



Bangladesh – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 30 May 2011

Information on an NGO called Odhijar. What assistance do Odhijar provide to members of the public who are victims of police brutality and/or torture and/or harassment?

A *Human Rights Watch* report, in a section titled “Methodology”, refers to an NGO called Odhikar as follows:

“Odhikar is a Dhaka-based human rights monitoring group that collates information about human rights violations from media reports and also its network of local human rights defenders. It also conducts some fact-finding missions. It submits updated information on human rights issues to the authorities and to the media, and has long campaigned for an end to BSF abuses against Bangladeshi nationals.” (Human Rights Watch (9 December 2010) *“Trigger Happy” – Excessive Use of Force by Indian Troops at the Bangladesh Border*, p.10)

The opening paragraph of the most recent annual human rights report published by *Odhikar* states:

“Odhikar is committed to upholding human rights by promoting civil, political, economic, social, cultural and collective values that constitute a cohesive and just community. Odhikar monitors and creates awareness about the obligations of the Government prescribed by the national Constitution as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Socio, Economic and Cultural Rights, the Convention on Torture, CEDAW and other relevant principles.” (Odhikar (1 January 2011) *Human Rights Report 2010: Odhikar Report on Bangladesh*, p.2)

The Introduction of this report states:

“In 2010, Odhikar also came under the harsh scrutiny of the government. On April 28, 2009, the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Office of the Prime Minister authorised Odhikar to carry out programmes relating to the prevention of torture as well as the protection of human rights under the project titled, ‘Human Rights Defenders Training and Advocacy Programme in Bangladesh’. Under this project, the organisation held a ‘Tribunal against Torture’ in June 2009. Later, the NGO Affairs Bureau sent Odhikar a letter dated August 17, 2009 directing it to close down its torture related programme, citing reservations expressed by the Ministry of Home Affairs as the reason. In response, Odhikar filed a writ petition before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. On October 11, 2009, the High Court Division issued a Rule Nisi against the Government and suspended the order directing Odhikar to close down its programme. As a result, Odhikar completed its programme on torture in December 2009.” (ibid, p.4)

An appeal issued by the *World Organisation Against Torture*, in a paragraph headed "Description of the situation", states:

"The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about continuing acts of harassment against the members of Odhikar, a human rights organisation composed of lawyers, university professors, journalists, social and development activists committed to human rights. According to the information received, numerous acts of harassment have been recently taking place against several members of Odhikar, particularly in the aftermath of Odhikar's 3rd 'Annual Human Rights Defenders Conference' organised on March 12 and 13, 2011 in Dhaka. Since March 14, 2011, members of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) reportedly resumed their activities of close monitoring on Odhikar and its members, in particular Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan its Secretary and member of OMCT General Assembly." (World Organisation Against Torture (22 March 2011) *Bangladesh: Continuing acts of harassment against members of Odhikar [BGD 001 / 0311 / OBS 039]*)

A newsletter published by the *National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections*, in a paragraph headed "ANFREL calls for end to harassment of Bangladesh human rights organization", states:

"In a letter to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) calls attention to the harassment of members of Odhikar – an organization in Bangladesh composed of lawyers, university professors, journalists, social and development activists committed to human rights. Odhikar is one of ANFREL's member-organizations. 'On multiple occasions in the past two weeks, unknown figures apparently connected to the government have appeared outside Odhikar's office and Mr. Khan's (Odhikar Secretary Advocate Adilur Rahman Khan's) home. They have harassed staff, followed Mr. Khan, and demanded personal information about Mr. Khan as well as the records of Odhikar. Their questioning included asking very specific questions about Mr. Khan's family, questions no doubt intended to intimidate and scare him into discontinuing his work,' the letter said. According to reports, acts of harassment against members of the organization have taken place particularly after Odhikar's third Annual Human Rights Defenders conference held in the capital Dhaka early this month." (National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) (28 March 2011) *Election Monitor, Vol 2, No. 5*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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