



**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, must withdraw CEDAW reservations

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. Regrettably, gender-based wage discrimination, sexual harassment in workplaces and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), and insufficient provision of healthcare undermine the rights of the women workers.

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 due to disappearances of the breadwinners and face threats from law enforcement agencies and government agents.

The country's judicial system remains hostile towards women. Women and girls often encounter obstacles in seeking justice, including intimidation from perpetrators and corrupt judicial officers. Lengthy legal procedures that are often subjected to political interference commonly dissuade women from going to the courts.

Bangladesh's reservations to Articles 2 and 16.1(c) 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. The articles mandate that state parties to the Convention ensure gender equality in their domestic legislation, repeal all discriminatory provisions in laws, and guarantee equal rights to entitlements regarding marriage and divorce by establishing parity between men and women.

Laws that are biased against women and those that do not afford full protection, are yet to be amended. For example, the Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, a primary law against violence, does not contain a detailed, comprehensive definition of sexual harassment and the law on rape is riddled with loopholes.

For the past 15 years, 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 sexual harassment and gender-based violence committed by government agents. The absence of democracy has also stifled the emergence of female leadership at the grassroots level.

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. Bangladesh needs protection, not persecution, of human rights defenders, especially the women who seek justice for human rights abuses, including cases of enforced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial executions.

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](#)