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THE PREDICAMENT OF  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
ACTIVISTS IN BANGLADESH

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## Who Defends the Defenders?

The Predicament of Human Rights Activists In Bangladesh

July 2023

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# Executive Summary

Human Rights Defenders, that is, those who gather and report human rights abuses, endeavor to stop such abuses, and ensure that everyone has access to their universal rights, are facing a perilous situation in Bangladesh. In the past decade, along with the overall deterioration of the human rights situation in the country, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are being subjected to threats, harassment, intimidation, and persecution from state and non-state actors. Legal and extra-legal measures are being used by the government and state agencies to deter the Defenders from their efforts to uphold the inalienable rights of the people. The United Nations, since the adoption of the resolution in the General Assembly in 1998, has been underscoring the need for the protection of the HRDs and reminded the states through the 2015 resolution to refrain from, and ensure adequate protection from, any act of intimidation or reprisal against human rights defenders. Although Bangladesh voted in favor of both resolutions, it has yet to put in any legal safeguard measures for the HRDs. On the contrary, the actions of the government, the ruling party, its supporters, and state agencies, have created an adverse situation for both HRDs and Human Rights Organizations. Laws inimical to the independence of the HROs and HRDs have been legislated and used. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a constitutionally mandated entity, has not lived up to expectations in protecting the rights of the victims and the HRDs. Its structure and composition do not incorporate the voices of human rights activists, nor allow it to act as a powerful independent body. The judiciary's role in protecting the victims of Human Rights violations, HROs, and HRDs has been limited, at its best. This study explored the challenges faced by the HRDs through interviews of leaders of national HROs, and the head of the NHRC, and conducting a survey of 50 grassroots Human Rights defenders from 36 districts of the country.

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The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a constitutionally mandated entity, has not lived up to expectations in protecting the rights of the victims and the HRDs.

Representatives of the national HROs and grassroots HRDs have painted a poor state of the human rights situation and identified the following challenges:

- The overwhelming majority, that is 86%, of the Human Rights Defenders at the grassroots level, have said that they face various obstacles in their work as a defender.
- The Human Rights situation in the country is poor and worsening, making Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Organizations' work perilous; more than 46% of the survey respondents have rated the situation worst or near worst on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the worst). 62% of the respondents rated the overall environment for their work as 'very unsafe and unsafe'.
- The obstacles/threats/intimidation/persecution the HRDs face come from sources connected to the state, such as law enforcement agencies, state intelligence agencies, government officials. These three sources have been identified as sources by 42.3% of respondents. Ruling party activists are identified as the source by 23.7% of respondents.
- Existing laws, such as the Digital Security Act 2018, are widely used to intimidate and persecute the HRDs, according to the leaders of the National Human Rights Organizations.
- Family members of the HRDs, in more than 10% of instances, face intimidation and threats according to the responses of the grassroots HRDs
- Threats/ harassment/ intimidation/persecution severely impact the life and work of the Human Rights Defenders forcing a significant number of them to scale down their work (28.6%) or leave their areas (10.7%).
- Reporting to the authorities about the threats and harassment by the victims, including the HRDs, is low (36% do not report) due to a lack of trust in the legal system (20.5%), fear of retribution from the perpetrators (20.5%), absence of proper investigations (17.8%) and confidence in investigative entities (15.1%).
- Involvements of state actors, relations between perpetrators and the government, and the authority's bias towards perpetrators are also cited as reasons for underreporting.
- Although Human Rights Organizations are the primary source of support to the HRDs, their support, and assistance are considered inadequate by 36% of the grassroots HRDs.

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The Human Rights situation in the country is poor and worsening, making Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Organizations' work perilous.

## Recommendations

Drawing on the available studies, interviews of the leaders of the various HROs, and the survey of grassroots HRDs, the following recommendations are made to improve the Human Rights situation and defend the Human Rights Defenders in Bangladesh.

- The government must explicitly express the political will and uphold the promise to improve the human rights situation in the country, and the adversarial attitude of the government toward Human Rights Defenders should be shunned.
- The government must stop all forms of harassment of HROs and HRDs using various state agencies.
- The government should, in consultation with the HROs, legislate laws to protect the HRDs based on the UN resolutions of 1998 and 2015.
- The government must create mechanisms, especially at the local levels involving local administration, which will help the HRDs work with the victims of human rights violations and allows the HRDs to report the hindrances and adversities they face including maligning them with spurious allegations.
- The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 must be amended and vague terms such as 'anti-state activities' and 'inimical' or 'derogatory' comments about the Constitution and constitutional institutions of Bangladesh should be deleted or clarified to stop using the law against NGOs, particularly the HROs.
- The National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) structure and composition should be reformed to act as an independent body, represent the voices of the HRDs, and have the power to investigate and act on incidents of all human rights violations, including those perpetrated by law enforcement agencies and other state actors.
- Independence of the judiciary must be established, and the judiciary's impartiality should be ensured.
- Draconian laws such as the Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA) must be repealed immediately.
- Existing laws that protect citizens' rights and punish the perpetrators, irrespective of their political identity and affiliations with the state, must be enforced.
- Law enforcement agencies should be provided with training about Human Rights including laws protecting the rights of citizens, and they should be subjected to independent investigation in case of allegations of Human Rights violations.
- Efforts must be made to create awareness among the public about Human Rights, including incorporating lessons about the fundamental rights of citizens in the educational curriculum.
- HROs should enhance their support mechanism for the HRDs, document incidents of violations, and make this information available to the public.

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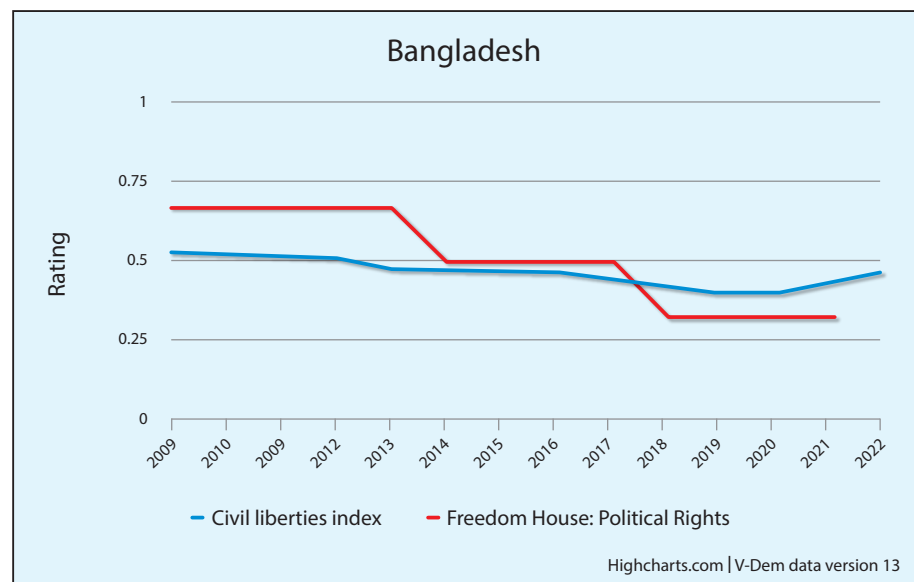
**The government must stop all forms of harassment of HROs and HRDs using various state agencies.**



# 1. Introduction

In the past decade, Bangladesh has witnessed serious erosion of the human rights situation. According to Freedom House reports, the country's political and civil rights have not only remained low but also decreased significantly (Figure 1). Reports of various international human rights organizations and of the United States Department of State have documented various aspects of the increasing instances of rights violations. Although incidents of human rights violations and the increasingly authoritarian tendency of the government have been discussed in various forums for almost a decade, the issue gained salience after the sanctions imposed by the United States on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and seven of its former and current officials (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2021). Sanctions were imposed on RAB and selected officials for egregious violations of human rights. However, the Bangladesh government has repeatedly denied any human rights violations including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the country (The Daily Star 2021; The Daily Star 2021a).

The Bangladesh government has repeatedly denied any human rights violations including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the country.



**Figure 1: Civil liberties and political rights in Bangladesh, 2009-2022**

Source: V-Dem Database, version 13, 2023

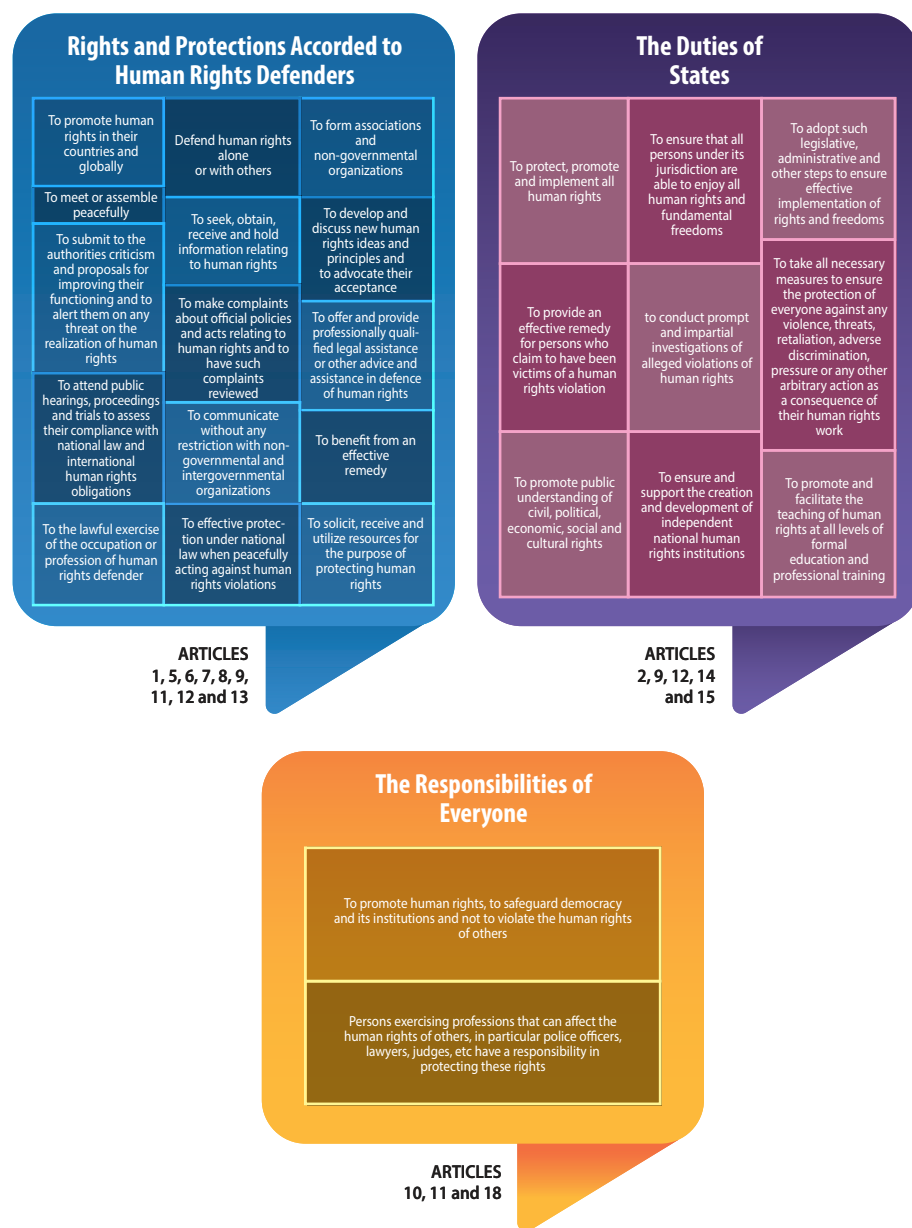
As the overall human rights situation deteriorated in the country, national and international media have reported harassment, intimidation, and persecution of human rights defenders, that is those who gather and report human rights abuses, endeavor to stop such abuses and make sure that everyone has access to their universal rights (Amnesty International UK 2018). Besides individual human rights activists being persecuted, Human Rights organizations are also subjected to attacks. For example, in September 2022, a prominent Human Rights organization in the country, Odhikar, has been deregistered (Civicus 2022) after withholding its registration for eight years. These developments are contrary to Bangladesh's commitment to protecting Human Rights defenders. During the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 (UN Human Rights Council 2018), Bangladesh accepted 178 and noted 73 recommendations made by UN member states. Although many of these recommendations were a continuation of the first and second UPR cycles (2009 and 2013), most of these recommendations have not been implemented (For UPR, see OHCHR, nd) In the third cycle UPR, "Bangladesh accepted recommendations to repeal restrictive legislative provisions that limit the rights of human rights defenders and civil society organizations to freedom of expression and free speech, end all assaults on human rights defenders, and publicly commit to ensuring that human rights defenders and civil society organizations are able to carry out their activities without fear of surveillance, intimidation, harassment, arrest, prosecution, or retribution" (Solidarity Group for Bangladesh 2023).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to protect human rights defenders on 9 December 1998. The UN resolution entitled, "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" laid out the rights and protections accorded to the HRDs, the duties of the member states, and the responsibilities of other citizens (Figure 2).

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Individual human rights activists being persecuted, Human Rights organizations are also subjected to attacks.

Human Rights Defenders: 'The people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner'.



**Figure 2: UN Declaration And Resolution About Human Rights Defenders**

The Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders defined Human Rights Defenders as 'the people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner' (OHCHR, n.d.). Following the declaration many countries promulgated their specific law to protect defenders' rights. However, there have been countries that were not providing adequate protection to the HRDs. Consequently, on 17 December 2015, UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/Res/70/161) which urged:

States to acknowledge through public statements, policies, or laws the important and legitimate role of individuals, groups, and organs of society, including human rights defenders, in the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as essential components of ensuring their recognition and protection, including by condemning publicly all cases of violence and discrimination against human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, underlining that such practices can never be justified (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

The resolution strongly called upon all States:

To refrain from, and ensure adequate protection from, any act of intimidation or reprisal against human rights defenders who cooperate, have cooperated, or seek to cooperate with international institutions, including their family members and associates (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

While Bangladesh voted in favor of the resolution, the country is not only yet to take any concrete measures, but rather continued to violate the letter and spirit of the 1998 Declaration and the 2015 resolution.

In recent years, human rights reports of international and national human rights organizations have highlighted the increasing intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders (HRDs). According to these reports, it has become increasingly difficult for the HRDs to gather and report human rights abuse and raise awareness.

In 2021, the Frontline Defenders, a Dublin-based international organization reported that “Human rights defenders in Bangladesh face judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest, fabricated charges, abduction, physical attacks, torture, and extrajudicial killings” (Frontline Defenders, nd). In March 2022, UN experts called upon the government of Bangladesh to end reprisals against human rights defenders. It noted that the human rights defenders and relatives of forcibly disappeared persons are facing intimidation and reprisals for their activism and cooperation with international human rights bodies and UN mechanisms (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2022). Similar points have been made by HRW in 2022 (Human Rights Watch 2022, 76). Reports of family members of HRDs being harassed have been mentioned by the HRW (2022) and the World Organisation Against Torture (2022). Persecution of HRDs who are working with Rohingya refugees has also been reported (Frontline Defenders n.d.).

According to a statement of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in June 2022, ‘Human rights defenders, dissidents, and political opposition survive in a profoundly dangerous condition of civic space in Bangladesh’ (Asian Human Rights Commission 2022). The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights, Mary Lawlor, wrote in 2022,

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While Bangladesh voted in favor of the resolution, the country is not only yet to take any concrete measures, but rather continued to violate the letter and spirit of the 1998 Declaration and the 2015 resolution.

'Human rights defenders face attacks in Bangladesh. According to reports received by my office, since December 2021, Bangladeshi authorities have launched a campaign of threats, intimidation, and harassment against human rights defenders. HRDs in the country have been living in a state of insecurity for years' (Lawlor 2022).

Reports in the Bangladeshi press have also documented the challenges HRDs face. A newspaper report in 2019, drawing on interviews with 21 activists and scrutinizing 14 cases, concluded that fear has permeated the human rights organizations which are pushing them away from taking up issues and cases which are considered 'sensitive' to the government (Alam 2019). The situation became more difficult in the subsequent years, and many HROs have limited their work to 'safer' issues.

The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, enacted in 2016 has made the situation worse. The law has given significant power to the government to establish control over non-government organizations in general, particularly human rights organizations. The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, which requires NGOs accepting foreign donations to register with the NGO Affairs Bureau and to obtain project approval for projects using foreign donations, has weakened the NGOs in general but disproportionately affected human rights organizations. Vague terms such as 'anti-state activities' and 'inimical' or 'derogatory' comments about the Constitution and constitutional institutions of Bangladesh have given the government sweeping power to deregister the NGOs. In 2019, a prominent human rights activist told a newspaper that while the NGOs are cognizant of the need for accountability, the requirements set under the law are highly problematic. She said, "To get the [NGO] bureau's approval, clearances from the National Security Intelligence Agency (NSI), The Special Branch (SB) of the Police, and the National Defense Intelligence Agency (DGFI) are required." At that stage, "NGOs are given a runaround " she said. Besides, the government uses controversial clauses of the Digital Security Act, she alleged." (Alam 2019). Since the introduction of the 2016 law, human rights organizations have been facing serious impediments in receiving foreign funds (Alam 2019a).

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While international and national human rights organizations have been raising serious concerns regarding the human rights situation and HRDs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh appears to have paid little attention to it. The NHRC, established in 2007 through an ordinance under the caretaker government, was made into an independent statutory body under a law in 2009. Since its inception, the commission has come under severe criticism for not playing any effective role (Karim 2022). Human rights organizations and analysts have pointed out that the scope of the commission laid out in the law and the composition preclude it from playing an effective role (Riti and Rahman 2018). As for the HRDs, there have been brief references in the annual



reports of the NHRC. For example, in its 2019 annual report the NHRC stated that it “encourages other human rights defenders to be united to consolidate a movement on certain demands on human rights” (Begum et al. 2019). NHRC plans to ‘organize training programs for officers, members of law enforcement agencies (LEAs), lawyers and human rights defenders including journalists for promoting and protecting human rights.’ The challenges faced by the HRDs have not been discussed in the available annual reports or other publications of the NHRC, although in 2019, the Asian NGO Network of National Human Rights Institutions -ANNI - report, published by the Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) recommended that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should establish a separate desk for the human rights defenders for their safety and security.

It is against this background, this report examines the challenges faced by human rights activists in Bangladesh. The report is based on– (a) a survey of 50 human rights activists throughout the country and (b) interviews with leaders of selected national-level human rights defenders.. . The former is intended to gather information from the grassroots while the latter is to provide a national-level picture.. . As many of the national-level HRDs are in the leadership of various HROs, they were also asked about the challenges to the HROs.

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Since the introduction of the 2016 law, human rights organizations have been facing serious impediments in receiving foreign funds (Alam 2019a).

### 3. Voices from the Grassroots: Results of a National Survey

A survey of 50 Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) from 36 districts of the country was conducted between 24 May and 25 June 2023. A questionnaire with 28 multiple-response questions and one open-ended questions was administered over the telephone, through email, and face-to-face. The objective of the survey was to gather data about the challenges the Human Rights Defenders face at the grassroots level and their perspectives on the overall Human Rights situation (See Appendix 1 for methodology and the questionnaire). The following are the descriptive statistics of the survey.

#### Demographic data of the respondents

The respondents of this study comprised four-fifths male by gender, almost three-fifths Muslim by faith, and more than four-fifths Bengali by ethnicity. The gender disaggregation showed male dominance in our sample as female human rights defenders are small in Bangladesh. The dominant age group among the respondents was 46-65. (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6).

