



## **A Joint Statement by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, Asian Human Rights Commission and Odhikar on the occasion of International Human Rights Day**

### **BANGLADESH: Defending rights requires unified resistance**

**Dhaka/Manila/Hong Kong, 10 December 2019:** On International Human Rights Day, the Asian Federation against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), and Odhikar pay tribute to and stand in solidarity with the victims and survivors of human rights violations.

Today, Human Rights Day is being celebrated globally on the United Nations 'theme *Youth Standing Up for Human Rights*'. In Bangladesh, the government uses the ruling party's student and youth wings and law-enforcement agencies against youth who stand up for their civil and political rights. Two glaring examples of this were seen during the Safe Road Movement and the Quota Reform Movement. Freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly are curtailed for everyone except for the allies of the incumbent government. Dissidents are subjected to harassment, including arbitrary detention in trumped up criminal cases. Fundamental rights are degraded to such an extent that even academic freedom is limited by the use of muscle power in educational institutions at home and abroad. Political opposition has largely been rendered criminal and democratic systems have been replaced with authoritarianism. The notion of 'justice' has ceased to exist. Detained and imprisoned opposition political leaders face systemic denials of medical treatment while they are held in custody unjustly. Tortured inmates and detainees succumb to their injuries, suffer permanent physical disability, being consistently denied adequate medical treatment.

Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings are all too common. The death penalty is still in force and is bestowed on accused persons largely based on coerced confessional statements as the only evidence. Violence against women, girls and children including sexual abuse in domestic and public spheres of life, go mostly unpunished and are subject to the pro-ruling party identities of the alleged offenders. Ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority communities routinely face atrocities in the hands of politically powerful groups of the country.

Excessive political and economic aggression by the Government of India over the institutions and people of Bangladesh in the last decade, had encouraged human rights violations within Bangladesh as the government scrambles to meet India's demands. Water sharing, transit, agriculture and even the promotion of civil servants are some of the issues that contribute to the degradation of human rights within Bangladesh. Furthermore, the Indian Border Security Force is responsible for the killing of hundreds of Bangladeshi nationals, even by intruding into the latter's territory. Bangladesh's incumbent government retains power because of the support of the Government of India. This is common knowledge.

The extrajudicial execution of Rohingya refugees, who fled genocidal atrocities by the military and Buddhist extremists of Myanmar, indicates that nobody's life is safe in the hands of Bangladesh government. The lack of education and schools for Rohingya refugees within the camps is also a human rights violation and the ensuing idleness will only encourage further violations.

The Bangladesh government, in the United Nations' General Assembly, submitted voluntary pledges towards the promotion and protection of human rights, prior to the elections for the membership of the Human Rights Council. In contrast, the same government resorts to gross human rights violations relentlessly. At the UPR sessions, it is obvious that the international community is aware of the double standards.

The people of Bangladesh, who are disenfranchised since the January 2014 elections, strive for a democratic state to uphold equality, human dignity and social justice - the fundamental principles of Bangladesh's Liberation War. Fostering democracy, redesigning and rebuilding institutions of the rule of law and governance, and protecting rights can only be possible when unified resistance of the people overpower the domestic authoritarianism and external aggression.

###

*The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) is a federation of human rights organisations working directly on the issue of involuntary disappearances in Asia. Envisioning a world without desaparecidos, AFAD was founded on June 4, 1998 in Manila, Philippines. AFAD was the recipient of the 2016 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award conferred by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.*

*The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) works towards the radical rethinking and fundamental redesigning of justice institutions in order to protect and promote human rights in Asia. Established in 1984, the Hong Kong based organisation is a Laureate of the Right Livelihood Award, 2014.*

*Odhikar, meaning 'rights' in Bangla, is a registered human rights organisation based in Dhaka, Bangladesh established on October 10, 1994 by a group of human rights defenders, to monitor human rights violations and create wider awareness. It holds special consultative status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations.*