



**Maayer
Daak**



A Joint Statement by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Maayer Daak, and Odhikar on International Women's Day 2024

Bangladesh needs a democratic system and a robust judiciary to protect the rights of women and girls

Bangkok/Dhaka/Manila/Paris (8 March 2024)—The theme for this year's International Women's Day, "Invest in women: Accelerate progress," deeply resonates with the current situation in Bangladesh. Investing in women and girls means safeguarding their well-being, protecting their rights, providing inclusive economic opportunities, and promoting gender equality in all spheres of life..

In Bangladesh, the prevalence of violence and discrimination against women and girls is alarmingly widespread. Domestic violence, dowry-related abuse, rape, and sexual harassment still persist. Women and girls face discrimination and hardship. The families left behind by victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings endure significant financial hardships and face threats from law enforcement agencies and government agents.

The country's judicial system remains unsupportive towards women.

Women and girls often encounter obstacles in seeking justice, including intimidation from perpetrators and corrupt judicial officers. Lengthy and politicised legal procedures commonly dissuade women from going to the courts.

Bangladesh's reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also pose significant challenges to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality in the country. Laws that are biased against women are yet to be amended. Likewise, the law on sexual harassment is weak and provides very little in the way of actually defining the offence.

For a decade and a half, Bangladesh has been governed by an authoritarian regime.

The lack of democratic governance paired with the enforcement of harsh laws that suppress dissenting voices prevents women from exercising their right to freely express their opinions and highlight their issues. During protests, women are at great risk of police brutality and harassment committed by no other than government agents.. The absence of democracy has also stifled the emergence of female leadership at the grassroots level.

In Bangladesh, the protection, promotion, and advancement of women's rights can only be fully realised in the presence of a solid foundation of democracy, effective governance, and the unwavering commitment of political leaders to champion and foster gender equity, women empowerment, and inclusion.

We are calling for the protection of all women human rights defenders who are seeking truth, justice, and accountability.

Organisations signed:

1. [Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances](#)
2. [Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development](#)
3. [International Federation for Human Rights](#)
4. [Maayer Daak](#)
5. [Odhikar](#)