



August 16, 2026

Odhikar's Statement Against the Attempt to Turn the National Human Rights Commission into a Subservient Government Body.

On August 10, 2026, the Cabinet approved the draft Bill of the National Human Rights Commission Act. Odhikar believes that if the draft of the National Human Rights Commission Act 2026 is passed in Parliament, it may turn into an organisation under government control instead of an independent institution.

During Sheikh Hasina's 15 year-long repressive and violent rule, the National Human Rights Commission functioned as an entity subservient to the government. While opposition leaders, activists, dissidents, human rights defenders and ordinary citizens fell victim to various forms of oppression- including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture- the then National Human Rights Commission remained silent on these matters. To prevent the National Human Rights Commission from becoming a partisan subservient institution and to enable it to function as a strong human rights commission in line with the Paris Principles, the Interim Government issued the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance, 2025. However, due to the BNP government not presenting the Ordinance as a Bill in Parliament, it lapsed.

The Paris Principles clearly state that a national human rights institution has to be given as broad a mandate as possible. However, the 2026 NHRC draft law, as it reads, seems to be designed to limit the NHRC's powers to perform any meaningful task. For example, the Principles state that the Commission must have the authority to investigate allegations of human rights violations, receive any testimony, and obtain any necessary information. However, under Section 19 of the approved draft law, the Commission cannot independently investigate allegations of human rights violations committed by disciplined forces or their members in the first instance. This is because, just like during Sheikh Hasina's regime, the responsibility for investigating human rights violations has been assigned to the disciplined forces themselves. Odhikar believes that these investigations will neither be neutral nor fair, as was the case in the past. Consequently, accused members of the forces will enjoy impunity.

The Paris Principles are very clear in the appointment of members of the NHRC. The Principles seem to prefer an election of members, but clearly state that whatever the process is, it must ensure a pluralist representation of society and that if government departments are involved then their representatives must be there only in an advisory

capacity. In the draft NHRC law, the proposed structure of the Selection Committee for appointments to the Commission, will establish dominance of the ruling party, ensuring that government decisions are implemented. According to Section 7 of the approved law, the nine-member Selection Committee includes the Speaker of the National Parliament, two government ministers, a Member of Parliament from the ruling party, and the Cabinet Secretary. Furthermore, among the remaining four members provided for, three will in practice also be nominated by the government, as the law specifies that two of them will be nominated by the President and one by the University Grants Commission. This means that eight out of the nine members on the Selection Committee will be government-aligned. Additionally, no separate representation for women or persons with disabilities, has been specified in the Selection Committee, which is discriminatory.

Odhikar believes that when compared to the 2025 Ordinance, the new draft law shows certain changes that contradict the long-standing public aspirations for establishing an independent and effective human rights commission, as well as the spirit of the July Mass Uprising, and is inconsistent with the internationally recognized standards of the Paris Principles. Therefore, enacting the National Human Rights Commission Act 2026 in accordance with the Paris Principles—by amending the aforementioned issues—will help prevent human rights violations, endure unbiased investigations and enhance the government's image nationally and internationally.

Issued by:

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