



A Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN), Asia Alliance Against Torture (AAT), Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP), CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Eleos Justice, Monash University, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Odhikar, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) on the occasion of International Day in Support of Victims of Torture 2024

BANGLADESH: Government must comply with its obligations to uphold the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill treatment, end impunity and ensure access to justice for victims

Bangkok/ Dhaka/ Geneva/ Jakarta/ Johannesburg/ Kuala Lumpur/ London/ Manila/ Melbourne/ Paris/Washington DC: 25 June 2024: On the occasion of the [United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#) on 26 June, we, the undersigned organisations, are gravely concerned over the continuing acts of torture and other ill-treatment committed by law-enforcement agencies and security forces in Bangladesh, and the lack of access to comprehensive rehabilitation services including medical, psychological, legal, and social support for torture victims. Under the theme for this year’s International Day, “Freedom from torture is our right”, we stand together in solidarity with victims of torture and other ill-treatment, their families, and the human rights defenders who speak out on their behalf, and call on the Bangladeshi authorities to stop torture and other ill-treatment, hold perpetrators accountable and ensure access to justice.

Torture and other ill-treatment is [widespread in Bangladesh and frequently used by the police](#) to obtain confessions as part of routine criminal investigations. Moreover, there have been significant incidents of torture, and other ill-treatment committed by law enforcement officers for [politically motivated purposes](#) against government critics and political opponents to obtain information, to intimidate, to suppress, or to convey more broadly a message of fear in society. In fact, the practice of torture may lead to a more serious crime of enforced disappearance. In this particular case, torture is multiplied and inflicted to the victim’s family who are left to cope with the disappearance.

Acts of torture and other ill-treatment committed by the police, and other law enforcement and security forces violate both international law and the Constitution of Bangladesh. International law absolutely prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. There are no circumstances under which states can be justified or excused for perpetrating either. This prohibition appears explicitly in human rights treaties - including in Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Bangladesh acceded in 2000, and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), which Bangladesh acceded to in 1998. Freedom from torture and other ill-treatment is a non-derogable human right; it cannot be infringed or restricted even “in time of emergency which threatens the life of the nation”. Acts of torture committed by the police, and other law enforcement and security forces also violate Articles 31, 32 and 35(5) of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

Ahead of the latest general elections held on 7 January 2024, [thousands of opposition party members](#) were detained and many of them were reportedly tortured in custody. Apart from the police stations and other places of detention, there have been allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of political prisoners in jails across the country. For instance, Odhikar recorded 128 deaths in jail custody in 2023. Additionally, at least [13 BNP leaders and activists died in prisons](#) due to alleged torture between January 2023 and March 2024. Recently, there was a woman named [Afroza Begum who died in police custody](#), hours after she was picked up from her residence in Jashore. Her family alleged that the police implicated her in a false drug case and tortured her for money. The [family moved to a relative's house fearing reprisals](#) from police as they have been under constant surveillance and intimidation.

Allegations of deaths or torture and other ill-treatment in custody in Bangladesh are hardly investigated or prosecuted, despite the Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act 2013 which criminalises all acts of torture. In most cases the victim's family does not even file a complaint due to threats and pressure coming from various quarters. Since the 2013 Act was passed, at least 103 persons have been tortured to death in Bangladesh between November 2013 and March 2024, as documented by Odhikar; and although [50 cases have been filed](#) in the last 10 years, [only one case of torture resulted in a conviction](#) under this Act. The Act is not properly implemented, resulting in widespread impunity and continued perpetration of torture and custodial death by law enforcement agencies. Several [cases have even been filed](#) against torture victims, in retaliation of cases against the police for torture. For instance, the family of torture victim, Shahjalal, whose [eyes were allegedly gouged out by the police](#) in Khulna in 2017, has been [threatened](#) in various ways to withdraw their case. In February 2024, a team of police visited Shahjalal's home and forced them to 'settle' the case with the police.

Despite wide-ranging criticism against members of the law enforcement agency, the authorities have promoted a torturous law-enforcement system by [rewarding](#) the perpetrators with the 'Bangladesh Police Medal' and the 'President's Police Medal' when [dissidents and political opposition](#) supporters are tortured.

Bangladesh has ignored [repeated requests](#) from the United Nations Committee Against Torture to follow up on the recommendations it made during Bangladesh's July 2019 review by the Committee. The Committee's recommendations include independent monitoring of all detention centres and investigation of all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials. Moreover, the government once again [refused to accept recommendations](#) on Bangladesh's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture at the UN Human Rights Council during its most recent Universal Periodic Review in November 2023. As a State party to the UNCAT and the ICCPR, Bangladesh must not disregard its obligation to prohibit torture, proactively adopt measures to end the practice, bring those responsible to justice, and provide redress for the victims.

We urge the Government of Bangladesh to:

- put an end to torture and conduct thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture and prosecute perpetrators in fair trials;
- comply with the rule of law by ensuring the rights of all detained persons, and justice and accountability for torture victims;
- meaningfully engage with the international community by swiftly implementing the recommendations made by the Committee against Torture, the Universal Periodic Review and UN independent experts.

Organisations signed:

1. [Amnesty International](#)
2. [Asia Alliance Against Torture \(A3T\)](#)
3. [Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network \(ADPAN\)](#)
4. [Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances \(AFAD\)](#)
5. [Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development \(FORUM-ASIA\)](#)
6. [Capital Punishment Justice Project \(CPJP\)](#)
7. [CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation](#)
8. [Eleos Justice, Monash University](#)
9. [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#)
10. [Odhikar](#)
11. [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights](#)
12. [World Organisation Against Torture \(OMCT\)](#)