



BANGLADESH: Police raid on the House of the founder of Mayer Daak

A Joint Statement by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) and Odhikar

Manila, Dhaka; 1 November 2021: The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) and Odhikar strongly condemn the police raid on the house of Hajera Khatun, the founder of Mayer Daak, a network of families and relatives of disappeared persons; and the arrest of people gathered at a prayer session on 31 October 2021.

Sanjida Islam, sister of disappeared BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon and an organizer of Mayer Daak, said her mother Hajera Khatun had been hospitalised for a long time. Upon her return from the hospital, her family members organised a prayer session at home in gratitude for her recovery and for the welfare and return of the disappeared. Family members of other victims of enforced disappearances and Sumon's political colleagues from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), joined the prayer meet. During this, Tejgaon police raided the house at around 1:30 pm and arrested about 15 leaders and activists of BNP. Sanjida Islam alleged that during the raid, the police forcibly entered the house and broke open the doors of different rooms and beat family members of the victims of enforced disappearances.¹

Families of the disappeared ought to be treated with much respect. Enforced disappearance is a crime against humanity. The fact is acts of enforced disappearance continue all over Asia, including Bangladesh.

According to Odhikar, 605 people have been subjected to enforced disappearances between January 2009 and September 2021. Among them, the whereabouts of 154 people still remain unknown and the bodies of 81 people have been recovered. These are just the reported figures.

AFAD and Odhikar observe that apart from commissions of enforced disappearances, the incumbent Awami League government has also taken away the right to freedom of assembly and expression. Police are detaining opposition leaders and activists and filing cases against them even if they gather in indoor meetings or go to attend any meeting. AFAD and Odhikar strongly demand the return of the disappeared and an end to the persecution and harassment of their relatives.

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) is a federation of human rights organisations working directly on the issue of enforced disappearances in Asia. Envisioning a world without desaparecidos, AFAD was founded on June 4, 1998 in Manila, Philippines. www.afad-online.org

Odhikar is a registered human rights organisation based in Dhaka, Bangladesh established on 10 October 1994 by a group of human rights defenders, to monitor human rights violations and create wider awareness. It holds special consultative status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. www.odhikar.org

¹ New Age, 1 October 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/153269/police-detain-bnp-activists-at-prayer-session>