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## Bangladesh: Stop Punishing Human Rights Work

*Deregistration of Bangladeshi organization Odhikar is part of pattern of curbs on rights groups*

Bangladeshi authorities should immediately reverse their decision to deregister prominent human rights organization, Odhikar, eleven organizations said today. Human rights defenders should be allowed to conduct their work without fear of reprisals, intimidation, and harassment from the authorities.

On June 5, 2022, Bangladesh's Non-Governmental Organization Affairs Bureau sent a letter to Odhikar, denying the group's application for renewal of registration. The letter said that Odhikar had published "misleading information" on extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in Bangladesh that has "seriously tarnished the image of the state to the world." The bureau further claimed that Odhikar's publications on such human rights violations were propaganda that "created various issues against Bangladesh."

This latest development appears to be part of a [pattern of reprisals](#) by the Bangladesh government against human rights groups and defenders following the United States Global Magnitsky [sanctions against Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion](#) on December 10, 2021.

Odhikar has been documenting human rights violations in Bangladesh since 1994. Odhikar's application for renewal with the Non-Governmental Organization Affairs Bureau was [pending since 2014](#), severely inhibiting its ability to conduct human rights monitoring and reporting. But after years of inaction, in early February 2022, soon after the United States sanctions were passed, the bureau sent Odhikar a letter requesting specific information and documents, including the names and addresses of everyone killed extrajudicially and disappeared between 2009 and 2021.

In May 2019, in response to government inaction on its application for registration renewal, Odhikar filed a writ in the High Court. The court asked the bureau to provide an explanation for its non-renewal. The bureau's decision to deny Odhikar's application, without providing a reply to the High Court, even as the matter is pending there, shows its disregard for following due process.

Since the announcement of the United States Sanctions, members of Odhikar and their family members have reported facing increased surveillance and harassment by law enforcement

officials. Bangladeshi authorities have previously targeted Odhikar's members in an attempt to silence their work. In 2013, Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were arbitrarily detained for 62 days and 25 days, respectively, after publishing a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings. They are currently facing ongoing delays and other forms of judicial harassment in a trial based on trumped-up charges at the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, has [expressed her concerns](#) on the court's failure to uphold fair trial principles as well as attacks, smear campaigns, surveillance, and harassment against Odhikar.

The Non-Governmental Organization Affairs Bureau's decision to deregister Odhikar demonstrates the government's determination to stifle human rights work in the country. It is the authorities' failure to ensure accountability for human rights violations rather than Odhikar's exposure of those violations that has tarnished Bangladesh's reputation, the organizations said.

The authorities should immediately renew Odhikar's registration, allow them to conduct their human rights work without reprisals, and welcome their findings as an opportunity to improve the country's human rights record. More broadly, the government of Bangladesh should end politically-motivated persecution of human rights defenders and critics, allow human rights groups to do their work without fear, and ensure accountability for human rights violations.

The groups are:

1. Amnesty International
2. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
3. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)
4. Capital Punishment Justice Project
5. Elios Justice, Monash University
6. Human Rights First
7. Human Rights Watch
8. International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearance (ICAED)
9. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
10. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
11. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders