

Joint statement

Bangladesh: Call for the release of two human rights defenders unjustly detained

72 human rights organisations stand in solidarity with **Adilur Rahman Khan** and **ASM Nasiruddin Elan**, two prominent Bangladeshi human rights activists from the Odhikar group, after they were sentenced to two years' imprisonment as retaliation for their human rights work.

On 14 September 2023, Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of Odhikar, as well as a member of the OMCT General Assembly and FIDH Secretary General, and ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director of Odhikar, were [sentenced](#) to two years in prison and a fine, following ten years of relentless judicial harassment. The two men were remanded at Dhaka Central Jail. Khan and Elan's lawyers plan to appeal the decision once the court has issued its written judgment, which could take months.

The case was launched after Odhikar, a member of the OMCT SOS-Torture Network and of the FIDH, published an investigative report documenting extrajudicial killings by the State in response to a protest in May 2013. In 2013, Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan were [arbitrarily detained for 62 and 25 days](#) respectively before being released on bail. Since then, they have been subjected to [continuous judicial harassment](#), with Bangladeshi courts repeatedly dismissing their requests without serious legal grounds, prosecuting witnesses without the consent of the defendants' lawyer or allowing them enough time to prepare for cross-examination, in clear violation of the internationally recognised right to a fair trial.

The Bangladeshi authorities accelerated hearings in their case following the adoption of [US sanctions](#) against the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a notoriously abusive paramilitary organisation, and its leaders in December 2021, as they blamed human rights groups such as Odhikar for this outcome. Over the years, Khan and Elan, as well as Odhikar, have been subjected to smear campaigns, criticised, and demonised by the government for their human rights work. Odhikar's registration was finally [denied](#) for renewal in June 2022 after being pending for eight years.

In Bangladesh, human rights violations committed by the security forces, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture, remain rampant throughout the country, with absolute impunity. Instead of prosecuting and punishing those who document and expose human rights violations, the government should investigate and hold to account the perpetrators of these violations.

The harassment of Odhikar has been widely condemned by the [United Nations Special Procedures](#), the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [UN Secretary-General in its latest report on reprisals](#), and the [European Parliament](#).

We call on the authorities of Bangladesh to immediately and unconditionally release Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan, to overturn their convictions and to put an end to the judicial harassment to which they are subjected.

We also call on the international community to take a firm stand in support of human rights defenders in Bangladesh and to demand the release of all those behind bars as retaliation for their legitimate and unflinching work.

We stand in solidarity with Adilur and Elan.

Inspired by their courage, commitment, and resilience, we will continue to fight until they are freed and can continue their vital human rights work without fear of threat.

Signatories:

1. ACAT Belgium - Belgium
2. ACAT España/Catalunya- Acción de los Cristianos para la Abolición de la Tortura - Spain
3. ACAT Germany (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) - Germany
4. Advocacy Forum - Nepal
5. Al-Haq - Palestine
6. Alliance pour l'Universalité des Droits Fondamentaux (AUDF) - Democratic Republic of Congo
7. ALTSEAN-Burma - Myanmar
8. Asia Alliance Against Torture (A3T) - Indonesia
9. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) - Thailand
10. Association Nigérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ANDDH) - Niger
11. Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) - India
12. Center for Prisoners' Rights Japan (CPR) - Japan
13. Centre d'Action Sociale, de Réhabilitation et de Réadaptation pour les Victimes de la Torture et de la Guerre - SOHRAM - CASRA - Türkiye
14. Centre de Documentation et de Formation sur les Droits de l'Homme (CDFDH) - Togo
15. Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH) - Honduras
16. Changement Social Bénin - Benin
17. Coalition Tunisienne Contre la Peine de Mort - Tunisia
18. Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas José Alvear Restrepo CAJAR - Colombia
19. Collectif des Associations Contre l'Impunité au Togo (CACIT) - Togo
20. Comisión Ecuánica de Derechox Humanos (CEDHU) - Ecuador
21. Comité Vietnam pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (VCHR) - Vietnam
22. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) - India
23. Defender Center for Human Rights - Libya
24. DITSHWANELO - The Botswana Centre for Human Rights - Botswana
25. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) - Egypt
26. Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC) - Ethiopia
27. Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany - Germany
28. Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (INREDH) - Ecuador
29. Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) - Greece
30. Human Rights Association (IHD) - Türkiye
31. Human Rights Centre ZMINA - Ukraine
32. Human Rights Defenders Alert ~ India (HRDA) - India
33. Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan" - Kyrgyzstan
34. Humanist Union of Greece - Greece
35. Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) - Azerbaijan
36. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) - France
37. Justiça Global - Brazil
38. JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France (JMBF) - France
39. KARAPATAN - Philippines
40. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR) - Kazakhstan
41. Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG) - Ukraine
42. League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) - Iran
43. Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH) - Lebanon
44. Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos A.C (Limeddh) - Mexico
45. Ligue Algérienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme - Algeria
46. Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH) - Tunisia
47. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) - Maldives
48. Manushya Foundation - Thailand & Laos

49. Martin Ennals Foundation - Switzerland
50. Minority Rights Group - Greece
51. Mouvement Lao pour les Droits de l'Homme (MLDH) - Laos
52. Musawi - Pakistan
53. Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) - Norway
54. Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (ODHR) - France
55. Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP) - Venezuela
56. OPEN ASIA|Armanshahr Foundation - Afghanistan
57. Organisation Contre la Torture en Tunisie - Tunisia
58. Palestinian Human Rights Organisation (PHRO) - Lebanon
59. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) - Republic of Korea
60. People's Watch - India
61. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) - Philippines
62. Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea) - Venezuela
63. Promo LEX Association - Republic of Moldova
64. Sectoral Transparency Alliance on Natural Resource Governance in Cebu, Inc. (STANCe) - Philippines
65. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) - Malaysia
66. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression - Syria
67. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) - Philippines
68. The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) - Indonesia
69. Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) - South Korea
70. Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos - Guatemala (UDEFEQUA) - Guatemala
71. Union Arabe-Aramiens en Haute Mésopotamie - Türkiye
72. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) - Switzerland