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Maayer
Daak



A Joint Statement by the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN), the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Capital Punishment Justice Project, the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Maayer Daak, Odhikar, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) in commemoration of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances in 2024

[Joint Statement] Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh: Government must hold perpetrators accountable, ensure justice and reparation for victims, survivors, and their families

Bangkok/ Dhaka/ Geneva/ Kuala Lumpur/ Manila/ Melbourne/ Paris/ Washington, D.C.; (29 August 2024) – In commemoration of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on 30 August, we—the undersigned organisations—express solidarity with the families of the disappeared in Bangladesh and across the world.

Under the deposed Sheikh Hasina administration, Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies and security forces systematically committed enforced disappearances.

Enforced disappearances were used to suppress political opposition, silence dissent, and create a climate of fear in the country. In the past decade, families of those who had been subjected to enforced disappearance were systematically denied legal redress.

Secret Detention Centres

As human rights defenders and families have pointed out, victims of enforced disappearance were detained in secret detention centres like the *Aynaghar* (The House of Mirrors), which is reportedly located in Dhaka Cantonment and operated by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the intelligence agency of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. Other victims were held in similar detention centres across the country operated by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Detective Branch of the police.

The recent release of three disappeared victims from the *Aynaghar* after years of arbitrary and incommunicado detention only confirms the long-denied allegations of enforced disappearances committed under the deposed Hasina administration.

In December 2021, the US imposed sanctions on the RAB and several of its officers due to serious human rights violations. Shortly after, incidents of enforced disappearance somewhat declined. Most victims who have only disappeared for short periods resurfaced and were subsequently arrested on various criminal charges. However, in July 2024, Bangladesh witnessed a new worrying pattern of enforced disappearances. During the initial stages of the student-led quota reform movement, many student protesters were subjected to brief disappearances.

According to data collected by Odhikar, between January 2009 and June 2024, 709 people were subjected to enforced disappearances by Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies and

security forces. Among them, 471 were surfaced alive and/or produced in court. Meanwhile, 83 victims were found dead, with some of them allegedly caught in “crossfire” with security forces. To date, 155 people remain missing.

In Bangladesh, victims of enforced disappearances mostly include academics, journalists, dissenting voices, and political activists belonging to the opposition. Odhikar’s data show that majority of enforced disappearances were committed by the RAB, the Detective Branch of the police, and intelligence agencies.

Call to action

We welcome the interim government’s decision to form a Commission of Inquiry to conduct a thorough, independent, and impartial investigation into allegations of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. We expect the Commission to publish its findings and recommendations with utmost transparency.

We also welcome today’s decision by the interim government to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It should now enact a domestic law that criminalises enforced disappearances and recognise the mandate of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

We urge the interim government to immediately and unconditionally release all persons who may still be held in illegal secret detention centres.

We also call on the interim government to extend a standing invitation to all Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Likewise, the interim government should facilitate the official country visit of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

The interim government should take concrete steps to hold perpetrators of enforced disappearances to account. No perpetrator shall be exempted from the rule of law, including law enforcement agencies and especially those with command responsibilities.

Last but not the least, the interim government should strive to promptly deliver justice and reparation to all victims and survivors—including their families and loved ones—of enforced disappearances.

Organisations signed:

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