Dhaka: March 06, 2020

# STATEMENT TO COMMEMORATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY

Odhikar is observing International Women's Day on 8th March 2020, with deep concern, as women in Bangladesh are subjected to unchecked, widespread gender-based violence.
Domestic abuse against women are a routine phenomenon and forms of discrimination against them are prevalent in every segment of the society. Rape, dowry demands and related violence and sexual harassment continue at an alarming rate. Both women and girls are targets.

Women's freedoms of movement and association, as guaranteed in the Constitution and in international human rights law, are being violated on a daily basis. They are facing sexual harassment, insecurity and social barriers due to existing patriarchal norms and the melt down of the socio cultural structure.

Rape has become rampant. Data shows that female children (below the age of 18) who have been subjected to this heinous crime, are double in number to adult women. According to the statistics of Odhikar between January and December 2019 a total of 1080 women and children had been raped. Among them, 330 were women, 737 were girls below the age of 18, while the age of 13 persons were not reported. Of the women, 150 were victims of gang rape, 10 were killed after being raped and two committed suicide. Out of the 737 girls, 137 were victims of gang rape, 32 were killed after being raped and five committed suicide. Furthermore, 149 women and girls were also the victim of attempted rape.

Many women are facing physical and mental abuse and even death in the hands of their husbands and in laws, over illegal demands of dowry. According to this organization's report, a total of 48 women were killed and 55 were physically abused for refusing/ non payment of dowry in 2019.

According to Odhikar's statistics in 2019 a total of 189 women and children were victims of sexual violence. Of them, 14 committed suicide, six were killed, 21 were injured, 34 were assaulted, two were abducted and 112 were victims of stalking/sexual harassment. Women are

also facing sexual harassment in public transport and work places. Reports alleged that the ruling party leaders and activists are involved in many incidents of violence against women. Women are still not safe in private and public spheres.

Many of these women do not seek justice, as they do not file cases fearing social stigma, a lengthy legal process and a culture of impunity. In most cases, witnesses are reluctant to come to the court as they are not being protected by the prevailing system. At the same time, due to the power and position of many perpetrators, an overwhelming majority of the cases are settled out of court.

Moreover female participation in politics in Bangladesh has become meager due reprisals, persecution and insecurity and in the absence of rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and rights to freedom of expression and opinion.

The dysfunctional criminal justice system, a prevalent culture of impunity and lack of political will are the main hindrances to bringing the perpetrator of such crimes to trial. Furthermore, there is no visible campaign in the print and electronic media on the issue of violence against women. It needs to be stressed here that it's very important to change the bias mindset towards women and the state machinery needs to be constantly reminded that women have similar and equal rights as men, as guaranteed in the Constitution of Bangladesh. All concerned need strive to ensure that gender equality is enforced.

Odhikar expressed its deep concern, highlighting that increasing violence against women has a detrimental effect on women's human rights and political participation. Without ensuring a safe environment for women, enhancing women's empowerment and gender equality, it is next to impossible for a state to develop and flourish. On this day, Odhikar also remembers and honors the women who sacrificed their lives for women's rights and justice all over the world.

The Odhikar Team