



A Joint Statement by Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN), Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP), International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Eleos Justice, Monash University, Maayer Daak, Odhikar, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) on the occasion of International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances 2023

BANGLADESH: Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable

Bangkok/ Dhaka/ Geneva/ Hong Kong/Kuala Lumpur/ Manila/ Melbourne/ Paris/ Washington, D.C.; 29 August 2023: We, the undersigned organisations, are gravely concerned over the continued commission of [enforced disappearances](#) in Bangladesh and the [denial of access to justice](#) for the victims. The acts of enforced disappearance occur with impunity in Bangladesh and have become an [institutionalised practice of repression](#) in violation of Articles 9 and 16 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Articles 31, 32 and 33 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. The government uses enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress political movements and silence dissenting voices, creating a climate of fear in the country.

Government agencies have continued to subject enforced disappearance to members of opposition parties and dissidents [for the past decade and a half](#). In recent times, [“short-term” disappearances](#) have occurred, where law enforcement officers have later shown the disappeared persons as arrested on various [criminal charges](#), including under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009; Explosive Substances Act, 1908; and Digital Security Act, 2018. Furthermore, disappeared persons are reportedly being [tortured](#) while in custody.

According to Odhikar, from January to June 2023, at least 16 persons were subjected to enforced disappearance. Among them, 15 persons were later resurfaced alive, while information regarding one victim could not be ascertained. Most of the disappeared persons are known to be [opposition party activists and dissidents](#) who have participated in [anti-government protests](#) in the lead up to the parliamentary elections in January 2024. Among the disappeared victims, some persons were released after being kept incommunicado in undisclosed facilities and many were handed over to the police and/or produced before a court after being implicated in cases of terrorism or arson. This has now become a common pattern of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. The police usually [refuse to register complaints](#) or reports of the crime of enforced disappearances and instead [harass](#) the victims’ families.

Some disappeared victims have been labelled as [“Islamic militants”](#). For example, a madrassa teacher, his wife and their six-month-old son were allegedly forcibly disappeared for a month before being produced in a Dhaka court in an Islamic militancy case. On 30 April 2023, they were picked up by plainclothes law enforcement officers from SA Sarkar Road of

Mymensingh Town and put into a van displaying a police sticker. When their relatives went to the police station to file a complaint, the police refused to register it. The family searched for them at police stations, and the offices of the Detective Branch (DB) of police and the Rapid Action Battalion. However, no state agency acknowledged their arrest. A month after their disappearance, on 30 May, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit showed them as arrested. Madrassa teacher Ikramul Haque Milan and his wife Dewan Faria Afrin Anika are [currently detained](#).

Family members of the victims of enforced disappearances have been subjected to [intimidation and harassment](#) by members of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. In recent months, members of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) and the DB repeatedly visited the houses of victims of enforced disappearances throughout the country, interrogating the family members of the disappeared and asking them various questions mostly relating to the whereabouts of their missing relative. The government officials also [inquired](#) about the victims' families' income sources and collected their National Identity cards and other documents.

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the Bangladeshi government to put an end to enforced disappearances and harassment of victims' families. All perpetrators must be brought to justice. Bangladesh should also ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, recognise the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and adopt national legislation criminalising enforced disappearances.

Bangladesh should give UN human rights experts, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, access to the country to assess the situation of enforced disappearances to ensure justice for victims. We urge members of the UN Human Rights Council to call on the government of Bangladesh to conduct thorough, impartial, and transparent investigations into all allegations of enforced disappearances, hold those responsible accountable and deliver justice to the victims.

Organisations signed:

1. [Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network](#)
2. [Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances](#)
3. [Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development](#)
4. [Asian Human Rights Commission](#)
5. [Capital Punishment Justice Project](#)
6. [Eleos Justice, Monash University \(Australia\)](#)
7. [International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances](#)
8. [International Federation for Human Rights](#)
9. [Maayer Daak](#)
10. [Odhikar](#)
11. [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights](#)
12. [World Organisation Against Torture](#)