



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONFERENCE



Venue: Hotel Favour INN, Sky View Hall (8th Floor), Chittagong

Date: November 9-10, 2012

Organised by Odhikar

INTRODUCTION

Odhikar, being an organisation of human rights defenders in Bangladesh, strongly believes that 'human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, nationalities or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible'. Odhikar stands against all forms of human rights violations. Odhikar brings the movement a strategic perspective which is not only for the protection of civil, but also to constitute a democratic state.

Since the formation of Odhikar on October 10, 1994 its human rights defenders are working to improve the situation of human rights in Bangladesh. Its principle aim is to monitor and document human rights violations and to raise awareness and undertake policy advocacy activities to address human rights violations and to mobilise local people against injustices. These human rights monitoring activities and mobilisation programmes contribute to eventual positive steps for the improvement of overall human rights situation. Odhikar's human rights defenders also monitor pre-election, electoral day and post-election violence. There are about 400 active human rights defenders in forty districts working to protect and promote human rights.

The objectives for arranging Human Rights Defenders Conference is to strengthen the human rights activism. The conference helps human rights defenders to learn and share strategies with each others. It encourages young and new human rights activists to learn from experienced and skilled human rights activists through sharing and exchanging experiences. The objective of this conference was to assess the knowledge of HRDs on issues regarding the sensitivity, diversity, challenges, security and protection. A total 104 participants participated in the conference. The HRDs exchanged their views and pledged to promote human rights and to combat against human rights violations. Details of the conference proceedings are given below:

CONTENTS

The conference ran with several contents:

1. Human Rights Defenders Activism: Introducing the Human Rights Defenders Handbook
2. Challenges of Human Rights Activism
3. Group Work: Problems Faced by HRDs and the Ways for Resolution
4. Towards Strengthening Human Rights Defenders Network
5. Pledges to Uphold Human Rights Principles
6. People's Movement

ACTIVITIES

The Human Rights Defenders Conference was a two-day event, held at the Hotel Favour Inn, Sky View Hall (8th Floor), Chittagong. Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Expert, International Law and Mr. Henrick Van Asch, First Secretary, Political Affairs, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands attended the conference as well. The following is a daily activity report of the conference:

Day 1: November 9, 2012, Friday

Inaugural session

The inaugural session started at 9.30 am. The session was chaired by Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar.



Photo: (Left) Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Expert, International Law, Mr Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary, Odhikar and, Professor Mohammad Anwarul Azim Arif, Vice-Chancellor, University of Chittagong, Mr. Henrick Van Asch, First Secretary, Political Affairs The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Adilur Rahman Khan introduced the guests with the human rights defenders. Professor Mohammad Anwarul Azim Arif, Vice-Chancellor, University of Chittagong announced the inauguration of the conference. Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Expert, International Law and Mr. Henrick Van Asch, First Secretary, Political Affairs, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands were Guests of Honour.

Adilur Rahman Khan said that after inception of Odhikar on October 10, 1994, different governments threatened, sometimes tortured Odhikar's human rights activists for its strong and impartial human rights activism. He said that the state actors of Bangladesh failed to

protect the human rights of the people. He expressed that human rights defenders associated with Odhikar must work seriously in order to defend human rights.

Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin said that, Odhikar strengthened the network of human rights defenders at forty districts in last 18 years. The network should be extended to other districts as well. He said that, human rights defenders from field level are playing core role to get the complete picture of human rights situation. Thus, it is very important to enhance their knowledge and consciousness about the world's context of human rights to compare the situation between Bangladesh and other countries of the world. He also said the activities of human rights defenders are not limited to any specified place; it should be expanded to everywhere to counter and combat any places wherever any incident of human rights violation happened. He also emphasized that human rights defenders should be dependent on the correct information at the time of delivering report of any incident of human rights violation.

Mr. Henrick Van Asch, First Secretary, Political Affairs, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands said, the work of the human rights defenders are very important to combat human rights violations. He said Netherlands is very much focused on gender issues and he was happy to see so many women human rights defenders present in the conference. He also expected that there would be fruitful discussions in the two days conference.

Professor Mohammad Anwarul Azim Arif, Vice-Chancellor, University of Chittagong in a written statement stated that 'protection and promotion of human rights is now considered one of the main goals of modern welfare States. Proliferation of international human rights instruments, incorporation of human rights norms in the national constitutions and establishment of national human rights institutions- all these reflect great significance of human rights in the present world. Human rights are conceived as minimum conditions for human life and human dignity. Today, human rights are considered central to the legitimacy of governments and essential pillars of international system. Human rights are now globalised and represent universal acceptance. Human rights are categorized as civil, political and economic, social and cultural rights.

He said, in the contemporary world, human rights have become dominant ideology as it received almost universal recognition by all societies and people of all creeds. Human rights are now considered as sine qua non for the holistic development of human personality. While dignity and autonomy remain the essence of human rights, indivisibility and unity of the human person in the physical, intellectual and spiritual sense is sought to be the philosophical basis upon which human rights are premised.

He added, religions and ancient civilisations have contributed much to understandings of human dignity and evolution of human rights. Thus, human rights are not entirely product of western civilisation. The adoption of UDHR in 1948 was the landmark step in the history of human rights.

He mentioned that the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state was the result of a fight against violation of human rights in different ways. Bangladesh has ratified many human rights instruments to protect human rights. Moreover, constitution of Bangladesh has incorporated many human rights as fundamental rights. Bangladesh has recently established national human rights commission to protect human rights. Government of Bangladesh has also enacted the Right to Information Act in 2009. Moreover, it has taken many steps to protect the rights of most vulnerable communities such as ethnic minorities, women, children and disabled people. Many human rights organisations and civil society organisations are actively involved in protecting human rights in Bangladesh.

He added, despite these progresses, human rights violations remain unabated and is a great concern for us. Custodial torture, enforced disappearance and extra-judicial killings by law-enforcing agencies have remained as a persistent feature of our criminal justice system. Custodial torture has been widespread in Bangladesh. Successive governments have failed to stop this endemic problem. Despite enough potential for progress, the country is still faced with abject poverty, which is perhaps the most powerful enemy of human rights. Violence against women and children still persists in Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has a strong set of laws to tackle violence against women, especially domestic violence, the implementation remains poor.

Finally he mentioned that, we have long way to go for the protection of human rights. We want a poverty free Bangladesh where all can enjoy their rights without discrimination.

Day 1: Session 1

The first session of day one started at 11:30 am, after the inaugural session. In this session Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director of Odhikar introduced the human rights defenders handbook. Rezaul Karim Hashmi, Human Rights Trainer discussed about different parts of the book in the conference. ASM Nasiruddin Elan chaired the session.

Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan said, this handbook is a guideline for the human rights defenders. It stated about the duties, liabilities and responsibilities of the human rights defenders. It will help to sort out very important things such as what to do during fact findings or how to take immediate steps for filing a General Diary (GD) or First Information Report (FIR) etc.

Mr. Rezaul Karim Hashmi stated that, every human rights defenders should be committed to the activism otherwise nothing can help them not even the handbook. So, the commitment to uphold the rights should be embedded in their mind to protest against the violations of human rights.

Many HRD's expressed their satisfaction for delivering them such an important handbook.

Mr.Rezaul Karim Hashmi asked for feedback about the handbook from the human rights defenders. Feedbacks are given below:

Feedback from Human Rights Defenders are-

- Suggestion to include early marriage under violence against women.
- Include the telephone numbers of focal persons of the district level human rights defenders of Odhikar.
- The book stated about the risks that were faced by human rights defenders but not about the solutions.
- If GD and FIR is not taken then what is to be done should have been mentioned in the book.

Mr. Reazaul Karim Hashmi said that, solutions depend upon the situation. Odhikar is always there with the grassroot level HRD's to state what steps they would take if they face any problem.

Session 2

After lunch from 2.30 pm a session was held on the topic 'Challenges of Human Rights Activism' the session was chaired by Sazzad Hussain, Programme Coordinator, Odhikar. In this session, the discussant was Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin.

Sazzad Hussain asked the participants to describe what types of challenges they have faced when working as HRDs.



Picture: Discussion

Different HRDs from forty districts expressed concern and challenges while working to uphold human rights. Some are mentioned through the bullet points below:

- Police do not like to give access to the HRDs to the police station or prison to see the condition of the victims.
- HRDs are threatened in various ways and put under pressure for carrying out human rights activism. They were threatened by the miscreants, activists of political parties and also the members of the law enforcing agencies;
- HRDs and their families are being threatened
- HRDs are threatened by political influentials or by police; They tell them that false case will be filed against the HRDs.
- HRDs were tortured in the police custody;
- Many women victims resolved the issues due to the social pressure or stigma or fear. So sometimes it has become tough to ensure justice for the women victims.
- WHDs face more challenges because of gender issue. Even they are prone to sexual harassments for carrying out human rights activism;
- Women human rights defenders are not supported by her own family and sometimes not even socially.
- When RAB/ police is involved in extrajudicial killings, some HRDs were also threatened by them (RAB/ Police) that they also would be killed in ‘crossfire’
- Local goons by getting money or being influenced by the influentials threat local HRDs

Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin emphasised that, human rights defender’s work is challenging. However, we should not approach where victims donot wish to step forward. It has happened mostly in the cases of violence against woman. He also said, challenges are always there but we have to go ahead for the betterment of the society. He said that, the network for HRDs is a very important thing to defend human rights. Through networking HRD’s can strengthened their HRDs activism.

➤ **Session 3**

A session was held on the topic to reduce the gaps in getting information between Odhikar office and grassroots level human rights defenders. The session was chaired by Ms.Taskin Fahmina, Progamme Coordinator of Odhikar.



From (left) Mr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Ms.Taskin Fahmina, Mr.ASM Nasiruddin Elan

The discussants of this session were ASM Nasiruddin Elan and Dr Ahmed Ziauddin. In this session both of the office staffs and human rights defenders from the field confronted to minimize the gaps for getting better understanding and information.

Human rights defenders raised some points regarding the gaps. These are given below:

- Not getting feed back on time from Odhikar office about the report ;
- Sometimes asked for follow-up in very short span of time and also asked for queries of a report after one/ two months
- One person should contact with the local defenders otherwise the flow of work is directed differently;
- Don't have easy access to get information from jail;

Ms.Fahmina stated that four to five fact finding reports were sent at a time from the field. So, it takes time to organise all the reports as Odhikar office does not have many staffs and also there are fund constraints to recruit new staffs. Thus, sometimes the queries were asked one or two months later. Abusers never give information properly. Thus, different strategies have to obtain to get information. In the case of jail monitoring, the HRD's should interview the former detainees to know the condition of the jail and other information are hanged outside the jail.



Photo- Discussion at conference on November 09, 2013

Mr. Ziauddin said that it is very important to make coordination between the field and Odhikar office. As Odhikar do not have any field office so to reduce the gap regular phone and email communication can help.

Day 2: Session 1

On November 10, the session started at 9am. Kirity Roy, Secretary of Manobadhikar Surokha Moncho (MASUM) of India chaired the session. The other discussants were A.S.M Nasiruddin Elan, director of Odhikar and Shahiduzzaman, Chief of the Correspondent, New Age. The session was on the 'towards strengthening human rights defenders network'.



From (left) Mr. Shahiduzzaman, Mr Kirity Roy, Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan

Kirity Roy stated that, the activities of Odhikar are similar to MASUM. He compares the situation of human rights between Bangladesh and India. He said that it's a challenging work as there is a risk factor involved. Human Rights activists dedicate themselves to protect and promote human rights. Basically human rights activists help the state to follow the due process of law. However, when state failed to protect and promote human rights and tries to hide its atrocities it takes its position against human rights. To carry out human rights work networking is very important among human rights activists.

Nasiruddin Elan stated that, we would discuss how to spread the network and strengthen the network all over the country. Odhikar is working at forty districts but it is necessary to build network in other 20 districts.