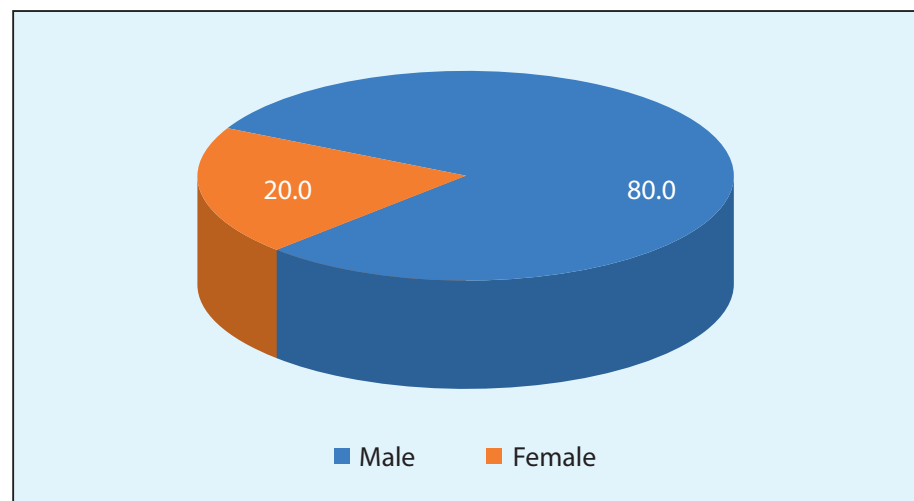


Figure 3: Gender of the respondents

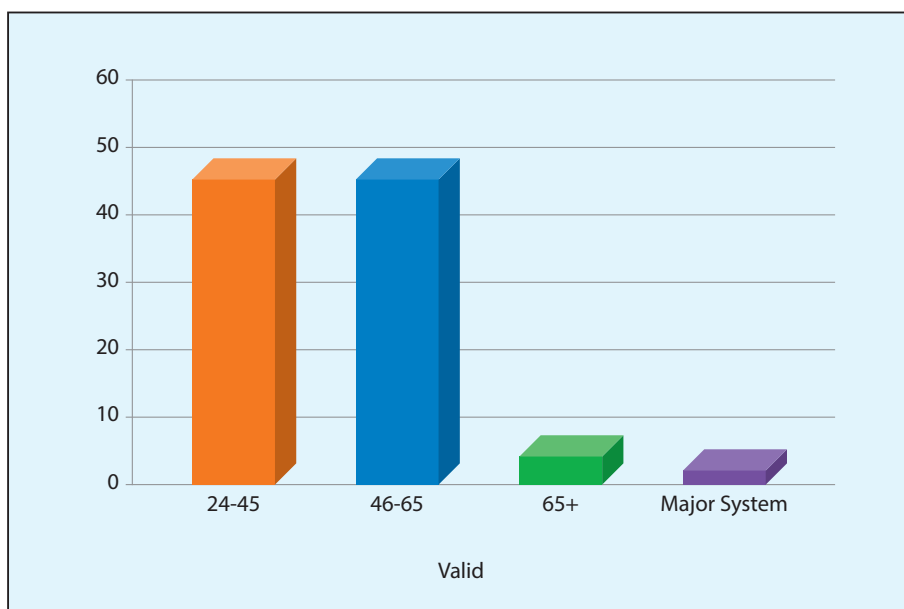


Figure 4: Age of the respondents

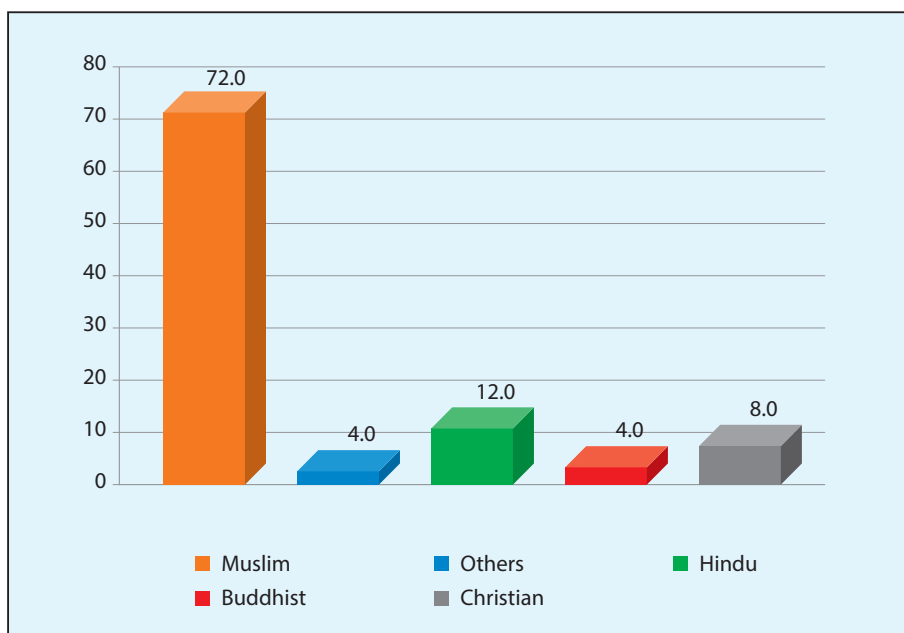
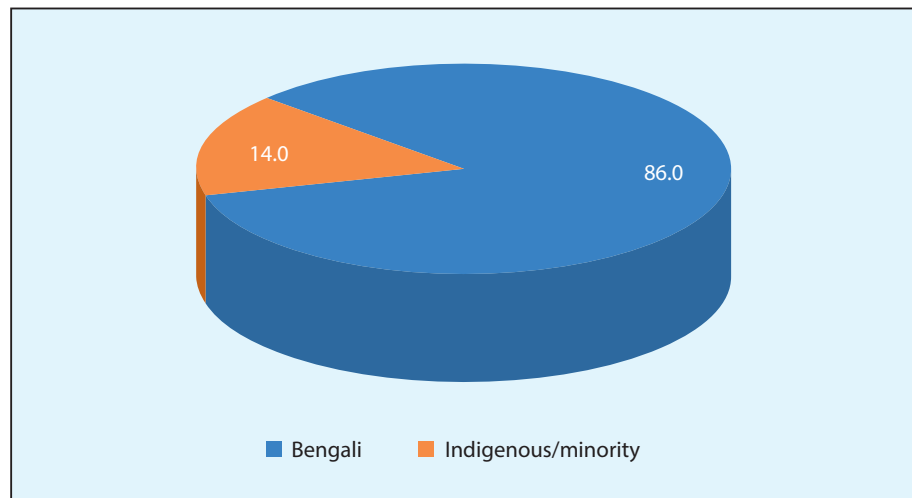


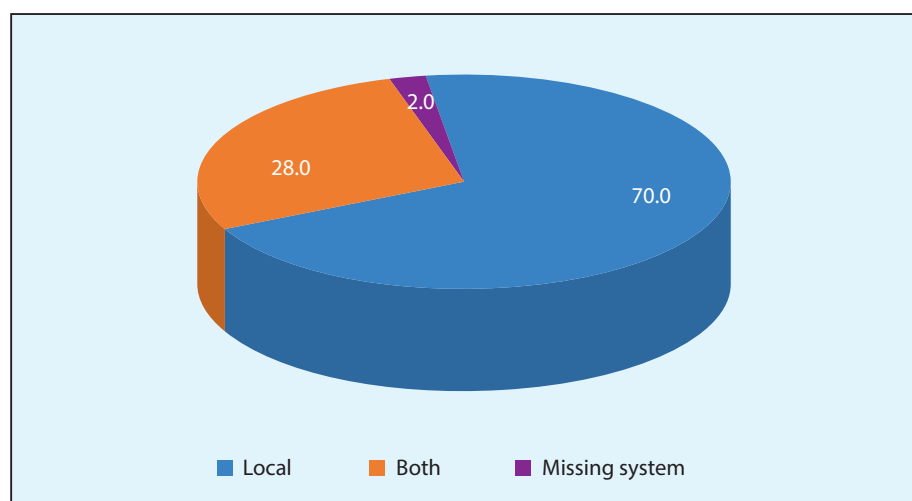
Figure 5: Religious composition of the respondents



**Figure 6: Ethnic identity of the respondents**

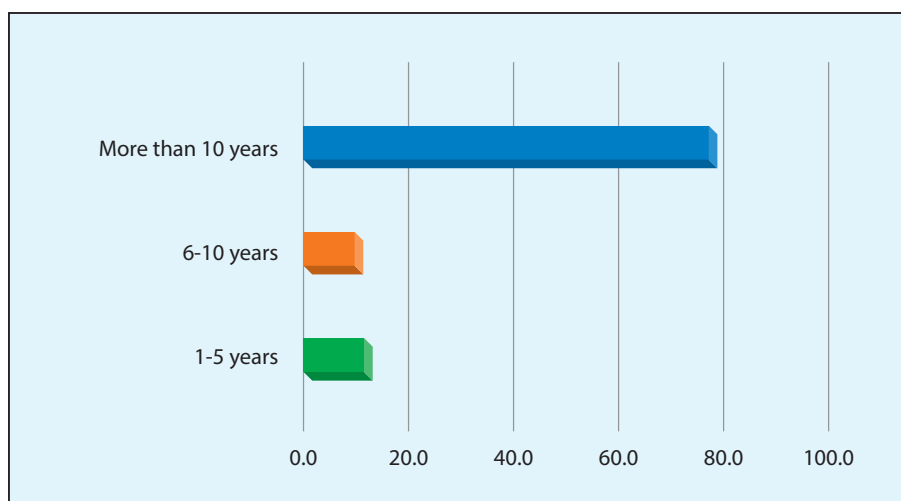
### The scope of the HRDs work, and the length of the HRDs involvement

The survey data shows that most respondents, comprising almost two-thirds of the sample, are engaged in human rights work primarily at the local level. A little over a quarter of the respondents reported being actively involved at both the national and local levels (Figure 7). The absence of HRD working at the national level is because the survey was conducted outside the capital. The views of the national-level HRDs are represented through the interviews of the leaders of national-level Human Rights organizations and independent HRDs (See section 4).



**Figure 7: Scope of their works**

Out of the 50 respondents, more than two-thirds have been active for over 10 years in working on Human Rights. The remainder has been in this field between 6 and 10 years. A large number of HRDs' long-term involvement in human rights activities has provided them the opportunity to offer a more experienced perspective (Figure 8).

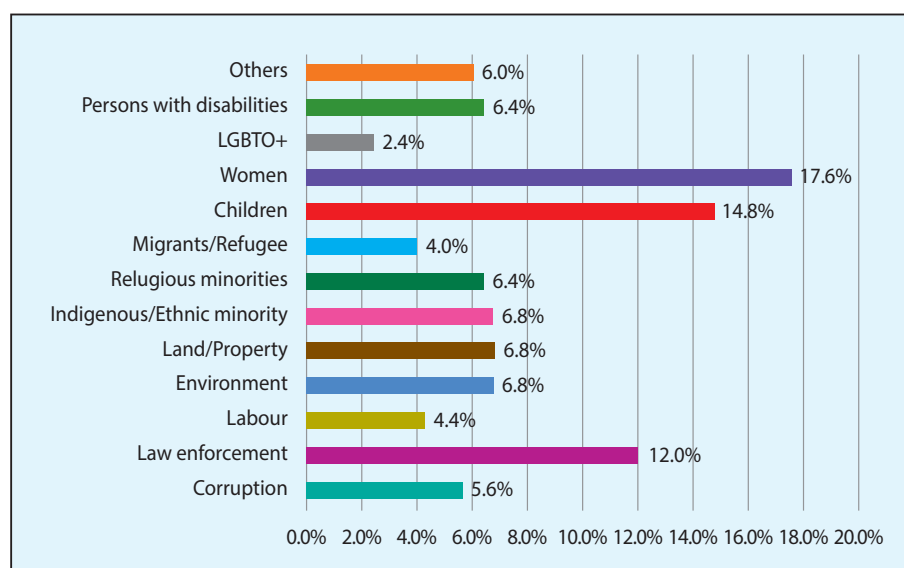


**Figure 8: The length of service**

### The focus of the respondents' work

The participants of our survey are engaged in multiple aspects of human rights issues. A large portion of them work with women, children, and law enforcement. In addition to addressing a wide range of issues, such as the rights of individuals with disabilities, religious minority groups, environmental preservation, land and property matters, and combating corruption, they also engage in various other endeavors. A notable proportion of individuals, specifically over 17%, are engaged in work related to women, while a slightly lower percentage, exceeding 14%, are involved in activities concerning children. Additionally, approximately 12% of individuals' works are related to human rights violations involving law enforcement (Figure 9).

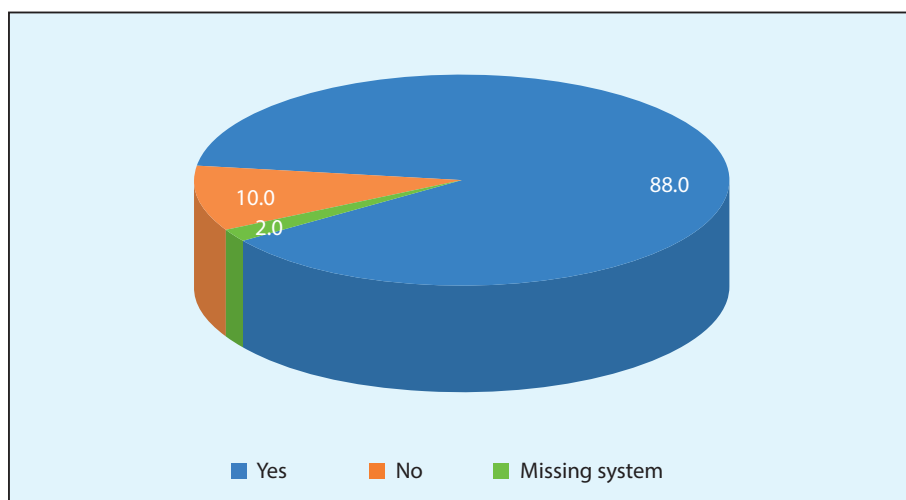




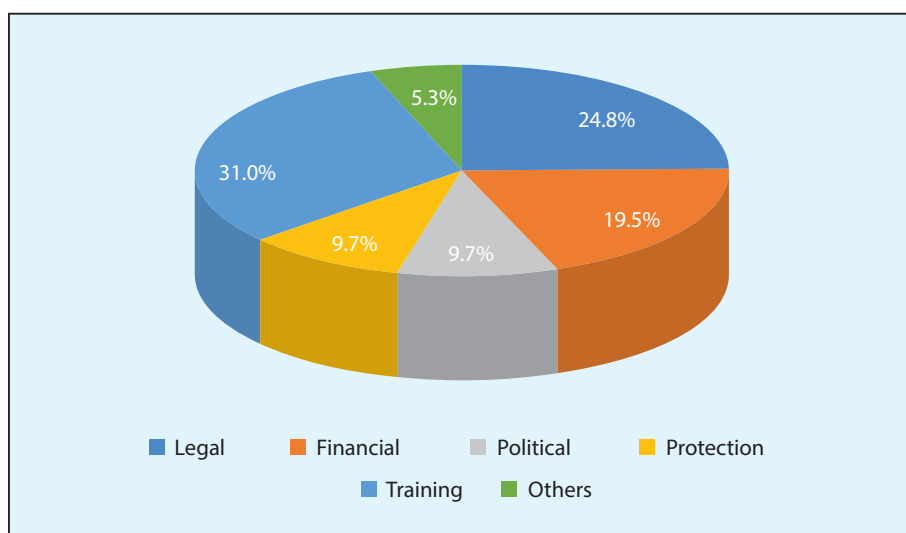
**Figure 9: The focus of the HRDs**

### Support and assistance to the HRDs

Out of the total 50 respondents, the overwhelming majority, forty-four, responded affirmatively to the question of 'if they have received or have been receiving support or any form of assistance to facilitate their activities from any source'. More than three-fourths of the sampled population received some kind of help, while one-tenth did not receive any kind of help (Figure 10). Almost three-fourths of that support was received in the form of training on relevant issues. The remaining one-fourth of the assistance came in the form of legal, financial, and political help in the form of protection. (Figure 11). A considerable portion of this support came from the defender's organization and some notable amount came from Other human rights organizations or NGOs. Respectively 30% and 26% of assistance came from these two sources and the rest were received in minimal amounts from law enforcement agencies, independent benefactors, government organizations/agencies, and other sources. (Figure 12).



