



24 November 2024

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Statement from Odhikar

Patria Mirabal, Minerva Mirabal, and Maria Teresa Mirabal were sisters and staunch opponents of Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. On 25 November 1960, they were brutalized and killed while on their way to visit their incarcerated husbands, who had also suffered greatly during Trujillo's regime. Their assassination and noteworthy opposition to the violent dictatorship paved the way for the Mirabal sisters to be memorialized forever as icons of feminist, anti-regime resistance.

In 1990, the United Nations declared the date of the Mirabal sisters' murders as the ***International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women***.¹ Tomorrow marks 25 years of the UN's commemoration of the occasion. According to a report on femicide by UN Women and UNODC to be published tomorrow, ***at least one woman was killed globally every ten minutes in 2023***.²

Violence against women remains a constant and widespread issue in Bangladesh, and can be attributed to many factors, including the lack of law enforcement and implementation, a deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset, and a general lack of awareness regarding women's issues. Social stigma in the region further contributes to low rates of reporting (and therefore accountability in) instances of violence to law enforcement agencies, as women are often blamed in these situations. Gender-based violence continues to affect women in Bangladesh with regards to dowry, acid attacks, child marriage, stalking, rape, and sexual harassment of women and children. It is more widespread among those who are low-income, undocumented, working in the informal sector, and/or homeless. According to a UN report published in 2021, it was found that ***"93% of women in Bangladesh reported having experienced or knowing another woman who has experienced violence against women and girls."***³

Contributions of female activists during the July-August 2024 student-led mass uprising in Bangladesh can neither be overlooked nor trivialized. The authoritarian Awami League regime could not have been toppled without women at the forefront of the movement, who much like the Mirabal sisters, endured extreme state-sanctioned violence and yet continued their fight against oppressive forces. Odhikar remains vigilant in reporting and documenting violence against women in Bangladesh, and continues its enduring commitment to the struggle for justice.

¹ "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day>

² "On International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women," UN Women Media Advisory, 15 November 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/media-advisory/2024/11/on-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-un-women-draws-attention-to-femicides>

³ "From Crisis to Action," UNICEF Bangladesh, 7 December 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/crisis-action-unfpa-unicef-un-women-shed-light-key-essential-services-support-gender>