



Urgent Alert

Human Rights Defender under Threat

Shampa Goswami is 32 years old and a mother. She is a teacher in a primary school in Kaligonj in the district of Satkhira. Shampa participated in a human rights defenders training programme run by Odhikar in early 2011 and is now a woman human rights defender, working in Odhikar's violence against women project.

In May 2011, Shampa learnt of the gang rape of an elderly woman and visited the hospital to speak to the victim. She visited the woman several times in hospital to check on her and give her mental support. She requested the woman to go to the police, but the latter was in denial of what happened, although her son was adamant that something should be done.

Some days later, Shampa learnt that four men had been arrested for the gang rape. Later, a man called Shushanta Kaur, called her and said that since she worked for human rights she should intervene and get the men released. Living in the locality, he would repeat this every time he bumped into her. She told him that there was nothing she could do in this matter and ignored all subsequent phone calls from him.

Several months later, on 23 October 2011, Shampa was waiting on the side of the road for another human rights defender who would accompany her to the District Administration Office to submit some forms related to the Odhikar project she was working in. As she waited, a friend of her younger brother walked up to her and requested her to sit in the nearby shop, out of the sun. While they sat there, four men she recognized vaguely came up to them and made suggestive, sexual remarks about Shampa and her brother's friend. The Shopkeeper became uncomfortable and worried about Shampa, and asked her to leave before any further harassment. When she left the shop, 10 – 12 men, including Shushanta Kaur, surrounded her and began to harass her, telling her to come with them. When she refused, they threatened to hand her over to the police. When Shampa took out her cell phone to call the police station herself, they snatched it away from her.

One man started dragging her away, but she resisted and told them that she would go with them. They took her to the roof of a nearby building, where she saw her younger brother's friend had already been taken there. The men made them sit together and began taking pictures of them on a cell phone and verbally harassing and intimidating them. Shampa told them that she was a human rights defender working with Odhikar, where by they mocked her. The men kept asking her for money; otherwise they would send the pictures to the press.

At one point, a stranger came up to the roof and began to argue with the men, shaming them for harassing a respectable woman. Still arguing, he managed to get Shampa down from the roof. Later, he told her he was a local journalist and was passing by when he heard the noise. Traumatized, Shampa went home and informed Odhikar of the incident the next morning, 24 October 2011.

On 25 October, Shampa went to the Satkhira Police Station to lodge a First Information Report against the men. The FIR is numbered 72, dated 25/10/2011 and the men have been accused in it of the crimes of unlawful assembly, wrongful confinement, theft and criminal intimidation, under sections 143, 342, 379, 506 of the Penal Code respectively.

Odhikar is monitoring the progress of the investigation very closely and is in constant contact with Shampa Goswami and its other human rights defenders in Satkhira – as well as the Satkhira Police Station police. To date, there has been no threats to Shampa from the men who confined her on the roof.

We will keep you informed and updated on the progress of the case.