



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 1, 2015

**A Joint Statement by
Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances
Asian Legal Resource Centre**

**The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders [a joint programme of the
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against
Torture (OMCT)]**

**BANGLADESH: Government repression and intimidation of families of
victims of enforced disappearance**

1 September 2015 – On the occasion of the International Day of the Disappeared on August 30, families of victims of enforced disappearance, AFAD, ALRC, FIDH and Odhikar had jointly organised a commemorative event in Dhaka, Bangladesh to remember those who have been forcibly detained and whose fate and whereabouts remain unknown. However, less than 24 hours before the event was scheduled to take place, it was suddenly cancelled by the National Press Club where the event was slated to be held. In addition, families of the disappeared who were scheduled to speak during the event received threatening phone calls, and police were deployed to the National Press Club without an explanation. Our organisations have reason to believe that the Bangladesh government is behind this sudden cancellation of the event and the intimidation of victims' families, as part of a wider effort to silence any voices speaking out against Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh and to maintain impunity for these crimes which many claim have been committed by State authorities.

On 29 August 2015 at 5:20 PM, the National Press Club informed one of the organisers of the Odhikar/AFAD/ALRC/FIDH event that the President of the Club had ordered the event to be cancelled, claiming that there was “another programme” scheduled at the same time. However, witnesses confirmed that no programme was held at the venue on Sunday, and that several police officers were deployed to the Press Club on Sunday morning and remained on the premises throughout the day with no explanation for their presence.

In addition, family members of the disappeared who were scheduled to speak at the event received threatening telephone calls dissuading them from participating.

In areas outside Dhaka, other commemorations were also met with threats and police deployment. However, with the support of local civil society activists, the families of the

disappeared went ahead with the events, and commemorations were successfully held in Khulna, Rajshahi, and Rajbari district among others.

The events scheduled on August 30 aimed to highlight the worsening human rights situation in Bangladesh, particularly for the families of the disappeared who are systematically denied truth, justice and recovery. Between January to June 2015 alone, Odhikar has recorded 38 cases of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. The victims were reportedly picked up by men claiming to be from law enforcement agencies.

As partners of Odhikar and the families of the disappeared, AFAD, ALRC, FIDH, and OMCT strongly condemn this State repression of human rights defenders and those speaking out against human rights violations. Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establish the rights of all people to freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly, respectively. The right to assembly is likewise provided for by the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (Article 21), which Bangladesh has ratified. This right has also been reaffirmed in the UN Human Rights Council in its [resolution 15/21](#) (October 2010), [resolution 21/16](#) (October 2012) and [resolution 24/5](#) (October 2013).

Our organisations call on the government of Bangladesh to honour its commitments as a State party to the ICCPR and member of the UN, to immediately stop harassing and curtailing the rights of organizations and individuals to assemble and speak out in the pursuit of truth and justice for the victims of enforced disappearances.

Moreover, we call on the government to adhere to the principles of the 1992 Declaration on the Protection of All Persons Against Involuntary Disappearances, which states that: “*No State shall practise, permit or tolerate enforced disappearances*” [Article 2.1], and that “*Each State shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent and terminate acts of enforced disappearance in any territory under its jurisdiction*” [Article 3]. The victims of enforced disappearances and their families deserve truth and justice, and we will continue to support their struggle until they are afforded these rights.

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) is a federation of human rights organizations working directly on the issue of involuntary disappearances in Asia. Envisioning a world without desaparecidos, the Federation was founded on June 4, 1998 in Manila, Philippines.

The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) works towards the radical rethinking & fundamental redesigning of justice institutions in Asia, to ensure relief and redress for victims of human rights violations, as per Common Article 2 of the International Conventions. Sister organisation to the Asian Human Rights Commission, the ALRC is based in Hong Kong & holds general consultative status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.