

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 unfailing 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.](#)