

PRESS RELEASE

Bangladesh: UN Day for victims of torture - an urgent call to end impunity

Geneva, 26th of June 2014. On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the leading global civil society coalition against torture, and one of its member organisations in Bangladesh, Odhikar, call on the authorities to take decisive steps to end impunity.

Despite the ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) in 1998, Bangladesh falls short in complying with the CAT. Not only has it never submitted its initial report to the UN Committee Against Torture in the last twenty three years, torture and impunity remain a widespread practice in Bangladesh.

The UN Day in support of victims of torture reminds us: victims have rights whatever their affiliation or origin may be. *“Torture and ill-treatment are horrors a myriad of detainees have to endure, that marks individuals for the rest of their lives. The baseline consensus must be that it is unacceptable whatever the circumstances may be”*, said Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar.

Both organizations welcome the recent adoption of a law criminalizing torture; and call for an action plan for its implementation. Laws without real implementing mechanism will not be able to bring institutional and cultural change in the police and security forces. Implementing the UNCAT requires effective prevention of torture, such as an independent visiting mechanism, foreseen under the Optional Protocol Against Torture (OPCAT), the provision of remedies to victims and steps to ensure accountability for torture.

“The experience around the world has told us that preventing torture without tackling impunity is an empty promise. We believe a cornerstone of reform ought to be full civilian and judicial oversight and accountability over the country’s notorious Rapid Action Battalion in Bangladesh”, said Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the OMCT.

The effective implementation of the UNCAT as well as the national anti-torture law, also depends largely on civil society involvement and their ability to work and report on torture. It is vital that those who document torture are enabled to do so, rather than being harassed or intimidated.

In this regard, OMCT and Odhikar remain very concerned about a new draft NGO law that, if passed by parliament, would increase the even heightened control over civil society access to funding. *“It is contradictory to establish a new law on torture and to pledge to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and then to freeze approved funds to organizations working on its very implementation”*, he added on the occasion of the June 26 commemoration.

On the occasion of the UN Day for the Victims of Torture Odhikar, conducts a series of events, including rallies in several districts as well as public awareness events.

The OMCT wishes to thank the European Commission for their financial support to the OMCT global campaign on June 26 '*nothing can justify torture under any circumstances*'.

For further information please contact:

Nicole Buerli, Human Rights Advisor, OMCT, nb@omct.org

Sazzad Hussain, Program Coordinator, Odhikar, odhikar.bd@gmail.com

OMCT would like to thank the European Commission for its financial support to its global campaign on 26th of June – International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The content of the document lies in the responsibility of the OMCT only and cannot be considered as reflecting the position of the European Commission.

