
December 9, 2013

Odhikar's statement on the occasion of International Human Rights Day

Constant political violence causes human rights violations

10th December is International Human Rights Day. Odhikar would first like to honour the great human rights defender, Nelson Mandela. The Odhikar team expresses deep condolences on the death of South Africa's great leader. Odhikar recalls with due respect his invaluable contribution and struggles for ending racial discrimination and establishing human rights.

Incidents of massive human rights violations are taking place in Bangladesh, while we and the rest of the world are preparing to observe this international day. People are dying as a result of indiscriminate police firing during political violence, caused by the unresolved political crisis over the 10th Parliamentary elections. Other incidents of serious injuries and deaths are taking place due to arson and petrol bombs attacks on public transport, depriving people of the right to life, livelihood, education and a whole host of other socio-economic and social rights. Children were not even spared from political violence and they have been severely hurt by handmade bombs during this period. Cases were filed against a number of unknown persons in relation to violent clashes and the accused were allegedly tortured in remand after arrest. Neither the Government nor the Opposition is taking responsibility for these casualties, but are blaming each other.

The present government closed down the electronic and print media owned by pro-opposition supporters/members such as Channel 1, Diganta TV, Islamic TV and the daily Amar Desh. The government is putting human rights defenders, journalist and other citizens in jail after arresting them under the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (amended in 2009 and 2013), a repressive law that curtails freedom of speech and expression.

Odhikar believes that the removal of the caretaker government system through 15th Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh is the main reason of this current political violence. The caretaker government in Bangladesh was introduced in the Constitution through a long struggle. Violence escalated across the country soon after the declaration of a one-sided election schedule on November 25, 2013 by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), without any political

solution among the political parties. The CEC announced that the election would take place on January 5, 2014.

On the occasion of the International Human Rights Day Odhikar demands the following recommendations to be implemented as soon as possible:

- The two main political parties have to come up with a political solution immediately through dialogue in order to resolve the current political crisis.
- The law enforcement agencies must stop indiscriminate firing and torture in custody. The perpetrators of political violence must also be brought to justice.
- Mass arrests of people and cases filed against 'unknown' persons perpetrate human rights abuses. Not all those arrested may be guilty of crime. Therefore, cases filed at random against 'unknown' persons should be stopped.
- All political prisoners should be released.
- The Government must not obstruct freedom of expression. Such obstruction violates the Constitution. The Government must withdraw the ban on media, including Amar Desh, Channel 1, Diganta TV and Islamic TV. The Acting Editor of the daily Amar Desh, Mahmudur Rahman must be released immediately.
- All repressive laws, including the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amendment 2013) must be repealed.