



# Public Advocacy Dialogue on Torture: International Obligation and Realities

*Khulna Division*



On 13 December 2025, Odhikar, in partnership with the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), organised a public advocacy dialogue in Khulna to confront the persistent practice of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh. The discussion critically examined the gap between Bangladesh's international human rights obligations and the lived realities of survivors. Bangladesh ratified the Convention against Torture (CAT) in 1998 and acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) on 17 July 2025, alongside the enactment of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. Despite these commitments, torture remains widespread and accountability remains elusive.



The programme brought together more than forty-five participants, including survivors of torture, law enforcement and prison officials, political representatives, human rights defenders, journalists, academics, lawyers, civil society actors, and youth. Their presence reflected a shared urgency to end torture and ensure justice for victims.



The dialogue was moderated by human rights defender ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director (Administration) of Odhikar. In his opening remarks, he reaffirmed that torture is an absolute crime under international law and can never be justified—under any circumstances. He stressed that the State has an obligation obligation to prevent torture, protect survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable, warning that impunity continues to erode public trust in state institutions.



Following the introductions, Md. Pulok Hasan of Odhikar delivered a comprehensive advocacy-oriented presentation on Bangladesh's binding obligations under CAT and OPCAT. He emphasized the urgent need for full criminalisation of torture in line with international standards, independent and impartial investigations, effective victim compensation, and strong preventive safeguards. Highlighting serious implementation failures of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, he underscored how weak investigations, political interference, and lack of accountability continue to enable custodial torture. He further explained Bangladesh's accession to OPCAT in 2025 and stressed the immediate necessity of establishing an independent, well-resourced National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) with unrestricted access to all places of detention. Without structural reform, he warned, torture will remain entrenched.



## Voices of Survivors: Exposing Systemic Abuse

The most powerful moments of the dialogue came from survivors, whose testimonies exposed the brutal reality of custodial torture and enforced disappearance in Bangladesh.

**Shahjalal**, a torture survivor, recounted his arrest on 18 July 2017 in connection with a mugging case in Khulna's Goalkhali area. While in police custody, officers demanded money from his family. When the demand could not be met, he was brutally tortured and his eyes were gouged out with a screwdriver. He was later admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital, permanently blinded. He filed a case against His testimony illustrated the use of torture as a tool of extortion and punishment.



**A. S. M. Mohiuddin Titu**, a former Chhatra Dal (student wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party) leader, described his detention during a political procession in 2012. He was blindfolded, handcuffed, and suspended from a ceiling fan hook while being beaten repeatedly. The torture left him unconscious, with a broken leg and serious spinal injuries. His account highlighted how torture is routinely used to suppress political dissent.



**Imran Hossain**, a survivor of enforced disappearance, who was disappeared on 02 February 2010, described being abducted by plainclothes law enforcement officers, falsely labeled a “militant,” and held in secret detention facilities. During interrogation at the Joint Interrogation Cell, he was violently assaulted, resulting in a ruptured eardrum and loss of consciousness. He was shown arrested on March 25, 2010 from Uttara, Dhaka. His testimony underscored the systematic use of secret detention, torture, and enforced disappearance, and the lack of transparency surrounding how victims eventually reappear.



### Accountability and State Responsibility

Guest speakers addressed the responsibility of state institutions in preventing torture and ensuring justice.

**Akhtar Hossain**, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue), Khulna, acknowledged that the State enacted the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act in 2013 but stressed that laws alone are meaningless without enforcement. He emphasized that no accused person should be punished without due process and urged political leaders to confront past abuses rather than deny them. He called for legal protection for victims and a collective commitment to uphold human rights, rule of law, and justice in rebuilding Bangladesh.





**Tazul Islam**, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Khulna (South), stated that investigations into cases of enforced disappearance and custodial torture committed prior to 5 August 2024, are underway and that those responsible will be held accountable. While acknowledging public mistrust, he emphasized that reform is possible only if honest officers are supported and political misuse of the police is ended.



**Nasir Uddin Pradhan**, Jail Superintendent of Khulna District Jail, addressed misconceptions about prisons while acknowledging serious structural challenges, including shortages of medical and mental health professionals. He emphasized that rehabilitation—not punishment—is the purpose of detention and called for political commitments to end the misuse of law enforcement and detention systems.



## **Call to Action**

The open discussion that followed reinforced a shared demand for concrete action: independent investigations into torture cases, effective witness and victim protection, operationalisation of OPCAT through a credible National Preventive Mechanism, and an end to political interference in law enforcement. Participants stressed that justice for survivors is not optional—it is a legal and moral obligation.

The dialogue concluded with a strong call for collective action by the State, political actors, and civil society to end torture, dismantle systems of impunity, and uphold human dignity. Without immediate and genuine reform, Bangladesh's commitments under CAT and OPCAT will remain symbolic, and survivors will continue to bear the cost of inaction.

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