



Odhikar rejects the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Statement from Odhikar

Dhaka; 2 January 2019: In response to the statement issued by the United States of America,¹ expressing disappointment over the cancellation of the election observation mission of the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), on 23 December 2018, the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry issued a statement² in which it noted:

“Odhikar is widely known for its disproportionate bias and prejudice against Bangladesh, in particular the government of Awami League, which is evident in its various reports including the recent ones published in October and December 2018. Besides, one of the top-ranking Bangladesh members of Odhikar was earlier appointed by the BNP-Jamaat Government as the Deputy Attorney General, which provides ground for disqualification of his organisation and related entities as independent and neutral observer of the national elections”.

Odhikar strongly condemns the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). As a human rights organisation, Odhikar has been monitoring the election process and election violence since 1996, with the objective of ensuring the people’s right to vote. Odhikar has been working with different activists, including human rights defenders in different countries of the world and international networks to establish democracy and human rights. It has even been part of international election observation teams in various countries. Since no government of Bangladesh has been respectful to human rights, Odhikar has been subjected to harassment and intimidation by successive governments since its inception in 1994. However, since 2013, the scale of harassment and repression has increased substantially.

Odhikar categorically emphasises the fact that it has been publishing reports of human rights violations consistently for the last 24 years. It unconditionally stands by the victims of oppression and maintains no prejudice with regard to their political leanings or ideological orientation. Therefore, the allegations of bias against the Awami League government are baseless. Odhikar recalls that after the BNP-led Alliance government came to power in 2001, it

¹<https://bd.usembassy.gov/upcoming-election-in-bangladesh/>

²https://mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/3bee6ae0-bb45-43cc-a469-76f086ff6f50

had to face various forms of reprisals of that government at different times for being vocal against human rights abuses. Even during the tenure of the military backed caretaker government, Odhikar highlighted human rights violations and demanded that leaders of both major political parties be unconditionally freed. This resulted in persecution of one of its key officials who was detained and intimidated.

Furthermore, the Ministry's allegation regarding one of the members of Odhikar being appointed by the BNP Government as the Deputy Attorney General, is a poor attempt in trying to show loyalty to a political party. Odhikar reiterates that the position of the Deputy Attorney General for Bangladesh is a constitutional position and not a political one.³ The government has deliberately targeted Odhikar for being vocal against human rights violations committed by the state actors. Such statements made by responsible persons of the government only act to exacerbate the shrinking democratic space in Bangladesh.

It is to be noted that Odhikar is a member of and has been working with various regional and international human rights organisations/networks. It is both unfortunate and unfair that due to this, the incumbent government is also tagging independent foreign organisations for allegedly being biased. Bangladesh has pledged before the UN Human Rights Council to protect and promote the human rights of its citizens, including those of the human rights defenders – and the fulfilment of this pledge is mandatory.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team
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³http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=370