



December 10, 2016

BANGLADESH: Stop Repression on Human Rights Defenders!

Odhikar's Statement on International Human Rights Day 2016

Today is 10 December, universally recognised as International Human Rights Day. The day is observed every year on 10 December worldwide after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. This year, Human Rights Day calls on everyone to stand up for someone's rights! Many of us are fearful about the way the world is heading. Disrespect for basic human rights continues to be wide-spread in all parts of the globe. People are becoming victims of war, aggression, repressive and extremism. In the name of 'war against terrorism' ordinary people who are raising their voice against repression are becoming victims of horrific violence. This day is being observed when human rights violations have escalated in different countries of the world and the situation of human rights in Bangladesh has worsened. The Awami League led alliance resumed power unilaterally through controversial and farcical Parliamentary Elections on January 5, 2014 without a large majority of the people's vote. As a result, the present government has become very repressive due to the absence of an accountable governance system, where democratic and fundamental human rights of the citizens and the rule of law have become victims of such repression. Incidents of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing and torture by security forces continue unabated. Furthermore, instances of violence against women and attacks on citizens belonging to religious and ethnic minority communities continue.

The present government is ordering attacks and arrests and taking away the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association; without any inclination to resolve the extended political crisis. They are attacking dissenting and alternative voices, including that of the opposition political parties. Furthermore, the government is suppressing people by imposing repressive laws and filing sedition cases against them. Meanwhile, the government supported student and youth organisations are mainly engaged in political violence and various criminal activities, including sexual harassment, extortion, and violence with lethal weapons. Due to political patronization

and shelter such cases are not investigated effectively by the police and the perpetrators get away with impunity. As a result of this reluctance, the tendency to commit more crimes has increased. Moreover, members of the law enforcement agencies are also being attacked by criminals and the law and order situation in the country is deteriorating. Instances of putting pressure on the media, intimidation, filing cases against and attacks on journalists continue. As a result, the rights to freedom of speech and expression and of the media are also being violated. People are largely dependent on social media for sharing information, as the electronic media are controlled by the government. But the government is monitoring all social networking media and mobile messaging and internet applications on the pretext of 'security' in the country. People cannot express their opinion freely due to the existence of the repressive law, Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended in 2009 and 2013) and the government is using this law as a tool of oppression against human rights defenders, journalists and people who hold dissenting views. The government has also enacted the National Broadcasting Policy to control the mass media and curb freedom of expression, by imposing various restrictions and also instructed the online newspapers and news portals to be registered. The publication of the daily Amar Desh, operations of Diganta TV, Islamic TV and Channel 1 are still barred. The power to impeach the Supreme Court Judges has been given to the Parliament, for controlling the Judiciary, further depriving its ability to function independently. Furthermore, the government passed the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2016 to control NGOs, including human rights organisations. This law violates freedom of expression and association; and controls human rights and voluntary organisations; which is contrary to the Constitution of Bangladesh, ICCPR and the UN Declaration for Human Rights Defenders.

Odhikar believes that a democratic state needs to be constituted based on equality, human dignity and social justice which were the main perceptions of the Liberation War of Bangladesh; and there is no alternative way other than people's mobilization and fight against injustice. Thus, on this 2016 International Human Rights Day, the people of Bangladesh have to be united and vocal in order to restore their voting rights and every human rights defender, with the families of the victims and the people, has to stand against human rights violations in one voice. The international community has also to come forward and take effective action to stop state repression against human rights defenders.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team