C/2024/1764

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Human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar

European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar (2023/2833(RSP))

(C/2024/1764)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the human rights situation in Bangladesh has severely deteriorated, including with regard to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, freedom of expression and workers' rights;

B. whereas Odhikar, a leading human rights organisation, has faced over a decade of harassment and criminalisation, including being deregistered as an NGO; whereas two Odhikar leaders, Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan, face trumped-up criminal charges, with a ruling delivered on 14 September 2023; whereas the failure to follow due process in the case has drawn widespread condemnation;

C. whereas UN bodies and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have condemned the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and Bangladeshi judiciary for persistently intimidating and harassing human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society activists, including when such figures engage with the UN;

1. Expresses deep concern at the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh; insists that the GoB restore a safe and enabling environment for NGOs, HRDs, activists and religious minorities and uphold the country's international commitments, particularly under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

2. Deplores the prison sentence handed down on 14 September 2023 by the Cyber tribunal of Dhaka against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan; urges the GoB to immediately and unconditionally quash this sentence and reinstate the registration of Odhikar, and to ensure that civil society organisations can access approved foreign grants;

3. Encourages the GoB to cooperate with the UN on establishing a specialised mechanism to investigate the allegations of enforced disappearances; insists that international observers be permitted to attend court hearings;

4. Recalls that an Everything but Arms (EBA) enhanced engagement process remains ongoing with Bangladesh owing to its serious violations of international conventions; is concerned that the Odhikar case is a regrettable step back, bearing consequences as to whether EBA preferences continue to apply to Bangladesh;

5. Is appalled by the violent murder of the trade unionist Shahidul Islam in June 2023 and calls for those responsible to be brought to justice;

6. Urges the GoB to comply with core International Labour Organization standards and implement its labour roadmap, as per its commitment within the enhanced engagement process;

7. Calls again on the GoB to repeal the Digital Security Act and encourages it to adopt cybersecurity legislation that fully complies with international standards;

8. Is concerned by the mass arrests of opposition representatives and the excessive use of force against protesters in Bangladesh; calls on the GoB to guarantee the conditions for free, fair and participatory elections in 2024; underlines that unhindered domestic and international observation is a key international standard;

9. Calls on the European External Action Service, the EU Delegation and the Member States' embassies in Bangladesh to raise human rights concerns at the highest levels and increase their support for local HRDs, union workers and journalists under attack, including by monitoring trials;

10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh.