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Odhikar's Statement on International Women's Day 2025



BANGLADESH: During the historic July-August 2024 revolution in Bangladesh, the unwavering courage of women alongside the men, contributed to the eventual downfall of Sheikh Hasina and her government.

However, the struggle for justice came at a heavy cost. According to the OHCHR's fact-finding report, women protesters were not spared from brutal attacks by state security forces and armed Awami League supporters. Many women faced gender-based violence, including threats of rape, and, in documented cases, sexual violence perpetrated by Awami League supporters. Reports also indicate that threats of rape and sexual violence were used as acts of revenge. Female protesters were frequently subjected to degrading verbal abuse, with attackers—both from Awami League/Chhatra League and law enforcement—labeling them as 'whores,' 'sluts,' and 'prostitutes.'

During Hasina's 15-year regime, countless women fell victim to sexual and gender-based violence. Reported incidents of rape and sexual harassment were high. However, due to a highly politicized law enforcement and judiciary, justice remained out of reach for most survivors.

On August 8, 2024, an interim government took power, forming several commissions, including the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, to address long-standing issues. Yet, violence against women and sexual harassment continues in various forms, including attacks based on women's clothing choices. Crimes such as rape, dowry-related violence, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse persist with no perceived improvement in the criminal justice system.

Although Bangladesh has broken free from a fascist regime, the nation remains entangled in violence, lawlessness, and impunity. Strengthening the judiciary is imperative, ensuring it is both pro-women and pro-people. Raising awareness about women's rights and gender equality is crucial, alongside the urgent need for victim and witness protection laws. A reformed and strengthened criminal justice system is essential to securing justice for survivors and ensuring a safer, more equitable future for all.