**Figure 10: Whether the respondents have received support and assistance**



**Figure 11: Types of support or assistance**

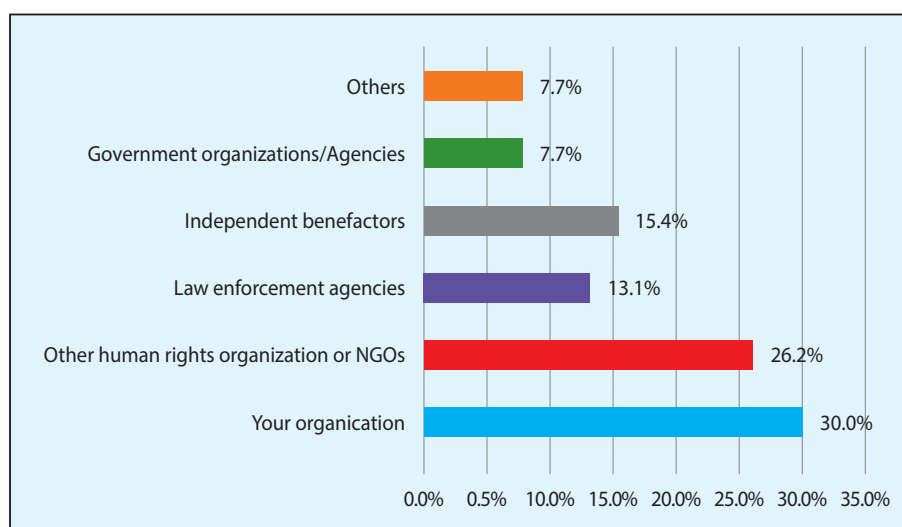


Figure 12: Source of support or assistance

### The obstacles: nature, scope, sources, and methods

Of the respondents in the survey, more than eight in ten, have faced some kind of obstacle as a human rights defender. While one response is missing, a little over one in ten said that they have not faced any hindrances. The response paints a picture wherein HRDs are in a difficult situation and are faced with various kinds of obstructions.

Almost a quarter of them have said that the ruling party is a major source of hindrances.

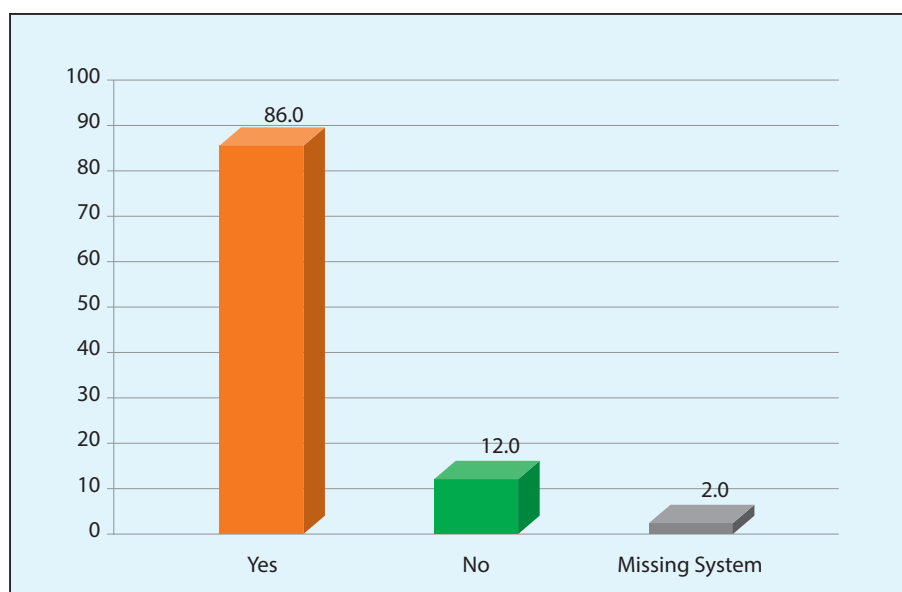
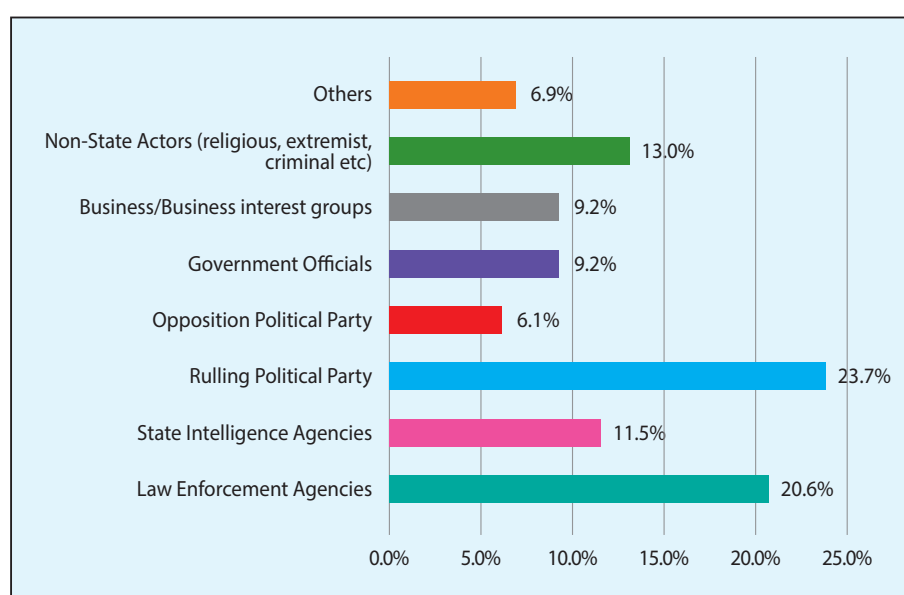


Figure 13: Does HRD face obstacles

Those HRDs who have reported obstacles have identified four major sources, of which three are directly and indirectly tied to the state and government (Figure 14). These sources are the ruling party, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence agencies. The fourth source is non-state actors. Almost a quarter of them have said that the ruling party is a major source of hindrances, while one-fifth have reported to law enforcement agencies, and more than one-tenth have reported intelligence agencies as a source of intimidation. These sources, including government officials, constitute 65 percent of the responses.

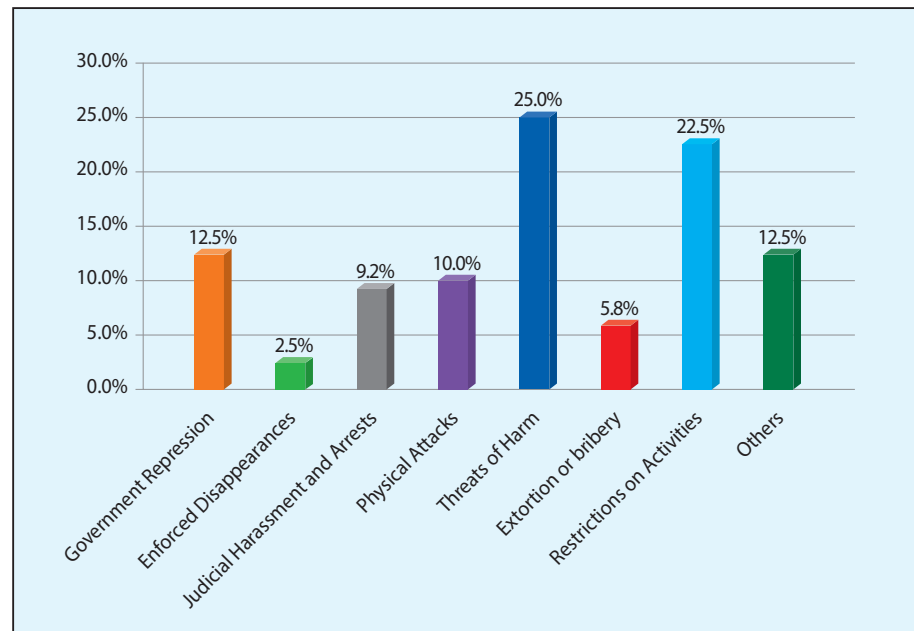
Considering multiple response options, these sources are not mutually exclusive, instead, the same person may have faced intimidation from several sources.



**Figure 14: The sources of obstructions**

Respondents were presented with a list of 7 multiple options to choose from and an 'other' option to identify anything not listed identifying the nature of the obstacles and intimidation they faced. They were allowed to select more than one option, resulting in a total of 120 responses from the 50 respondents. The breakdown of responses included: Government Repression (15 individuals), Enforced Disappearances (3 individuals), Judicial Harassment and Arrests (11 individuals), Physical Attacks (12 individuals), Threats of Harm (30 individuals), Extortion or bribery (7 individuals), Restrictions on Activities (27 individuals), and others (15 individuals). This shows that 60% of our respondents faced threats to harms and 54% respondents faced restrictions on activities. Percentage wise breakdown of the total 120 responses are presented in Figure 15.

The responses show judicial harassment, particularly through the filing of frivolous cases, as well as government repression, as major forms of intimidation. Notably, Figure 15 indicates that 3 out of the 50 respondents reported experiencing enforced disappearance. Furthermore, excluding threats of bodily harm, which could originate from various sources, approximately 25 percent of the intimidation and harassment faced by human rights defenders (HRDs) were attributed to government-affiliated entities.

