



09 October 2024

30 years of Striving to Establish Human Rights

Odhikar's Statement on the Occasion of its Founding Anniversary

10th October 2024 is *Odhikar's* 30th founding anniversary. On 10th October 1994, *Odhikar* was established by human rights defenders with the determination to establish human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Bangladesh. On its 30th founding anniversary, *Odhikar* stands against the last 15 years of violent, authoritarian rule under Sheikh Hasina, and remembers with profound respect those massacred in the atrocities perpetrated in July-August 2024.

For 30 years, *Odhikar* has continued the struggle for establishing human rights, while overcoming obstacles and facing severe adversity. *Odhikar* has formed a network with human rights defenders across the country. Adhering to its goal of establishing human rights and the rule of law, *Odhikar* has been vocal about ending extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, human rights violations by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) against Bangladeshi citizens, violence against women, and has been against impunity since its founding. Furthermore, as a member of several international human rights organizations, *Odhikar* remains an active participant in the global movement for human rights.

Odhikar has been subject to harassment and oppression for protesting human rights violations under many different governments. But the oppression against *Odhikar* that began when the Awami League-led coalition came to power in 2009 took on an extreme form in 2013, with arrests and relentless harassment. On 5th June 2022, the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office denied the renewal of *Odhikar's* registration and several pro-government news media channels spread untruthful propaganda against *Odhikar*. On 14th September 2023, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal judge AM Zulfikar Hayat sentenced *Odhikar's* then-secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and director ASM Nasir Uddin Elan to two years imprisonment and fined them ten thousand taka each, for publishing a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings. This was the first instance in Bangladesh's history wherein human rights defenders were sentenced to imprisonment.

Despite being subject to human rights violations by state forces, *Odhikar* and its human rights defenders have never strayed from the movement for protecting human rights. Human rights defenders affiliated with *Odhikar* have remained under surveillance for being vocal about human rights violations and communicating with family members of victims, and have faced challenges in meeting and gathering. *Odhikar's* human rights defenders also actively participated in the July-August student uprising.

On 5th August, freedom from an authoritarian regime was won and an interim government was formed shortly thereafter. On *Odhikar's* 30th founding anniversary, we present a humble request to the interim government that, as per the Proclamation of Independence of 1971, Bangladesh be re-established as a democratic nation where human rights and rule of law are truly respected, to ensure equality, human dignity and justice for the people of Bangladesh.