

Bangladesh: Stop Witch-Hunt against Odhikar

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 25 May 2016)-The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply concerned about the notice served to Odhikar, a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA in Bangladesh, by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in a manner aimed to intimidate and humiliate Odhikar.

The notice was issued on 18 May 2016 under sections 19 and 20 of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004, which Odhikar received on 22 May 2016 at 5-30 p.m. The notice alleged Odhikar of money laundering. The ACC has alleged that Euro 97,000 has been deposited as 'remittance' to the Standard Chartered Bank account of Odhikar.

In its reply to the ACC, Odhikar categorically denies the charges and established that the actual amount available in the account is Euro 97,501.07, which is part of a contribution made by the European Union (EU) to help Odhikar implement the 'Education on the Convention against Torture and OPCAT Awareness Program in Bangladesh'. It was credited to Odhikar's account with the Standard Chartered Bank with the permission of the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB). Odhikar made some initial withdrawals to implement the above mentioned EU project.

However, the NGOAB revoked its approval and that reflects the now pending amount in the bank. This arbitrary decision has seriously hampered the implementation of the project.

FORUM-ASIA condemns the systematic intimidation, harassment and attempted defamation of Odhikar by levelling baseless allegations of money laundering. It strongly urges the Government of Bangladesh to stop harassing civil society organisations, and abide by its human rights commitments, which includes unhindered space for civil society organisations. FORUM-ASIA also calls on the international community, including the EU, to take all measures necessary to end the persecution of civil society members in Bangladesh.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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