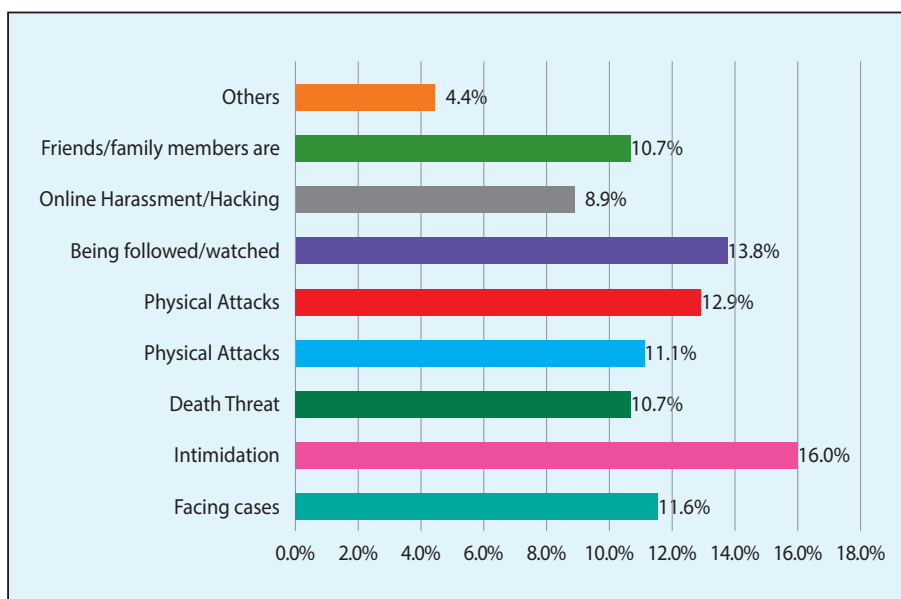


**Figure 15: The nature of obstacles and intimidation**

More than ten percent of the respondents said that their friends and family members have been subjected to various means of intimidation.

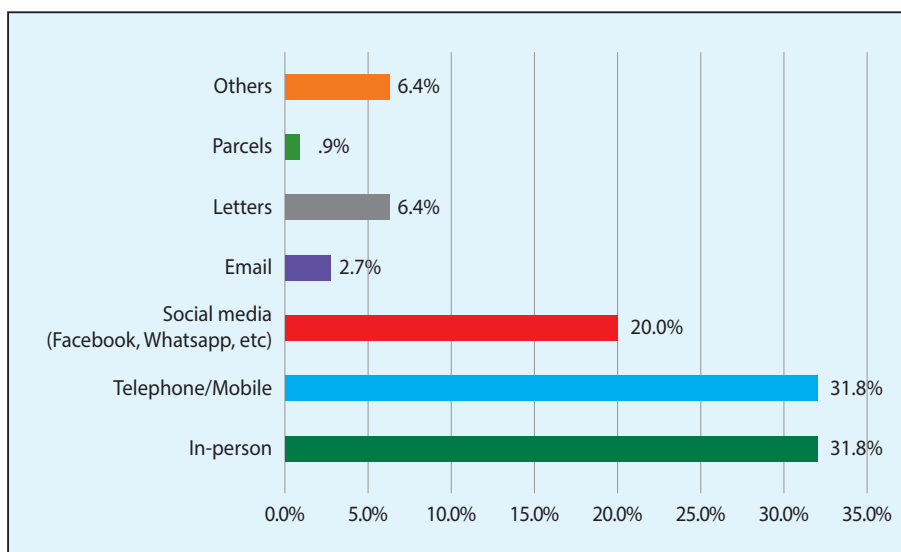
When asked about the methods of harassment, respondents frequently mentioned imparting fear by various means, being followed, and being subjected to physical attacks. More than ten percent of the respondents said that their friends and family members have been subjected to various means of intimidation. Given multiple response options, 225 instances of various methods of intimidation demonstrate that many respondents have faced several kinds of harassment and intimidation. In addition to physical attacks and being followed/watched, Human Rights Defenders commonly experience harassment and threats in various forms. According to participants, these harassment tactics and threats include legal cases (11.6%), death threats (10.7%), physical attacks (11.1%), threats of physical harm (12.9%), online harassment and hacking (8.9%), harassment, intimidation, or persecution of friends and family members (10.7%), and other forms of harassment (4.4%) (Figure 16).





**Figure 16: Methods of Intimidation/harassment**

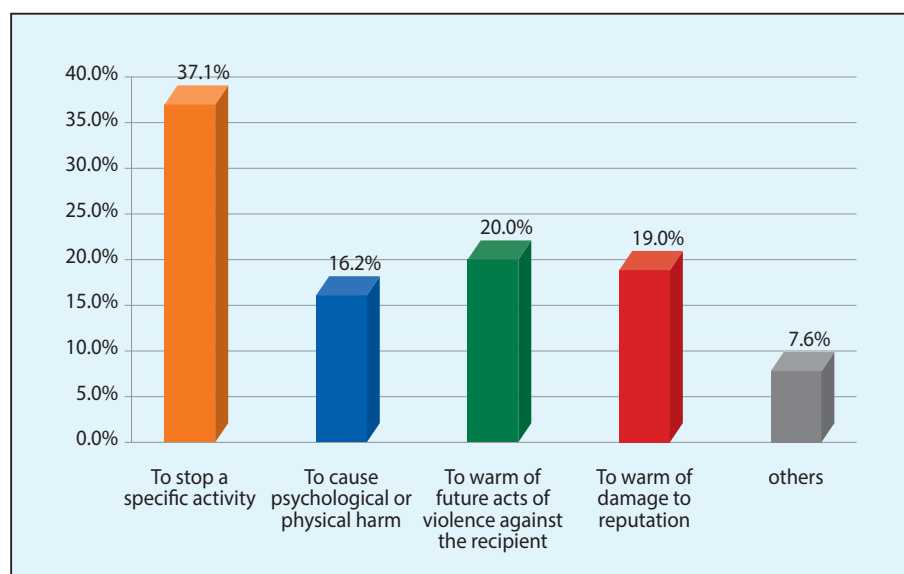
Our respondents shared their experiences regarding the common methods used to carry out threats or harassment. A significant portion of participants, more than one-third, reported that threats or harassment typically occur in person, while a similar percentage reported that they occur via telephone or mobile devices. One-fifth of the survey participants reported that social media is commonly used for the perpetration of threats or harassment (Figure 17).



One-fifth of the survey participants reported that social media is commonly used for the perpetration of threats or harassment.

**Figure 17: How the threats are carried out**

Participants were asked about the objectives of these acts of harassment. Most of our respondents indicated that the purpose of threats or harassment was to stop a particular activity. Additionally, one-fifth of the respondents stated that the intention behind these actions is to warn of future acts of violence against the recipient. Almost one-fifth of the respondents indicated that threats or harassment are motivated by a desire to warn of potential damage to their reputation (Figure 18).

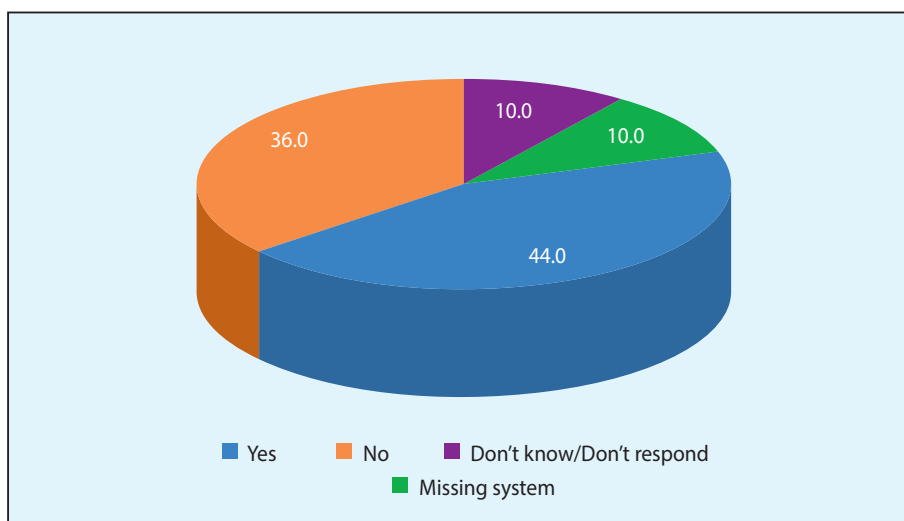


**Figure 18: The objectives of the threats**

## The role of authorities in defending the HRDs

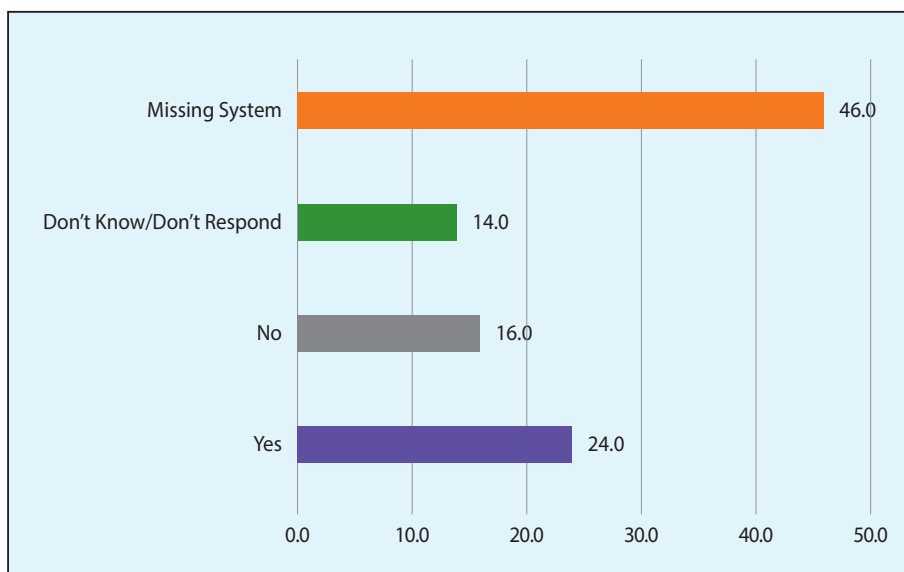
Almost half of the respondents who reported facing harassment and/or intimidation informed that those threats were reported to the relevant authority. However, more than a third said they were not reported and 10% declined to respond. The high rate of non-response to this question is a tacit acknowledgment that there is little hope of action by concerned authorities (Figure 19).

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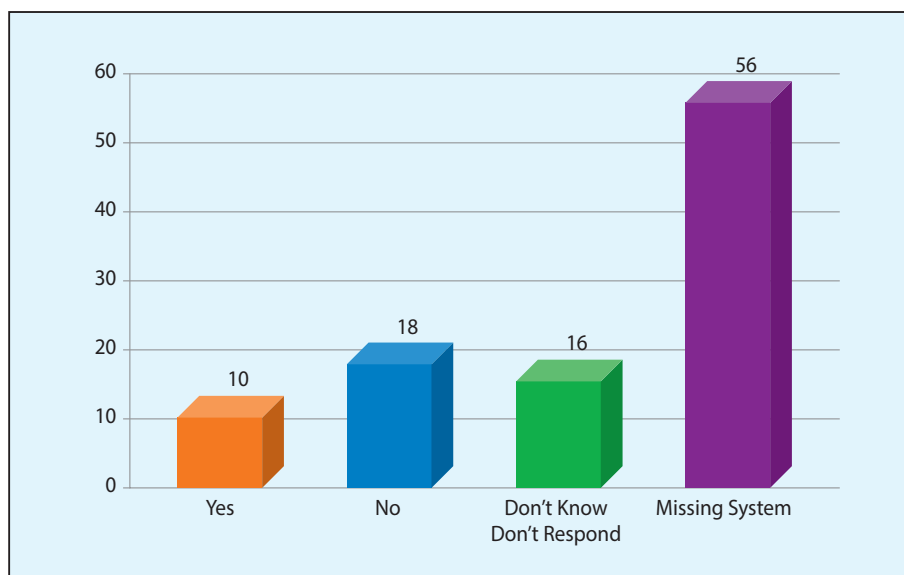
**Figure 19: Are threats reported to the authorities**

Of respondents who informed that they had reported the threats to the relevant authorities, almost a quarter said that these threats were investigated. However, 16% said these were not investigated, while almost an equal percentage of respondents didn't want to respond or didn't know (Figure 20).



