



25 November 2007

## **Odhikar Press Release**

### **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women**

25 November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Odhikar held a meeting today to discuss the situation of women in Bangladesh. The meeting was presided by ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Acting Director of Odhikar. Dr. Saira Rahman Khan founder member of Odhikar and an Assistant Professor of School of Law of BRAC University was the main discussant.

ASM Nasiruddin Elan said violence against women is a common phenomenon all over the world as well as in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there are many laws to protect women's' rights but practical access to justice is not yet available. Poor and oppressed women find it difficult to get justice in our class based society.

Commenting on the laws, Dr. Saira Rahman Khan said that the special laws present for the protection of women have some serious loopholes and some punishments that come across as too extreme. Extreme punishments often discourage the legal system from finding men guilty of the crimes of which they are charged. For example, in the case of the Nari-O Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain of 2000, both the crimes of attempt to cause death by rape and the attempt to cause hurt by rape carry a term of life imprisonment. First of all, both the offences were 'attempts' and secondly one was to cause death and one to cause hurt. Again, an over all study will show that capital punishment has also been used in a prolific manner. Dr. Khan also commented that it would have probably been better to amend the existing Penal Code, which already contains provisions for punishing a majority of the offences housed in these special laws. In concluding, she commented that laws are not enough. They have to be just to both victim and offender and effectively implemented. She also said that there is the dire need to have a special provision for the protection of victims and witnesses.

Taskin Fahmina, documentation coordinator of Odhikar mentioned that as per Odhikar documentation this year from 1 January to 24 November a total of 403 women and girls were the victims of rape and 106 women and girls were the victims of acid throwing. A number of women are the victims of dowry and domestic violence in Bangladesh each year. She added, social awareness, proper education, economic emancipation due process of law can help to combat the violence against women. Recently, Bangladesh was battered by devastating cyclone Sidr and this time many women, especially young girls, have become vulnerable to trafficking and sexual abuse. Therefore, the Government and NGO's should work together to protect potential victims.

Kaneez Fatema, Program Officer; Tasnuva Islam, Documentation Officer; Korban Ali Anik Fact-Finding Officer of Odhikar pointed out the discrimination on working women at home and work place and emphasized on the women empowerment to fight the violence against women.

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