



ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Her Excellency, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
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Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
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Your Excellency,

RE: Expression of concerns regarding cancellation of project relating to promotion of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture led by Odhikar

Given your government's public commitment to promote human rights, particularly to prevent torture, the recent decision dated 31st August, 2009 by the NGO Affairs Bureau to cancel the Odhikar project entitled, "Human Rights Defenders Training and Advocacy Programme in Bangladesh" comes as an unpleasant surprise. It is said that the objection has come from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

No reason has been given for the cancellation of the project which had already been approved by the NGO Affairs Bureau on the 28th April, 2009, which comes under the office of the Prime Minister. We are fully aware that such approval would have been given on the basis of the government's policy after due consideration. We believe that such approval was compatible with the government's commitment given to the UN Human Rights Council for the protection of human rights. Of particular importance is the proper enforcement of measures to improve the conditions of protection facilities, for which the project lead by Odhikar could have been of tremendous assistance.

It appears that the subsequent cancellation of this project is not based on proper understanding of the approval that has already been given. It also appears that this subsequent decision is an attempt to sidetrack the government's promises to improve human rights and to allow civil society actors to assist the state in the performance of the state's obligations relating to human rights.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) urges Your Excellency to take appropriate steps to review the situation and to undo the cancellation of the already approved project. We are fully aware that Your Excellency will appreciate that the benefits of such a project will go to the ordinary people in Bangladesh and such cancellation only deprives them of these benefits. There is no reason at all why the people should be deprived of services of civil society organizations who are willing to undertake voluntary work to assist the state institutions, such as prison authorities, to improve the difficult conditions people are faced with.

The AHRC is aware of the value of the Odhikar project and therefore we would think that it will be a great pity if they are unable to carry out this project due to the arbitrary cancellation of an already approved project.

We therefore urge Your Excellency to exercise good office and to restore the earlier approval to grant to this project.



Basil Fernando
Executive Director
Asian Human Rights Commission



CC.

1. Advocate Sahara Khatun, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs, BANGLADESH
2. Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, BANGLADESH
3. Dr. Dipu Moni, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BANGLADESH
4. Mr. Abdus Sobhan Sikder, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, BANGLADESH
5. Mr. Mustak Hassan Md. Iftekhhar, Director General, NGO Affairs Bureau, BANGLADESH