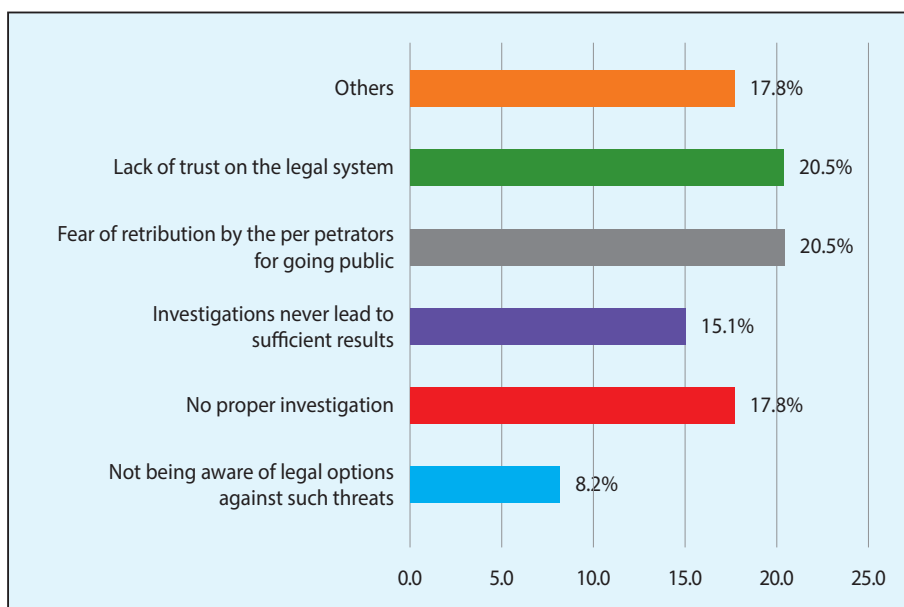
**Figure 20: Was an investigation conducted?**

Most of the respondents who had reported threats to the respective authorities expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome; about one-fifth responded negatively, while only one-tenth were satisfied. It is worth noting that 16 percent didn't know or didn't respond (Figure 21)



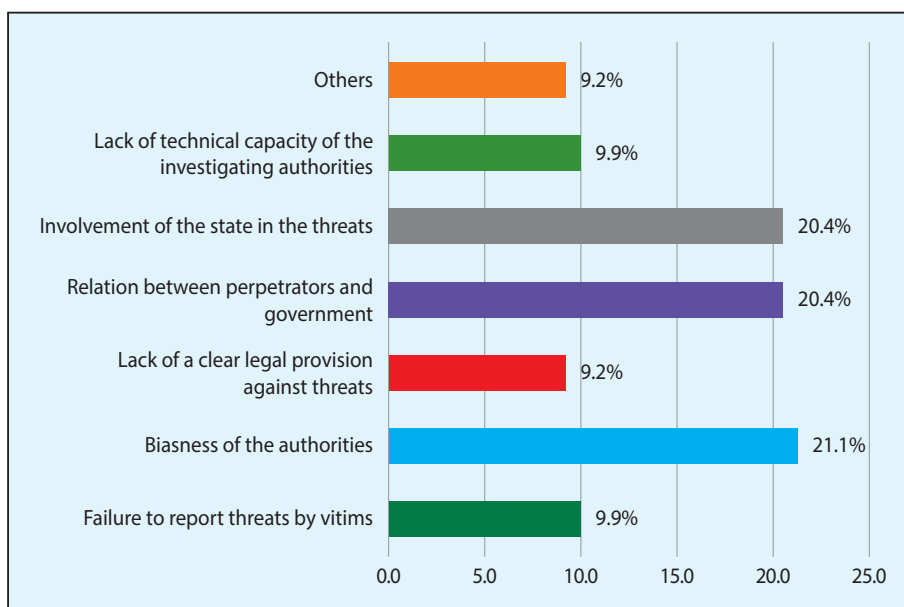
**Figure 21: Satisfaction with the investigation**

There seems to be a strong consensus regarding the reasons for underreporting threats. A significant proportion of our participants, one in five, that is 20%, believe that the reason threats are not reported is fear of retribution by the perpetrators. Additionally, more than one-fifth of respondents believe that the lack of trust in the legal system is the cause of non-reporting. A high proportion, more than 17 percent, perceive inadequate investigation as a contributing factor for not reporting threats (Figure 22)



**Figure 22: Why threats are underreported**

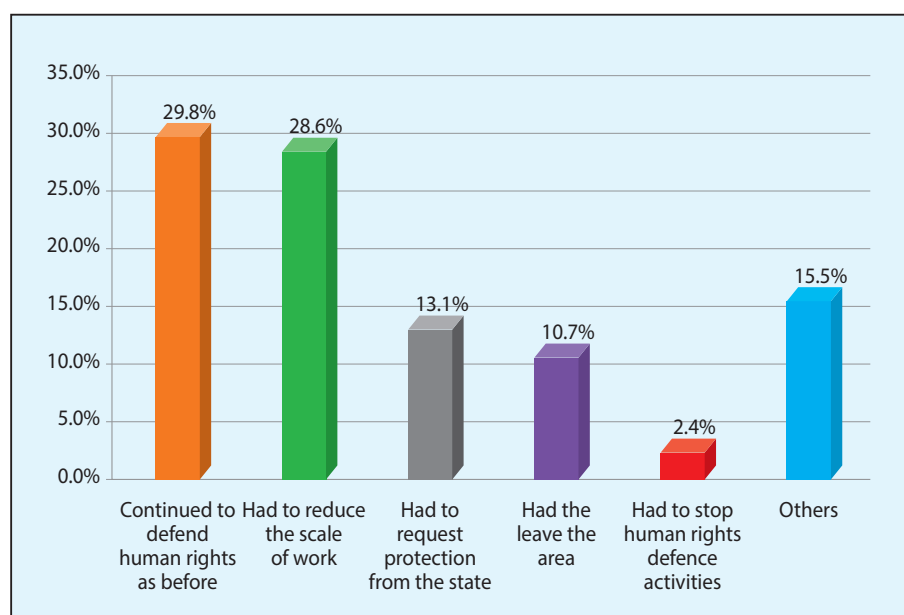
Referring to the persistent allegations that the threat against HRDs is not investigated, respondents were asked about their opinion as to why proper investigations are not conducted. Four factors have stood out in these responses: bias of the authorities, involvement of state actors, and the relationship between the government and the perpetrators. Almost ten percent, however, also opined that failure to report to the authorities is to be blamed (Figure 23).



**Figure 23: Why proper investigations are not conducted**

## Impacts of the threats and intimidations

The respondents informed that threats and intimidations significantly affected their daily activities and lives. Despite the resilience of almost one-third of the HRDs, reflected in the continuation of their work, almost one-third also reported scaling down their work. A total of 2.4% of participants were compelled to discontinue their engagement in human rights advocacy. Participants also reported the need to relocate and seek state protection (Figure 24). Altogether, 41.7% of the respondents said that these threats and intimidations have imperiled their lives.



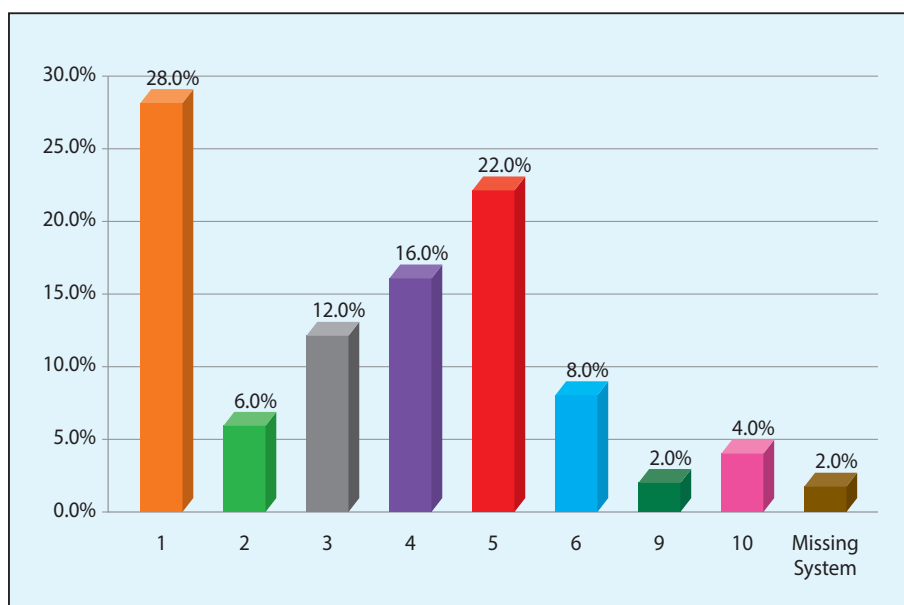
**Figure 24: Impact of the threats and intimidations**

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## Overall picture of the Human Rights situation and protection of the HRDs

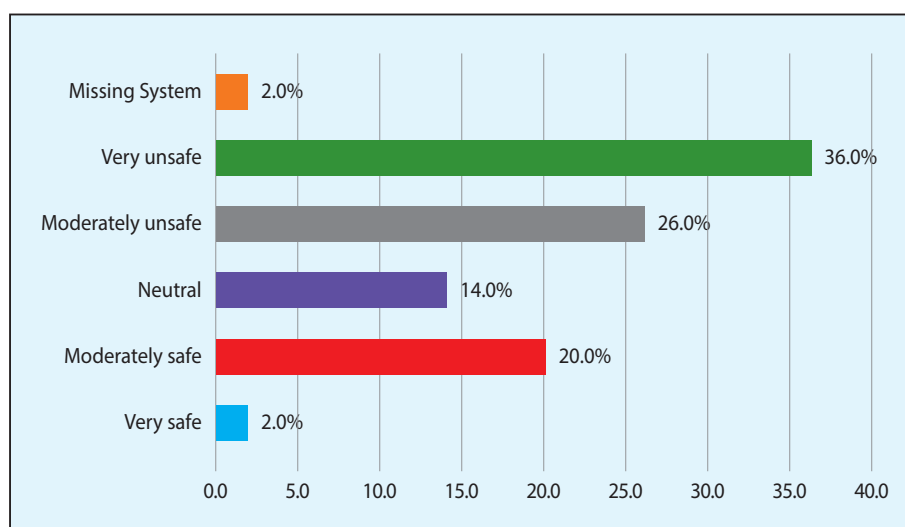
As for the overall human rights situation of the country, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the worst and 10 being the best), more than a quarter said it is worst and a total of more than a one-third have rated it as worst or near worst. A total of 46% rated the situation between 1 and 3. Only 6% of the respondents described it as very good and good (scoring 9-10) (Figure 25).



**Figure 25: State of Human Rights in Bangladesh**

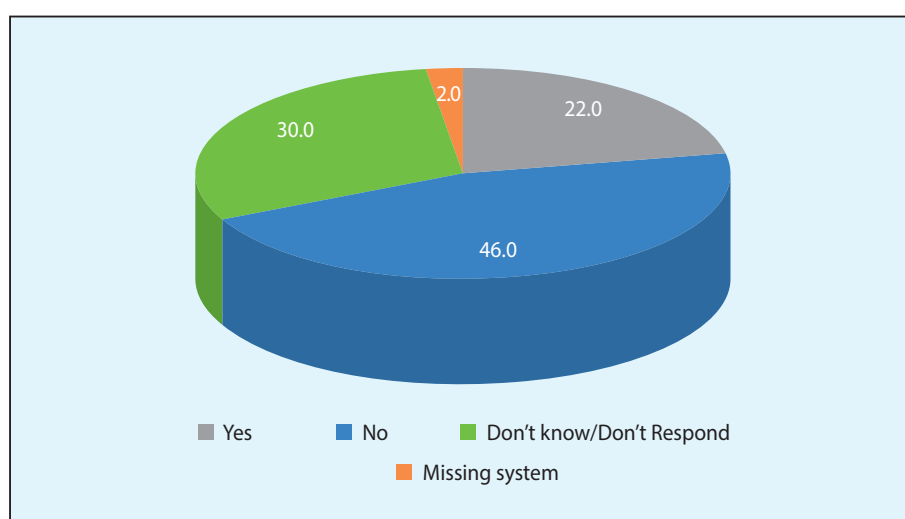
Overwhelmingly our respondents have described the situation in Bangladesh for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) as unsafe.

