



26<sup>th</sup> June, 2011

Press Release

## International Day in Support of Victims of Torture



On 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, Odhikar arranged a discussion forum at the National Press Club and rallies in six divisional cities across the country for the 'International Day in Support of Victims of Torture'. Bangladesh, one of the signatories of the United Nations Convention against Torture, ratified it in 1998. However, the Parliament has disregarded its obligations under the Convention to enact domestic laws criminalising torture and, equally worryingly, continues inaction with regard to High Court Judgments ordering reform in laws relating to torture.

The forum, which was arranged at the VIP lounge of the National Press Club, was directed by the Secretary of Odhikar Adilur Rahman Khan, and chaired by political analyst Farhad Mazhar. At the meeting statements were held by BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir; former VP of Dhaka University Central Students Union and Awami League leader Mahmudur Rahman Manna; General Secretary of the Jatio Shomaj Tantrik Dol, Sharif Nurul Ambia; General Secretary, BIplobi Workers Party, Saiful Haque; Secretary, Jatio Mukti Council, Faizul Hakim Lala and General Secretary, Hill Women's Federation, Konika Dewan. Iqbal Hassan Russell, brother of deceased Maniruzzaman Rubel who was tortured to death in police custody in Tangail and Mahmudur Rahman, acting Editor of Amar Desh who had also been tortured in police custody, attended the meeting and shared their experiences.

Acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir of BNP stated that, a large portion of the current government's election manifesto spoke against torture and about the necessity for change;

but currently the government is moving the country towards a scenario resembling Dark Ages. On the subject of torture, he spoke of the recent incident where members of one of the law enforcement agencies tortured Monowara Mani in her home in Chittagong, and pulled out her nails. He raised the matter of the 29 false cases filed against Ahsanul Haque Milon and about BNP leaders being imprisoned for long periods of time. He reminded those present of BNP leader Chowdhury Alam, who has been missing for over a year. He ended by saying that the opposition party is being deprived of its right to a democratic campaign.

Former VP of Dhaka University Central Students Union and Awami League leader Mahmudur Rahman Manna, condemning the killing of Moniruzzaman Rubel and the torture in custody of the acting editor of Amar Desh Mahmudur Rahman, said that data on the number of extrajudicial killings committed and the number of people killed in custody since the liberation of the country in 1971 needs to be documented.

Sharif Nurul Ambia, General Secretary of the National Socialist Party (JSD) stated that, the state of the country has not improved in the past 40 years. The absence of improvement in the political environment has stood in the way of social progress. The country's leading political parties have to reach a consensus for the sake of democracy and progress.

General Secretary of Biprobi Workers Party, Saiful Haque, said that Odhikar itself has been the victim of harassment for the past few years. Odhikar has continued work in the face of much abuse and torment. On the issue of torture in custody, he mentioned the arrest of Workers Leader Moshrefa Mishu from her home and placement in remand. He spoke further of how she had been kept imprisoned for 15 days even after having been granted bail.

Faizul Hakim Lala, Secretary of Jatio Mukti Council, spoke of how the military officers on the one hand going on United Nations missions and on the other hand serious human rights infringements were taking place in Rupganj and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. He said that the Indian Border Security Force is killing and torturing Bangladeshi citizens at the borders regularly and the government is taking no proper action to put a stop to such conduct. He alleged of a willingness on the part of the ruling party to surrender Bangladesh's natural resources to foreign authorities. He said that the citizens must take a firm stance against such propositions.

Konika Dewan stated that the minority groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are represented in an incorrect manner. The 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution identifies everyone as Bangladeshi's.

Acting editor of the Daily Amar Desh Mahmudur Rahman, who himself is a victim of torture at the hands of law enforcement agencies, gave an account of his experience. More than a hundred police men surrounded him during his arrest. He was taken into remand and at Katowali Police Station where he was made to remain standing for 24 hours. Afterwards he was kept in the station lockup

with drug addicts and alcoholics. During those 24 hours he was deprived of everything, including water. After this he was taken to the Cantonment Police Station, stripped naked, blind-folded and tortured. At a certain point during the torture he was rendered unconscious. He was taken into the Task Force Intelligence (TFI) cell and his hands were tied to a pole. He said he had not been questioned at the jail gate but taken straight into remand. He recounted that after the liberation of Bangladesh, 30,000 political workers were killed in this way by the Rakhibahini and operation 'Clean Heart' was carried out in the same manner in later years. He expressed that the current State was becoming a fascist one without law and order.

Iqbal Hassan Russell, brother of deceased Maniruzzaman Rubel, who was tortured to death in police custody in Tangail, recounted the cruel story of his brother's killing at the hands of the law enforcement agency. He said that despite calls for a fair investigation into the custodial murder of Rubel by the Home Minister and the IGP, no action has been taken. He demanded exemplary punishment for his brother's killing.

Chairing the meeting, Odhikar's advisor and political analyst Farhad Mazhar stated that the International day in support of Victims of Torture was being observed in many countries around the world. He said that torturing citizens without putting them on trial for charges which have been or may be filed against them, is a heinous crime. Such is declared completely illegal by the United Nations Convention against Torture. He opined that until we can establish a State where an individual's fundamental rights are respected, we cannot call ourselves part of a democratic state.

Odhikar's Human Rights defenders in Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet organised rallies and meetings in their districts in observance of this day and presented memorandums at the Deputy Commissioner and Metropolitan Police Commissioner's office, urging the government to put a stop to acts amounting to torture and degrading punishment and, punishing the perpetrators of the same.



Rangpur



Rajshahi



Barisal



Khulna



Chittagong