



16 June 2022

Joint Statement: International Democracy Advocates Denounce Odhikar's De-registration in Bangladesh

We, the undersigned international democracy advocates, strongly denounce the Government of Bangladesh's decision to deregister prominent human rights NGO Odhikar and express our unwavering solidarity with the group.

In early June 2022, Bangladesh's NGO Affairs Bureau under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office denied the group's application for renewal of registration. It accused Odhikar of publishing misleading information on extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in Bangladesh that has "seriously tarnished the image of the state to the world."

Odhikar's application for renewal of registration had been deliberately put on hold since 2014, until last week. The group has also been the subject of intimidation and repression in the past decade. Its secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and director A.S.M. Nasiruddin Elan were arbitrarily detained and charged due to their human rights work in 2013, and are currently facing trials at the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka.

Prior to the 2018 general election, the Election Commission of Bangladesh barred Odhikar from becoming an election observer due to NGO Affairs Bureau's inaction in registering the group. It also faced smear campaigns by government-aligned media that accused it of providing false information to the international community regarding elections and the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

Reporting on human rights violations does not tarnish the country's image; it is the human rights violations themselves, as well as assaults on fundamental freedoms, that do. We urge the Government of Bangladesh to uphold the right to freedom of association as protected in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party. The authorities must immediately reverse the decision to deregister Odhikar and enable it to operate freely without fear of retaliation.

Signed by,

1. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
2. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
3. Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)