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December 9, 2014

## **International Human Rights Day 2014**

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### **Statement of Odhikar**

10<sup>th</sup> December is universally recognised as International Human Rights Day. International Human Rights Day is being observed worldwide at a time when incidents of human rights violations in Bangladesh have reached an alarming level. The Awami League resumed power through controversial Parliamentary Elections on January 5, 2014 that most major political parties boycotted; and a very small percentage of people voted at. The January 2014 Parliamentary Elections are generally believed to be bereft of the peoples' mandate. 153 candidates from the ruling Awami League and its alliance were elected unopposed out of a total of 300 constituencies even before the elections were held. An Election Commission- that was made subservient by selecting election commissioners through a selection committee- conducted the elections.

The threats of human rights violations have increased as the ruling party assumed power through a non-participatory election process. Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture are violations whose reporting's are on the increase. Furthermore, instances of attacks on citizens belonging to religious and ethnic minority communities and violence against women continue. The Government supported student and youth organisations, Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League, are mainly engaged political violence and criminal activities. The rights to freedom of speech and expression and of the media are also being violated. The repressive law, Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended in 2009 and 2013) continues to exist. This law has curtailed the freedom of expression and the government is using this Act against human rights defenders, journalists and people who hold dissenting views. The government has approved the National Broadcasting Policy to control the media and curb freedom of expression, by imposing various restrictions and reserving power to misuse the policy on the pretext of 'maintaining the standard' of news, programmes and advertisements in the electronic media. The Acting Editor of the daily Amar Desh, Mahmudur Rahman has been detained in jail for 20 months and the publication of the daily Amar Desh, operations of Diganta TV and Islamic TV are still barred. Meetings and assemblies are being prohibited and the voices of people who have alternative beliefs are being



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suppressed by sedition cases under the repressive Special Powers Act of 1974. The power to impeach the Supreme Court Judges has been given to the Parliament, depriving the judicial arm of the state to function independently. Furthermore, the Cabinet recently gave its final approval to the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2014 to control NGOs, including human rights organisations. This law, as it stands, will violate freedom of expression and association; and will control human rights and voluntary organisations; which is contrary to the Constitution of Bangladesh and the UN Declaration for Human Rights Defenders.

Odhikar has been vocal against human rights violations for the last 20 years. Odhikar, since its inception, has always been vocal against human rights abuses; and struggling to establish human rights and democracy for all, irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender, political beliefs and economic stand. Odhikar does not function based on any special political ideology. The Organisation has been suppressed during all regimes for being outspoken against human rights violations. On August 10, 2013, the Secretary of Odhikar, Adilur Rahman Khan was picked up by plain clothed DB police men and later shown arrested, for conducting a fact finding mission on extrajudicial killings. Adilur and Odhikar's Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were detained in jail for 62 days and 25 days respectively; and since then Odhikar and human rights defenders associated with it, are constantly under surveillance and being harassed by various security forces of the government. From 2014, the NGO Affairs Bureau, which is under the Prime Minister's Office, has stopped the release of funds to Odhikar's ongoing human rights related projects. Odhikar believes that a democratic state needs to be constituted based on equality, human dignity and social justice; and there is no alternative way other than people's mobilization and fight against injustice. Thus, on this 2014 International Human Rights Day, the people of Bangladesh, including human rights defenders, have to renew their pledge against the continuous human rights abuses and stand beside the families of the victims and the voiceless; and build a strong wall of resistance.

In solidarity,  
The Odhikar Team