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**Figure 26: Safety of Human Rights Defenders**

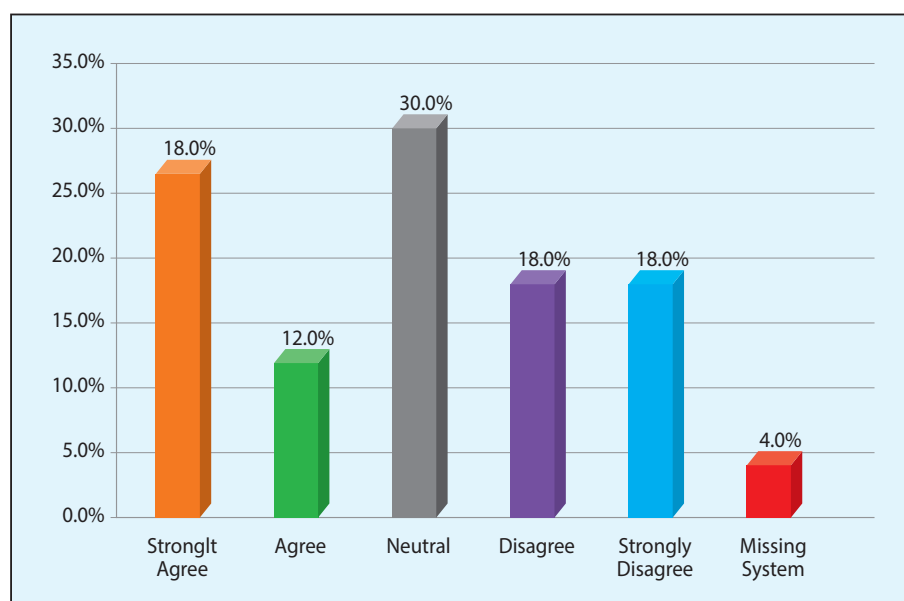
Overwhelmingly our respondents have described the situation in Bangladesh for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) as unsafe. More than one-third of respondents deemed it extremely unsafe, and more than one-quarter deemed it moderately unsafe. Only 2% of respondents described the situation as safe. These results highlight a significant concern among the surveyed individuals regarding the safety and security of human rights defenders in Bangladesh (Figure 26).



**Figure 27: Are there legal protections for the HRDs?**



Most of the HRDs surveyed felt that Human Rights Organizations (HROs) do not provide safety and support to the HRDs. More than one-third (36%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that the HROs provide support. However, about 30% of the respondents were ambiguous. They responded with a score of 3 on a scale of 5 (1 being supportive and 5 being not supportive at all). Two respondents skipped the question (Figure 28).



**Figure 28: Do HROs provide safety and support?**

## What More the HRDs Said

When asked about the other obstacles human rights defenders face in their activities, 38 participants of the survey responded. They emphasized that the HRDs have no freedom of expression and are often harassed using the Digital Security Act. They often become the victim of unjustified arrests. Additionally, significant barriers come from politically influential people. One respondent shared his experience of being harassed, both physically and psychologically, by a politically influential person. Several Human Rights defenders point out that they become the target of law enforcement agencies' surveillance if any of their activities appear to conflict with government interests. These put them in persistent concern for their own and their families' lives. There is even a lack of coordination and cooperation in investigation efforts and initiatives to save the victims. In short, the defenders expressed their anguish regarding the system that has failed to protect human rights as well as human rights defenders.

Most of the HRDs surveyed felt that Human Rights Organizations (HROs) do not provide safety and support to the HRDs.

Some respondents noted that there are some fake HROs that diminish the reputation of actual HRDs. They urged the National Human Rights Commission to be more vigilant about these organizations and widen the scope of lodging legitimate protests against gross human rights violations. The Commission's capacity needs to increase in the case of helping the HRD several respondents said. Besides the Commission, other executive and administrative bodies at the state level need to be active to ensure the protection of the defenders. The mass media needs to promote the activities of the defenders rather than hinder them.

Human Rights Organizations need to offer more assistance to the HRDs according to a few respondents. Better collaboration among the organizations to protect their activists is needed. The defenders need to be equipped with better capacity through proper training. There should be adequate technical support to help the defenders in performing their duties properly and they should be informed about the channels they can reach in case of any danger. There is also a lack of unity among the defenders. There needs to be a coalition among the defenders despite ideological differences so that they can assist each other and stand together against human rights violations. This is an opinion that has been expressed by quite a few respondents.

As human rights defenders are not working to pursue their interests, but instead working to protect the people at large, they deserve to be protected by the laws, agencies, governments, and all other relevant stakeholders. The need for laws to protect the defenders and the law enforcement agencies' cooperation in this regard has been underscored. This is needed to ensure that the HRDs can perform their activities without any fear or threat of any kind. The Human Rights Defenders who represent minority groups are in extreme danger; they can hardly raise their voice against any sort of human rights violence.

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## 4. Interviews of Human Rights Organizations' Leaders and the NHRC Chair

To understand the overall Human Rights situation of the country and the challenges faced by Human Rights activists at the national level, eight prominent Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) were interviewed between 21 May and 5 June 2023. Additionally, the current Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was interviewed to gather the NHRC's perspective. These semi-structured interviews have served as Key Informant Interviews (KII) of the project. A summary of the interviews on various issues is presented below. .

### The overall human rights situation in Bangladesh

Regarding the overall condition of Human Rights and Human Rights activism, almost all of our interviewees opined that the current situation is deeply disturbing and is worsening. For the overall deterioration, they have pointed to several phenomena, both legal and extra-legal. These include extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and wanton use of the draconian law called the Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA). The DSA was enacted in October 2018 and is being used by the government and individuals, especially ruling party activists, to silence critics of the government. According to the statement of Law Minister Anisul Huq, until the end of January 2023, about 7000 cases have been filed under the DSA. A prominent lawyer and a leader of a Human Rights Organization said, existing laws, such as the Digital Security Act 2018, are having a chilling effect on Human Rights advocacy in Bangladesh. He/she said that the HR activists have to speak in such a manner that is consistent with the interests of the government. 'If anyone says against the govt, he/she will be arrested under the Digital Security Act', he/she said.

The law has created serious restraints on free speech, several of our interviews have underscored. Before the DSA was enacted, Human Rights activists could express their opinions in various forums, although DSA's predecessor, the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act) posed significant restrictions. A safe and normal working environment is required for human rights defenders to function, which does not currently exist in Bangladesh, they said.

Referring to the situation of freedom of expression a prominent human rights lawyer, mentioned that due to the fear of the DSA, self-censorship has become the norm. As the DSA allows law enforcement to arrest anyone without a warrant for their social media

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According to the statement of Law Minister Anisul Huq, until the end of January 2023, about 7000 cases have been filed under the DSA.

posts, many employees of HROs are often picked up by the police, he/she informed. The interviewee expressed frustration about the way the law has been used; he/she said, 'If cases were filed [against individuals], they could be defended [at the court]. But there is a practice of arresting without any case [being filed]. Even things that were said long before [by individuals] are now 'dug out' to use against him/her and violate his/her freedom of speech.

An internationally recognized human rights activist pointed out that extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances by Bangladesh's law enforcement agencies have continued. He/she said that law enforcement agencies, such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), frequently 'abduct individuals, execute them, and later claim that they were shot in a "crossfire" while they or their cohorts attempted to resist arrest or escape custody.' The interviewee said, 'These incidents are taking place not only for the last two or three years, instead it has been happening for more than 12-13 years. Crossfire has increased greatly, especially after 2012 and 2013. Crossfire is not only being used against persons accused of a crime but also against innocent citizens, opposition leaders, and dissenters.'

Other issues observed by KIIs include the lack of coordination between the existing Human Rights Organizations and a lack of capacity of the judiciary to handle cases. Most interviewees agree that 'an ineffective and politically compromised judiciary' and 'rampant corruption' are hampering legal recourse to human rights violations in Bangladesh.

Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, the chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), holds a different view regarding the state of human rights. He asserts that the human rights situation in Bangladesh has significantly improved over the past five decades. As the country's economic conditions have improved, people are becoming aware of their rights, he insists. Expansion of educational opportunities, access to better livelihood, and improvement of the health sector were cited by Ahmed as factors for the improvement of the Human Rights situation, particularly awareness. However, he acknowledged instances of human rights violations, and cases of 'individuals disappearing without explanation.'

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'An ineffective and politically compromised judiciary' and 'rampant corruption' are hampering legal recourse to human rights violations in Bangladesh.

## Challenges Faced by Human Rights Organizations

Almost all the interviewees stated that the works of the Human Rights Organization (HRO) they are affiliated with are being restricted in various ways by 'intelligence agencies, the police, and local political actors.' There were multiple examples of harassment and intimidation from law enforcement agencies, even on innocuous issues. One of the interviewees provided an example of how their plan to organize a program on the SDGs in a district of Bangladesh in collaboration with

the International Labour Organization (ILO) faced obstructions. On the night before the program, they were informed by the police that they could not do that program because of pressure from 'higher authorities.'

A common problem faced by HROs involves obstacles in getting clearance for foreign funds, which the NGO Affairs Bureau regulates. According to an activist who has a long career in human rights works and works as a lawyer, 'Finding local funding for Human Rights Advocacy in Bangladesh is difficult. We rely on foreign funds, but to acquire these funds, we have to take clearance from the NGO affairs bureau. They use this power to control us. If an organization is [considered by the government as a] troublemaker, its [permission for the] foreign funding is denied.' Another interviewee, who heads an HRO has also asserted this point noting that, 'Although government legitimizes this complicated system by saying that this is needed to bring more funds, it is a huge impediment to the works of the [Human Rights] organizations and thus puts an additional obstacle on human rights protection activities.' One activist provided a more detailed description of how funding for HROs is disrupted:

For the human rights organizations which work for rights, details are sent to several ministries such as the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and Ministry of Home Affairs, and from there to agencies such as SB, NSI, and DGFI to investigate who are the board of members, whether they have any political link, what kind of activities they are doing. So naturally, when we talk about civil and political rights or criticize the government, raise concerns about custodial death, torture, mass arrests, or crackdowns on protests, we become a target of the government, and as a result, the report of NSI, SB comes in such a way that, we don't get clearance easily (from the NGO Affairs Bureau) for which projects get delayed, and implementation of the project becomes harder.

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These challenges include getting accused of false cases, and harassment of their family members.

Providing the perspective of the NHRC, Kamal Uddin Ahmed insisted that instances of HRO being harmed are very limited. The NHRC, a constitutionally mandated state institution, is better placed in this regard Vis a Vis other HROs, said Ahmed. Besides, HROs operate at various levels, implying that their problems are different from each other.