Shahiduzzaman stated that, networking is important for human rights defenders for themselves as they are facing risks. The network will reduce the risk of working with the human rights defenders.

Later Kirity Roy opened the floor to know how to strengthen human rights defenders network.

Suggestions came from human rights defenders to strengthen human rights defenders network are given below:

- Conducting monthly meetings
- Networking through Facebook, internet etc.
- Include mass people in the network
- Protest from all the districts at a time
- Include more ethnic minority people in the network

Kirity Roy stated that strengthening Odhikar means strengthening the movement of human right. To protect the right is a lawful movement and unlawful movement as well. Unlawful movement means that was not accepted in the domestic laws but which is accepted internationally.

Human right is not only individualistic right, it is also collective right. As for example mass protest in *Arial bil* in Bangladesh.

Human rights defenders should be careful about the support of mass people. The support of mass people is very important to carry out the human rights activism.

Day 2: Session 2

Rezaul Karim Hashmi recited pledges with all the human rights defenders to uphold human rights principles and to be committed to carry out the human rights activism.

Day 2: Session 3

The topic of this session was 'People's Movement'. Kurity Roy, Secretary of Manobadhikar Shurokkha Mancho (MASUM) of India, Shahiduzzaman, Chief of the Correspondent of the English daily New Age and Nasiruddin Elan, Director of Odhikar were the discussants. The session was chaired by Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar.

Shahiduzzaman said, we have to fight to achieve our rights. The means and ways of getting the right is 'movement'. As for example: movement in *Arial bil, Kansat and Phulbari*. One day, these single incidents will integrate into a mass movement. Movements will create new leaders and activists to show the path for the people.

Kurity Roy said that, everyone speaks for changing the society but the first struggle has to fight with his or her self. To change the system there are many friends as well as enemies. We have to think about how to keep ourselves safe during human rights activism. Victim and who try to help the victim –both of them are at risk. Thus we should tactfully handle the situation. He compares the legal system of India with Bangladesh. India did not ratify Convention against Torture yet. Thus, there is no specific law against torture. However, torture is defined in laws otherwise. To carry out the human rights activities we should go through along with the laws of the State. We should be tricky by using the laws to get justice.

We should get the support of public. We should step forward with the support of people.. Mass people should be involved in the activism.

Nasiruddin Elan said that, sometimes we need to protest and sometimes we need to go for resisting human rights violations.

Adilur Rahman thanked all the participants for a successful conference and hoped that all defenders will be active to protect and promote human rights.

Human Rights Defenders Conference

Date: November 9-10 '2012

Organised by: Odhikar

Venue: Hotel Favour INN, Sky View Hall (8th Floor)

Chittagong

Day 01: Friday, November 09, 2012

Inaugural session:

Time	Contents/Topics	
09.00 AM- 09.30 AM	Registration	Ms. Abida Sultana and Mr. Ahbabul Yusuf Khan
09.30 AM- 11.00 AM	Introduction and Chair	Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan, Advocate, Supreme Court and Secretary, Odhikar
	Inauguration of Conference	Professor Mohammad Anwarul Azim Arif, Vice-Chancellor, University of Chittagong
	Speech of Guest of Honour	Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Expert, International Law, Belgium
	Speech of Guest of Honour	Mr. Henrick Van Asch, First Secretary, Political Affairs, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
11.00 AM- 11.30 AM	Tea break	
11.30 AM- 1.00 AM	Human Rights Defenders Activism: Introducing the Human Rights Defenders Handbook	Chair: Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director, Odhikar
		Mr. Rezaul Karim Hashmi, Human Rights Trainer
1.00 PM-2.30 PM	Lunch (1 st Floor) and Prayer Break	
2.30 PM — 4.30 PM	Challenges of Human Rights Activism	Chair: Mr. Sazzad Hussain, Programme Coordinator, Odhikar
		Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin
4.00 PM-4.30 PM	Tea	
4.30 PM- 6.00 PM	Reducing gaps between Odhikar Office and Field Activities	Chair: Ms. Taskin Fahmina, Programme Coordinator, Odhikar
		Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin,
7 .30 PM-8.30	Dinner (1 st Floor)	

