



Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances

Rms. 310-311 Philippine Social Science Center Building
Commonwealth Avenue, Diliman, 1103 Quezon City Philippines
Telefax: 00-632-4546759, Mobile 00-63-9177924058
Email afad@surfshop.net.ph website www.afad-online.org

AFAD Statement on the State Harassment Against *Odhikar*
5 April 2011

Protecting the Rights of Human Rights Defenders: A State Obligation and a Moral Duty

It is not only a legal obligation of any state to promote, protect and fulfill the fundamental rights and freedom of its citizens but it is also its moral duty to recognize and protect those who are defending the rights of others, under the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), a regional federation of human rights organizations, advocates and families of the disappeared in Asia working directly on the issue of enforced disappearance in the region, is deeply concerned about the situation of human rights defenders (HRDs) in Asia who continue to face intimidation, physical and psychological assault and harassment for taking the frontline in the struggle for better human rights protection in their respective countries.

We are most gravely disturbed that governments, particularly their armed instrumentalities such as the police and the military mandated with the duty to protect, often do not only fail to do their duty but worse still, they gravely violate human rights.

The recent report that AFAD received from one of its newest member-organizations, The *Odhikar* from Bangladesh may not be so surprising but definitely alarming. According to their report, *Odhikar* is continuously under a close surveillance since December 2010. Just recently, intelligence men have been inquiring about its secretary, Adilur Rahman Khan, his family and his daily schedule. Thus, his movement is being monitored.

We believe that this form of harassment and intimidation by the state security forces is undoubtedly perpetrated in connection with *Odhikar's* consistent work for human rights which exposes the failure of the Bangladeshi government to fulfill its state obligation.

What is completely bothersome is the fact that threats against human rights defenders usually end up violently and that the danger which they face extends to their families and friends. Most of the time, states use their counter-

terrorism policy to criminalize human rights defenders and justify attacks against their persons.

Lest the government of Bangladesh forgets, the human rights defenders are important partners of government in making human rights a reality in any country.

In this regard, we call upon the Bangladeshi government to put an end to any kind of harassment against all human rights defenders in the country and to guarantee in all circumstances their physical, mental and psychological integrity, in conformity with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, specifically its Article 1:

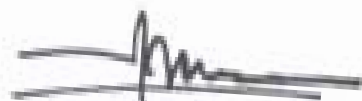
“which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”;

and Article 12.2:

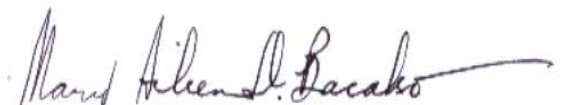
“which states that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”.

For human rights defenders like us, no amount of threats or danger can stop us from doing what is right. For perpetrators of human rights violations, they can never silence human rights defenders just because they have violated our right to defend human rights. **They should, instead, let a million defenders bloom!**

Signed and authenticated by:



MUGIYANTO
Chairperson



MARY AILEEN BACALSO
Secretary-General