



BANGLADESH: People's participation is needed to uphold human rights

Odhikar's Statement on Human Rights Day 2017

Dhaka; 9 December 2017: The 10th of December is universally recognised as International Human Rights Day. In 2017, the day is being observed at a time when the human rights situation in Bangladesh has become catastrophic. The current government resumed power through controversial Parliamentary Elections on January 5, 2014 where almost half of the Members of Parliament won seats without even a vote in their name; and due to this farcical election, the moral and legal foundation of this government has become controversial as well. The current political situation of the country is in a deep crisis due to the absence of an accountable government and a very weak parliamentary Opposition.

The civil and political rights of the people are being violated through the creation of a shrinking democratic space and deprivation of the right to freedom of expression and association; and even from the right to life; and the justice delivery system has become dysfunctional. Bangladesh has ratified seven core international Conventions and Treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UN CAT). It also ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. However, Bangladesh fails time and again to implement the mandatory obligations of these treaties. Due to, among other things, controversial and repressive enactments, confrontational and violent politics and rampant corruption, none of the indicators of democracy, like due process of law, right to fair trial, right to life, right to liberty and security, right to freedom of expression and opinion, right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of press, right to freedom of religion, etc are seen in practice in the present context. Institutions like the Election Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and even the criminal justice mechanism and law enforcement agencies, have become dysfunctional and incapable of fulfilling their mandates and obligations in a manner that brings any positive change in the country.

Incidents of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing and torture in custody of the law enforcement agencies continue at an alarming rate. Members of the law enforcement agencies are enjoying complete impunity in this regard. Instances of violence against women and attacks

on citizens belonging to religious and ethnic minority communities also continue. The ruling party men were reported largely involved in these incidents. The Government is suppressing people from various professions who are considered ‘dissenters’ or who have alternative beliefs; and leaders and activists of the opposition political parties, by arresting them under repressive laws and drafting laws that will cause further repression. It is reported that many have been arbitrarily arrested. As a result of these mass arrests, the prisons of Bangladesh are facing tremendous pressure due to over-population; and the human rights of the inmates are being violated. The rights to freedom of speech and expression and of the media are also being violated. The government is allegedly controlling most of the media, particularly electronic media by imposing various restrictions.

Interference and control of the Indian government on Bangladesh continues. This control was evident through its support of the controversial elections of 2014, where people’s participation was absent. The Myanmar government has been conducting genocide, perpetrated by the Myanmar security forces and local Buddhist extremists, against the Rohingya people in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. As a result, Rohingya people have fled to Bangladesh and Odhikar urges the Bangladesh government and the international community to take an active role in supporting the struggle for establishing peace in Rakhine state (Arakan state) and for the establishment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; and restoration of citizenship rights of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. Odhikar also urges the international community to intervene and take all measures to ensure justice for the Rohingya people.

Odhikar believes that a democratic state needs to be constituted in Bangladesh, based on equality, human dignity and social justice - which were the main foundations of our Liberation War. Based on these foundations, it is everyone’s right to give voice and participate in the fight against injustice and human rights violations.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team