PM		
9.00 PM-10.00 PM	Cultural Programme	

Day 02: Saturday, November 10, 2012

Time	Contents/Topics	Moderator/Facilitators
09.00 am-11.00 am	Towards Strengthening Human Rights Defenders Network	Chair: Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan
		Mr. A.S.M Nasiruddin Elan, Mr. Shahiduzzaman, Chief of the Correspondent, New Age
11.00AM-11.30AM	Tea Break	
11.30AM-12.00 PM	Pledges to Uphold Human Rights Principles	Mr. Rezaul Karim Hashmi
12.00PM-1.30 PM	People's Movement	Chair: Adilur Rahman Khan
		Mr. Kirity Roy, ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Mr. Shahiduzzaman
1.30 PM-2.00 PM	Closing Session	Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan
2.00 PM-3.00PM	Lunch (1 st Floor)	

Participant's List

<p>Human Rights Defenders Conference Organised by Odhikar</p> <p>Date : November 9-10, 2012 Venue : Favour Inn International, Chittagong</p>
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SI No.	District/Country	Name of Participants	Details
1	Chittagong	Osman Zahangir	Journalist/HRD
2	Tangail	Shamima Akter	Advocate/HRD
3	Dhaka	Korban Ali	Odhikar/HRD
4	Chittagong	Sohag Kumar	Journalist/HRD
5	Dhaka	Jobaer Ahammed Khan	Odhikar/HRD
6	Dhaka	Shahiduzzaman	Journalist
7	Rajshahi	Sarder M. Anisur Rahman	Journalist/HRD
8	Noakhali	Mahmudul Hoq Foez	Journalist/HRD
9	Rangamati	Bijoy Dhar	Journalist/HRD
10	Dhaka	Rezaul Karim Hashmi	Odhikar/HRD
11	Dhaka	Md. Ashiqur Rahman	Odhikar/HRD
12	Noagaon	Murad Chowdhury Selim	HRD
13	Dhaka	Sazzad Hussain	Odhikar/HRD
14	Barishal	Shahin Aziz	HRD
15	Narayanganj	Shahed Kayes	Teacher/HRD
16	Thakurgaon	Zakir Mostafiz Milu	Journalist/HRD
17	Dhaka	Golam Faruk Rana	Odhikar/HRD
18	Dhaka	Al Azam Khan	Odhikar/HRD
19	Chittagong	Salma Jahan Mily	Teacher/HRD
20	Dhaka	Ahbabul Yusuf Khan	Odhikar/HRD
21	Dhaka	Taskin Fahmina	Odhikar/HRD
22	Dhaka	Shawkat Khan Kochi	Odhikar/HRD
23	Dhaka	Nazibullah Quraishie	Odhikar/HRD
24	Dhaka	Abida Sultana	Odhikar/HRD
25	Gaibandha	Ziaul Hoq Jony	HRD
26	Gaibandha	Sha-Alam Bablu	Teacher/HRD
27	Mymensingh	Md. Wahiduzzaman	Journalist/HRD
28	Potuakhali	Sohrab Hossain	Journalist/HRD
29	Dinajpur	Kongkon Karmaker	Journalist/HRD
30	Bandarban	S. Bashu Das	Journalist/HRD
31	Jessore	Sundor Saha	Journalist/HRD

