

BANGLADESH: Civil society organisations come together to demand the release of Adilur Rahman Khan and Nasiruddin Elan

On 3 October 2023, civil society organisations (CSOs) working across different parts of Asia joined forces to call for the immediate release of Bangladeshi human rights defenders Adilur Rahman Khan and Nasiruddin Elan.

Khan and Elan are part of Odhikar, a watchdog for civil and political rights abuses in Bangladesh. Odhikar conducts fact-finding missions on human rights violations, including cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, and violence against women and minorities.

Through an open letter submitted to the Bangladesh Embassy in Indonesia, the Asian Forum on Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)—alongside the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), *Lembaga Studi & Advokasi Masyarakat* (ELSAM), the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Imparsial, Migrant CARE, Independent Election Observation Committee (KIPP), and SAFENet—expressed dismay and opposition against the arrest of Khan and Elan.

Together, we gathered in front of the Bangladesh Embassy to publicly express our collective appeals to the Government of Bangladesh: (1) to guarantee the right to freedom of opinion and expression of Khan, Elan, and all human rights defenders in the country; and (2) to immediately release Khan and Elan since both human rights defenders are protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a State party.

Khan and Elan were imprisoned on 14 September 2023 for documenting and reporting 61 incidents of extrajudicial killings in 2013 allegedly committed by law enforcement officers in Bangladesh.

Both were detained shortly after the report was launched. They experienced 10 years of judicial proceedings. Meanwhile, Odhikar and its other staff members also faced judicial harassment. Since 2014, Odhikar has had difficulties renewing its organisational registration and accessing funding. On 5 June 2022, Odhikar's registration was completely revoked.

Since the incident, the Government of Bangladesh has not only shut down Odhikar, but has also created an atmosphere of fear among other human rights organisations in the country.

Even though Odhikar has reported on crimes allegedly committed by law enforcement officers, the government has never initiated official investigations. Likewise, the government ignored Odhikar's fact-based recommendations on how to improve the condition of human rights protection in the country.

Together, FORUM-ASIA and other CSOs are urging the Government of Bangladesh to respect the right of every citizen to access information, protest peacefully, and express opinions as guaranteed by the State's Constitution.

'The invaluable work that organisations like Odhikar are doing to shed light on extreme human rights abuses are protected by international law. Elan and Khan's criminalisation is therefore a direct breach of Bangladesh's obligation to respect fundamental freedoms that are essential for establishing a thriving civic space. The Government of Bangladesh must immediately and unconditionally release Elan and Khan. The government must allow human rights defenders to carry on with their work without fear of reprisals,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

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Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan (KontraS)
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI)
Perhimpunan Bantuan Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia (PBHI)
Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu (KIPP)
Migrant CARE
Lembaga Studi & Advokasi Masyarakat (ELSAM)
Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)
SAFENet
Imparsial
The Asia Alliance Against Torture (A3T)