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A Joint Statement by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, International Federation for Human Rights, Maayer Daak, and Odhikar on the occasion of International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances 2022

BANGLADESH: Set up independent mechanism to investigate all cases of enforced disappearance

Manila/Paris/Dhaka, 29 August 2022: On the eve of [International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances](#), AFAD, FIDH, Maayer Daak, and Odhikar pay tribute to victims and survivors of the heinous crime of enforced disappearance and stand in solidarity with the families of the disappeared. The Bangladeshi government has consistently denied all cases of [enforced disappearance](#), despite [evidence and reports](#) corroborating claims of the families of the disappeared that their loved ones were taken by security forces. Human rights defenders (HRDs) and independent United Nations (UN) human rights monitoring mechanisms have repeatedly expressed concern over the involvement of law enforcement and security forces in enforced disappearances.

Enforced disappearances have been used as a [tool to curb any criticism against the government](#), thereby creating a climate of fear. Political opponents and dissenting voices that are critical of the government have often been among the victims of this crime. Victims are deprived of a many of other their fundamental rights, including the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and the right to a fair trial. Law enforcement agencies, particularly the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Detective Branch of the police, have been responsible for the commission of the majority of cases of enforced disappearance. Recent media reports have unearthed that victims were being detained in secret detention centres operated by Bangladeshi intelligence agencies.

In March 2022, [UN human rights experts](#), including the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), have requested the Bangladeshi government to provide information concerning enforced disappearances and raised concerns regarding the intimidation and harassment of families of the disappeared persons. However, to date, the government has failed to provide sufficient information and has not [responded to the WGEID's request](#) made on 12 March 2013 to carry out an official visit to the country. These failures to comply are tantamount to non-cooperation with the UN human rights mechanisms.

From 14 to 17 August 2022, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet carried out an official visit to Bangladesh. In her statement at the end of the visit, Bachelet raised ["deep concern"](#) over serious allegations of human rights abuses, including alarming allegations of enforced disappearances. Bachelet also urged the Bangladeshi government to acknowledge cases of enforced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial killings and to investigate them impartially by creating an independent and specialized mechanism.

Today, AFAD, FIDH, Maayer Daak and Odhikar urge the government of Bangladesh to:

- 1) Halt all enforced disappearances and immediately return all disappeared persons to their families.
- 2) Set up an independent mechanism to investigate all cases of enforced disappearances.
- 3) Refrain from all forms of reprisals against human rights defenders, family members of the disappeared, and civil society activists, and ensure the safety and security of victims and their families.
- 4) Hold all perpetrators accountable.
- 5) Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
- 6) Adopt and implement domestic legislation criminalizing enforced disappearance in line with international law.

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*The **Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)** is a federation of human rights organizations working directly on the issue of involuntary disappearances in Asia. AFAD was founded on 4 June 1998 in Manila, Philippines and was the recipient of the 2016 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award conferred by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. www.afad-online.org*

*The **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)** is the world's oldest non-governmental human rights organization. Founded in 1922, FIDH federates 192 member organizations from 117 countries. Its core mandate is to promote respect for all the rights set out in the UDHR. www.fidh.org*

***Maayer Daak** is a platform of the families of victims of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh with the common goal of seeking the whereabouts of their loved ones and advocating for justice.*

***Odhikar** is a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, established on October 10, 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*