



JOINT STATEMENT: Free Khan, Elan; stop attacks against HRDs in Bangladesh

The organizations represented here firmly denounce the conviction of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) Adilur Rahman Khan and Nasiruddin Elan of Odhikar in Bangladesh. On 14 September 2023, the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal sentenced Khan and Elan to two years in prison with a fine of 10,000 Bangladeshi Taka under the draconian digital security law.

The conviction of Khan and Elan is clearly a part of the government's ongoing tactic of subjecting human rights defenders, advocates, and journalists to continuous judicial harassment. This will impair Odhikar's mission of documenting human rights violations in the country.

In the wake of Odhikar's 2013 publication of a fact-finding report that brought to light extrajudicial killings during a protest, both defenders, Khan and Elan, faced earlier arbitrary detention. Khan,, was held in detention for 62 days, and Elan was held for 25 days. In June 2022, the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau denied Odhikar's application for renewal, citing that the organization's publications had "seriously tarnished the state's image on the international stage."

The government of Bangladesh has a long track record of employing the draconian digital security law to intimidate and suppress human rights defenders, journalists, and individuals expressing opposition views. According to a report by the Centre for Governance Studies, a think tank in Bangladesh, this law has been invoked in a staggering 1,029 cases. These cases

encompass 301 involving politicians and 280 targeting journalists, further highlighting the broad use of this law to suppress dissent and critical voices¹.

We demand the authorities to immediately reverse the conviction and unconditionally release of Khan and Elan. Odhikar has steadfastly led the charge in defending human rights, promoting democracy, and advocating for free and fair elections in Bangladesh. Their tireless efforts have exposed thousands of extrajudicial killings and instances of state-sponsored harassment, shedding light on critical human rights issues.

Further, we demand that the Bangladeshi government desist from its persistent and systematic harassment of human rights defenders and journalists and safeguard the fundamental principles of freedom of association and expression, which are integral to a thriving democratic society. Respecting these rights allows organizations such as Odhikar and human rights advocates to continue their vital mission in promoting human rights and democracy in Bangladesh.

We strongly stand in solidarity with Khan, Elan, the human rights defenders in Bangladesh, and freedom loving groups and institutions worldwide who persistently strive to safeguard human rights and democracy in the country.

1. Afghanistan Women Foundation
2. Asian Cultural Forum on Development Foundation (ACFOD)
3. Asian Democracy Network (ADN)
4. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
5. Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)
6. Citizen Congress Watch- Taiwan (CCW)
7. Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections- Malaysia (BERSIH)
8. Cross Cultural Foundation
9. Families of the Disappeared- Sri Lanka (FoD)
10. Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA)
11. Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)
12. General Election Observation Committee- Nepal (GEOC)
13. InterAmerican Network for Electoral Integrity and Election Observation (RedOIE)
14. Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu-Indonesia (KIPP)
15. Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)
16. Human Rights Lawyers Association (HRLA)
17. Legal Network for Truthful Elections- Philippines (LENTE)
18. National Election Observation Committee- Nepal (NEOC)
19. People Action for Free and Fair Elections- Sri Lanka (PAFFREL)
20. People's Voter Education Network-Indonesia (JPPR)
21. People's Solidarity for Participate Democracy- South Korea (PSPD)
22. Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi- Indonesia (PERLUDEM)

23. Pollwatch Foundation, Thailand
24. SEA Legal Assistance Association (SEALaw)
25. Timor Leste NGO Forum- FONFTIL
26. Transparent Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA)
27. We Watch Thailand
28. Women Caucus for Politic- Timor Leste