



Statement on the Commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2025, Bangladesh: Violence and discrimination against women in Bangladesh remains alarmingly widespread. Dowry-related violence, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, stalking, and gender-based cyber offences continue to impact thousands of women across the country. These forms of violence are deeply rooted in long-standing gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, and harmful attitudes that limit women's rights and freedoms.

According to Odhikar's statistics from January 2009 to September 2025, 14083 women and female children have reportedly been subjected to rape. Among them, 5123 were women, 8560 were female children, and the age of 400 victims was not determined. Of those women, 2017 were victims of gang rape and 452 were murdered after rape. Among the children, 1682 were gang-raped and 464 were murdered following raped. From 2009 to September 2025 a total of 4489 women were subjected to dowry-related violence. Among them, 2178 were reportedly killed, 2155 experienced various forms of physical abuse and 156 women committed suicide. Not only women the children and family members were also were killed and victimized due to dowry related violence. During this period 46 children were killed as their mothers couldn't pay dowry. Odhikar believes these statistics are only the tip of the iceberg, as countless incidents of violence against women go unreported.

The justice system, despite ongoing reforms, struggles to provide timely protection and fair outcomes. Delays, stigma, and limited access to legal support frequently discourage survivors from pursuing justice. For many women, seeking accountability becomes a second battle—one that is emotionally draining, socially isolating, and at times more painful than the violence itself. The definition of the crime of rape in the Penal Code has not been amended and the court-mandated definitions of 'sexual harassment' and 'stalking' have not been included in the law. These are serious drawbacks.

Between 2009 and August 2024, enforced disappearances were perpetrated with impunity in Bangladesh. Women from families of the disappeared lived in a financial, social and legal nightmare. Many lived under constant fear because they were monitored, threatened, or pressured for simply demanding answers about their missing loved ones. Their suffering also included financial hardship, as numerous women lost access to bank accounts, income or

property that were legally tied to the disappeared family member. Despite the interim government bringing some changes, many women still do not feel completely secure, and the atmosphere of caution remains present in their lives.

Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984, yet it continues to maintain reservations on Article 2 and Article 16(1)(c). These reservations prevent women from enjoying the full legal protections guaranteed under international human rights law.

To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 2025, Odhikar's recommendations are as follows:

1. Bangladesh must strengthen a gender-responsive judiciary, including fast and fair processing of cases related to violence against women. The justice system should adopt pro-women, survivor-centered approach that ensures safety, dignity, and equal access to legal remedies for all women.
2. Educational institutions from primary schools to universities should integrate comprehensive awareness programs to challenge discriminatory norms and prevent violence.
3. Women and family members affected by enforced disappearances must receive dedicated protection, psychosocial support, and economic assistance without fear of surveillance or intimidation.
4. The definition of 'rape' in the Penal Code must be amended to remove its narrowness that remains present since the Code was enacted in 1860; and the Suppression of Repression of Women and Children Act 2000 must be amended to include the court mandated definitions of 'sexual harassment' and 'rape'.
5. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018 and Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 should be effectively implemented.
6. To uphold international human rights commitments, Bangladesh should remove its reservations to CEDAW Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) and harmonize national laws accordingly.
7. Prevention and protection mechanisms, including shelters, hotlines, and community-level initiatives, must be strengthened nationwide. Men and boys should be actively engaged in promoting gender equality and rejecting harmful social norms.
8. Strong political commitment and accountability are essential to stop discrimination and violence against women – which make up more than half the population of Bangladesh.

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