32	Jessore	Sabina Yasmin	Student/HRD
33	Jessore	Kakoli Khatun	Student/HRD
34	Khulna	Md. Nuruzzaman	Journalist/HRD
35	Barishal	Syeda Shohana Akter	Teacher/HRD
36	Barishal	Sanjida Islam	Student/HRD
37	Kushtia	Hasan Ali	Journalist/HRD
38		A.N.M Khairul Bashar	Teacher/HRD
39	Gazipur	Abul Hossain Chowdhury	Lecturer/HRD
40	Narayanganj	Shilpi Paul	Teacher/HRD
41	Cox's Bazaar	Ahmad Gias	Journalist/HRD
42	Noakhali	M. Panullah	Teacher/HRD
43	Brahmanbaria	Bishuajit Paul	Journalist/HRD
44	Kishoreganj	Sumon Molla	Journalist/HRD
45	Feni	Jahirul Hoque Milu	Journalist/HRD
46	Khulna	F.M.A. Razzak	Advocate / HRD
47		Golok Chandro Mondol	HRD
48	Magura	Masum Billah	Journalist/HRD
49	Sylhet	Md. Muhibur Rahman	Journalist/HRD
50	Cox's Bazaar	Amirul Azam Raju	Teacher/ HRD
51	Moulovibazaar	Chowdhury Bhaskar Home	Journalist/ HRD
52	Khulna	Khalilur Rahman Sumon	Journalist/ HRD
53	Sunamganj	Aminul Hoque	Journalist/HRD
54	Feni	Jahan-ara Ferdous	Journalist/HRD
55	Dhaka	Nuzhat Binte Hossain	Odhikar/HRD
56	Dhaka	Samia Islam	Odhikar/HRD
57	Sylhet	Syed Kawsar Ahmed	Advocate/HRD
58	Munshiganj	Md. Shafiqul Islam	Journalist
59	Madaripur	Sagor Hossen Tamim	Reporter, Channel 24
60	Sirajganj	Nasima Khatun	Teacher
61	Rajshahi	Showmmi Naheed	Student
62	Rangamati	Unoching Marma	Student
63	Rangamati	Niti Dewan	Teacher
64	Bandarban	Marjita Chakma	Teacher
65	Bhola	Afzal Hossain	Journalist
66	Rangpur	Zakir Hossain	Journalist
67	Rangpur	Rawsan Jahan	Teacher
68	Narail	Saiful Islam Tuhin	HRD
69	India	Kirity Roy	MASUM/HRD
70	Dhaka	Adilur Rahman khan	Odhikar/HRD

71	Dhaka	Ayan Rahman khan	Odhikar/HRD
72	Munshiganj	Jahangir Hossain Akash	Advocate/HRD
73	Munshiganj	Md. Arafatujjaman	Teacher/HRD
74		Denar Barua	Teacher/HRD
75	Chapai Nawabganj	Altab Hossain	HRD
76		Nazmun Naher	Teacher/HRD
77	Sirajganj	Golam Mostofa Rubel	Journalist/HRD
78	Satkhira	Advocate Nazmunnahar	Advocate/HRD
79	Satkhira	Suborna Yesmin	Student/HRD
80	Chittagong	Md. Abdul Kaium	Private Service/HRD
81		S.M. Fazal Hossain Masum	Student/HRD
82	Journalist/HRD	Zannatul Ferdus Mokta	Lawyer/HRD
83	Pabna	Abul Kalam Azad	Journalist/HRD
84	Chittagong	Foujia Akter	HRD
85	Chittagong	Mohammad Monzurul Islam	Student/HRD
86		Md. Junaid	Student
87	Rajbari	Md. Shajid Hossain	Journalist/HRD
88	Rajbari	Taslima Khatun	Teacher/HRD
89	Kushtia	Shumi Sharmin	HRD
90		Shamsunnahar Barna	Teacher/HRD
91	Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka	Henrick Van Asch	First Secretary, Political Affairs, Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka
92	Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka	Shiban Mahbub	Political Officer Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka
93	Belgium	Ahmed Ziauddin	Expert, International Law
94	Dhaka	Ahsanuzzaman Fahim	Odhikar/HRD
95	Chittagong	Professor Md. Anwarul Azim Arif	Vice-Chancellor, University of Chittagong
96	Dhaka	Saiful Islam	Odhikar/HRD
97		MD. Mahfuzur Rahman	Journalist
98		Jinat Sultana	HRD
99	Dhaka	ASM Nasiruddin Elan	Odhikar/HRD
100	Tangail	Swapan Showmitra	HRD