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A Joint Statement by Mayer Daak and Odhikar on the Occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 2021

Stop violence and discrimination against women

Dhaka, 24 November 2021: Women in Bangladesh are facing lots of hurdles and challenges in personal and public lives. Along with patriarchy, the repressive nature of the authoritarian government in Bangladesh is causing many women and girls to be victimized by law enforcement agencies, pro-government political agents etc. It is hard for general people to get justice due to a dysfunctional criminal justice system and it has become harder for women to get justice.

Due to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, many female victim-family members suddenly find themselves having to take the role of breadwinners as well as fight for justice. They often face intimidation and harassment from security agents and almost all of them are facing severe financial crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic situation only makes the situation worse. 'A UN Women report, based on survey data from 13 countries including Bangladesh shows that COVID-19 has taken away women's feelings of safety, both at home and in public space, with significant negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being.'¹ Due to COVID-19, the schools in Bangladesh closed for 18 months, which is considered as the world's longest shutdown of schools during the pandemic.² Last year there was a 13% increase in child marriages.³ The main reasons for the surge in child marriages were that girls dropped out of schools (due to their closure) and parents' loss of income during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rape, sexual harassment, dowry related violence, domestic violence and over all discrimination against women - have been pervasive in Bangladesh from even before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the situation worsened.

25 November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. To overcome the violence and discrimination against women – Odhikar believes that due to the absence of a democratic system, the representation of people, including women, are missing from all spheres of the social structure. A democratic system is very important to ensure

¹ UN Women, *Media Advisory*, (17 November 2021), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/media-advisory/2021/11/media-advisory-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-25-november>

² The Business Standard, "*Bangladesh's school closure longest in the world*", (04 September 2021), <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/education/bangladeshs-school-closure-longest-world-297793>

³ Dhaka Tribune, "*Child marriage up 13% during Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh*", (28 March 2021). <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2021/03/28/child-marriage-up-13-during-covid-19-pandemic-in-bangladesh>

women's voices are heard and women receive justice. A strong, independent criminal justice system is very important in order to get redress of victims and to set an example in the society that no one can be spared by committing violence against women. Moreover, gender equality should be addressed in the curriculum of educational institutions everywhere. The vulnerable families who experience poverty and violence should be brought under a social safety net. Last but not least – the reservations to Articles 2 and 16 (1) (c) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) needs to be withdrawn and subsequent laws in Bangladesh needs to be revised to ensure women rights everywhere.

Mayer Daak (*“Mother’s Call”*) is a platform of the families of victims of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh with the common goal of seeking the whereabouts of their loved ones and advocating for justice for the victims.

Odhikar is a registered human rights organisation based in Dhaka, Bangladesh established on 10 October 1994 by a group of human rights defenders, to monitor human rights violations and create wider awareness. It holds special consultative status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. www.odhikar.org