



Bangladesh: Establishing human rights requires voluntary participation of the people

Odhikar's statement on the occasion of International Human Rights Day 2024

Dhaka, 09 December 2024: 10 December is the International Human Rights Day. As the world commemorates this day, the path to establishing a democratic state has been paved in Bangladesh through a mass uprising of students, workers and citizens from all walks of life. The authoritarian regime which ruled from 6 January, 2009 to 5 August, 2024, committed widespread human rights violations in the country to forcibly remain in power and deprived the people of their voting rights. Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture in the custody of law enforcement agencies and security forces became widespread. The massive human rights violations committed by the repressive administration in its attempt to suppress student and public protests in July-August were unprecedented. Law enforcement personnel and the then ruling Awami League party leaders and activists opened fire indiscriminately on the protesting students and people. At least 1,581 people, including children, were killed, 18,000 were injured, and 550 people lost their eyesight. *Odhikar* faced extreme state repression and harassment during this regime for its human rights activism.

On 5 August, 2024, Prime Minister Hasina fled the country. An interim government was formed on 8 August, 2024. The Indian ruling class, taking the side of the former authoritarian Government of Bangladesh, has been trying to destabilise the interim government in various ways. The Indian ruling class is running various types of false media propaganda to destabilize Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala, India has recently been attacked and the Bangladesh national flag has been burnt. The killing and torture of Bangladeshi citizens by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on the Bangladesh-India border continues. *Odhikar* strongly condemns India's political and economic aggression over Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government, in the last 15 and a half years, had systematically transformed all State institutions in the country into subservient institutions through politicization, in order to remain in power. The Awami League government used the Judiciary, the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission, among various important State institutions, to implement its political agenda. The ineffectiveness of these institutions has led to political intolerance and the absence of an effective role of the State in preventing undemocratic behaviour and human rights violations. After the fall of the regime, the interim government has formed six commissions to submit recommendations make State institutions effective.

In addition, the interim government acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, shortly after assuming office. Bangladesh had previously shown a failure to comply with and implement the obligations of various Conventions/Treaties it has ratified.

Odhikar believes that now is the time to implement the obligations contained in these instruments to establish human rights and to ensure the establishment of a democratic state by reforming all State institutions through spontaneous participation of the people.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team