ratification of the Convention were given by the participants:

1. Raise public awareness through poster campaigns in public places like educational institutions, press clubs, police stations, Government and non-governmental organisations etc.

2. To learn and teach the definition, nature, kinds of enforced disappearances and the involvement of law enforcement agencies
3. Share information and knowledge on enforced disappearance to nearest groups – first family then friends, neighbours, colleagues and others, to create awareness
4. Organise advocacy meetings and press conferences
5. Lobby with local politicians, MPs and community leaders
6. Encourage the politicians to speak in public meetings against enforced disappearance
7. Need to make a database to mobilise the families of the disappeared from each locality
8. Make victims family network for the movement against enforced disappearance
9. Monthly meeting among the HRDs and others to update on acts of enforced disappearance in each locality
10. Disseminate information through the print, electronic and social media
11. Publishing series of stories of enforced disappearances in the local newspapers
12. Publishing articles on the consequences of enforced disappearance
13. Circulation of the Convention to the grassroots level activists and community leaders. The Convention can be disseminated through the internet if hard copies are not available.
14. Need to work from the grassroots level and local government level and need to mobilize people from all strata against enforced disappearance, through organising rallies, human chains and releasing press briefings and submitting memorandums to the authorities

Outcomes:



The outcome of the training was very productive with regard to the campaign against enforced disappearance at the field level. Participants received a clear conception about the issues covered and they will be able to exercise their knowledge and skills at the field level successfully.

The training course has enhanced the capacity of the human rights defenders in working on issues relating to enforced disappearances and created awareness at the community level. The most important and significant outcome of the training is that the victim families have come into a network alongside the network of HRDs, where they can unite to make the authority accountable and to take some effective measures on the issue.

-The End-