## Challenges Faced by Individual Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defenders, who are either affiliated with various organizations or acting independently, face significant difficulties, according to the interviewees. As most of our interviewees are either currently leading or have led national HROs, they are aware of the

challenges faced by the HRDs throughout the country. They said HRDs face a lot of difficulties in performing their duties. These challenges include getting accused of false cases, and harassment of their family members. Many of their legitimate works are restricted, and they or their family members are not getting bail quickly. They also said that, while conducting outreach programs for the victims of Human Rights violations or conducting surveys, HRDs have been ‘abducted or threatened via phone by intelligence agencies.’ Speaking about the issues most HRDs face one interviewee with extensive experience in leading a national organization with an international reputation stated, ‘Often the human rights activists’ families are contacted and they [HRDs] are told to stop their work or else there would be consequences for them and their families.’ A Human Right Defender, who leads an HRO primarily addressing the rights violations of ethnic communities, provided an example of such circumstances. In 2022, when the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited Bangladesh, she held a closed-door meeting with 20 members of civil society. This group included an HRD from their organization as well. ‘The very next day, the police went to the village to collect information about him.’ This is the kind of harassment and intimidation HRDs face on a regular basis.

According to the NHRC chairman, Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, human rights defenders often face obstacles and resistance from influential individuals in the localities the HRDs work. He mentioned the murder of a journalist who was killed for exposing the truth regarding a prominent individual.

One interviewee described his personal experience of being a victim of an attempted abduction by unidentified individuals. He stated, ‘They tried to abduct me, but I still do not know who was behind it. The government intelligence agencies investigated this matter. Surely they have information about it.’

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They mentioned that depending on the type of activism, harassment can come from non-state actors too.

### The Primary Source of Challenges to HROs and HRDs

When the interviewees were asked to identify the sources of harassment and intimidation, seven out of nine interviewee, stated that it is mostly ‘state actors who were responsible for the majority of obstructions, impediments, and threats faced by HRDs.’ However, they mentioned that depending on the type of activism, harassment can come from non-state actors too. The most common example of state actors’ harassment includes RAB and other law enforcement agencies arresting individuals without charge or warrant, according to a number of interviewees. A lawyer emphasized this issue by stating, “The rate of causing harassment without adhering to even a shred of any law is increasing every day”. An interviewee who headed an HRO, particularly identified RAB as ‘one of the state actors involved in human

rights violation’ who have even been sanctioned by the United States because of their actions.

One of the interviewees with legal expertise and experience in leading an HRO defined the state actors in two categories—the administration of the local area, and the influential people there. According to most of the leaders we interviewed, when the state does not take any steps against perpetrators, it should be considered that there is ‘state sponsorship’ behind the harassment of HRDs.

The non-state actors identified by our interviewees include various private and public agencies, and regime-supported media agencies that conduct targeted hate campaigns against HROs, according to one interviewee. The interviewee said, multiple private actors support government activities indirectly though they claim to act non-politically and independently. These agencies run campaigns against HROs through different media and advocacy agencies to vilify them and portray them as traitors. He put an example of personal experience in this case—as a result of these false allegations placed by the agencies, their [the HRO’s] bank accounts have been frozen since 2014, their registration has not been renewed and their application has been denied.

## HRDs’ Assessment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Almost all interviewees have expressed disappointment in the current leadership of the NHRC. Several interviewees said that the NHRC has not lived up to expectations. They claim that the NHRC is overly bureaucratic and is run by bureaucrats selected by the government who have no experience in Human Rights activities. One of the leaders of a leading HRO said that the key weakness of the NHRC was that it had no investigative power and had to rely on government authorities for investigations. One of the leaders of the HROs interviewed stated that ‘It is basically an ornamental figure that does little to no work to improve the human rights situation in Bangladesh.’

KIs complained that the NHRC does not work with independent HROs, and expressed dissatisfaction with the current leadership. As an example of their lack of power, interviewees have pointed out that the NHRC does not look into incidents of extrajudicial killings by law enforcement agencies. One interviewee stated, ‘The Commission is mostly run by retired bureaucrats and those who are the most loyal to the regime to get these posts on a contractual basis.’ Similarly, another stated, ‘I feel there is a gap between the human rights organizations and the NHRC. And it is the responsibility of the NHRC to reduce the existing gap.’

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The NHRC chairman disagreed with the perception that the NHRC does not have communication with the HROs. He stated that the NHRC maintains positive connections with various human rights organizations. The NHRC has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with several organizations, including ASK, BLAST, BRAC, and the World Vision, he mentioned. These partnerships are aimed at addressing a range of issues such as the reduction of child marriage, the promotion of child development, and the protection of disabled individuals. NHRC is engaged in the promotion and support of these HROs. These organizations, in turn, facilitate communication with individuals at the grassroots level on behalf of the NHRC.

### **Lack of Existing Support Mechanisms and Resources to Confront Challenges Faced by HRDs**

The collective opinion of the KIIs can be summed up by this statement made by one of the interviewees 'There is virtually nothing to safeguard the Human Rights workers in Bangladesh.' According to several interviewees, there are no policies available to protect HRDs. Instead, HRDs need to know ways for protecting themselves.

One interviewee stated that every district has a legal aid committee from which human rights defenders can get support. But noted that 'the support that local human rights defenders get from the government authorities or legal aid committee is insufficient and unsatisfactory.' Therefore, HROs have to turn to international human rights organizations that support them by standing by their side whenever there is an attack on human rights organizations or activists. Pressure from the international community regarding Human Rights has enhanced the spirit of the local workers to continue working for human rights in Bangladesh.

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Several interviewees stated that there is no particular policy or law for the safety and security of human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

### **Existing laws and the role of the judiciary in protecting human rights and HRDs**

When asked about their awareness of laws protecting HRDs, several interviewees stated that there is no particular policy or law for the safety and security of human rights defenders in Bangladesh. One of the interviewees highlighted the issue saying, 'In the absence of specific legislation for human rights defenders, the judiciary cannot provide any assistance to them individually.' Others have opined that existing laws have a very narrow scope for protecting human rights activists, while laws like the DSA and Section 57 of the ICT Act are being used to put them in danger or harass them.

Several interviewees also claimed that even if there are laws meant to protect HRDs, the government is not enforcing them. One of the HRDs



stated, 'The laws only work if the media gets involved and has a lot of attention. Only then sometimes these laws put to work.' The Human Rights Organizations' leaders wondered about the independence of the judiciary. The NHRC Chairman claimed that several laws exist which are intended to support Human Rights organizations and prevent arbitrary arrests and torture; for example, Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, of 2013. He also highlighted the importance of adhering to the Criminal Procedure Law. However, 'it is crucial to ensure their effective enforcement', he added.

### **Impacts of the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Law 2016**

As one of the interviewees mentioned, due to the paucity of local funds, HROs tend to depend on external funding for their work. But it is becoming difficult to secure these funds, largely because of the restrictions imposed through the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Law 2016. The interviewees unanimously agreed that this law has created a serious strain on HROs dependent on foreign donations. According to one interviewee, the law acts as a system to impose control over the recipients of the funds, which is particularly detrimental to human rights organizations.

# Appendix 1:

## Methodology and Questionnaire

### Methodology

Purposive Sampling Method was used for developing the sample of the study. The criteria for selecting participants were that's the respondents had to be involved in human rights protection activities. The population of the survey was determined based on this criterion. A list of the population (potential respondents of the survey) was gathered from three sources; a list of HRDs from four nationally renowned human rights organizations, 42 local human rights organizations that were found from various sources like Google search and personal communications and snowballing from local level human rights defenders. Attempts were made to identify respondents from all 64 districts; finally, 50 respondents were included from 36 districts. The main reason for the reduced districts was the insufficiency of respondents from all 64 districts. Among the 36 districts, six of them had two respondents each, and three districts had three respondents each.

Initially, 82 potential respondents were contacted, of which 53 people agreed to participate. All of them were contacted later to conduct the survey but five people declined, and five people did not respond to the questionnaires. Near the end of the survey process, three responses from one human rights organization had to be taken off the list because of the cancellation of their registration due to their internal matters. Later, ten more people were contacted and added to the survey, making the total respondents fifty.

Out of the total 50 surveys, 14 were done over the phone, i.e., the respondents were asked to answer the question over a phone call and the answers were input into the forms by the surveyors. 35 were sent by email or WhatsApp and guided to complete the survey and were received timely. In instances where returned questionnaires had problems such as lack of clarity, enumerators contacted them for clarification and the instruments were completed accordingly. Only one survey was done face-to-face.

The first survey was conducted on 24 May 2023 in a face-to-face meeting and the first on-call survey was conducted on 25 May 2023. The survey process was completed on 24 June 2023.

## List of the Districts of the HRDs Surveyed

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Bagerhat      | 19. Madaripur    |
| 2. Bandarban     | 20. Meherpur     |
| 3. Barishal      | 21. Moulavibazar |
| 4. Bhola         | 22. Mymensingh   |
| 5. Barguna       | 23. Narail       |
| 6. Chattogram    | 24. Narayanganj  |
| 7. Cox's Bazar   | 25. Netrokona    |
| 8. Cumilla       | 26. Nilphamari   |
| 9. Dhaka         | 27. Pabna        |
| 10. Dinajpur     | 28. Patuakhali   |
| 11. Faridpur     | 29. Pirojpur     |
| 12. Jashore      | 30. Rajshahi     |
| 13. Jhenaidah    | 31. Rangamati    |
| 14. Khagrachhari | 32. Rangpur      |
| 15. Khulna       | 33. Shariatpur   |
| 16. Kishoreganj  | 34. Sherpur      |
| 17. Kurigram     | 35. Sunamganj    |
| 18. Lakshmipur   | 36. Tangail      |

# The Questionnaire

## Challenges to Human Rights Defenders in Bangladesh

*A Survey conducted by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)*

বাংলাদেশে মানবাধিকার কর্মীদের চ্যালেঞ্জসমূহ অনুসন্ধান

সেন্টার ফর গভর্ন্যান্স স্টাডিজ (সিজিএস) দ্বারা পরিচালিত একটি জরিপ

**Assalamu Alaikum,**

We are inviting you to participate in research work that is being done by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) and Asia Foundation. The main objective of this research work is to find out what kinds of impediments and challenges are faced by the Human Rights Defenders of the country while they perform their responsibilities. Since you are a Human Rights Defender and have some remarkable experience in this field, you are requested to take part in this survey.

For the sake of the research, the whole survey will be documented in written form. Also, your consent to participate in this survey will be recorded. Your identity and information will not be disclosed anywhere for personal safety reasons. You can refrain from answering any of the questions in the survey and if you wish to withdraw from the survey, please let us know.

**আসসালামু আলাইকুম,**

সেন্টার ফর গভর্ন্যান্স স্টাডিজ (সিজিএস) ও এশিয়া ফাউন্ডেশন পরিচালিত একটি গবেষণা কার্যক্রমে অংশগ্রহণের জন্য আপনাকে আমন্ত্রণ জানাচ্ছি। দেশের মানবাধিকার কর্মীরা তাদের দায়িত্ব পালনের ক্ষেত্রে কী ধরনের প্রতিকূলতা বা চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখোমুখি হন তা অনুসন্ধান করাই গবেষণাটির মূল লক্ষ্য। একজন মানবাধিকার কর্মী হিসেবে আপনার অভিজ্ঞতার কারণে আপনার মতামত সংগ্রহ করতে এই জরিপে অংশ নিতে অনুরোধ করছি।

গবেষণার স্বার্থে সম্পূর্ণ জরিপটি লিখিতভাবে নথিভুক্ত করা হবে। পাশাপাশি, এ জরিপে অংশগ্রহণের বিষয়ে আপনার যে সম্মতি রয়েছে তা রেকর্ড করা হবে। ব্যক্তিগত তথ্যের গোপনীয়তা রক্ষার্থে আপনার পরিচয় কোথাও প্রকাশ করা হবে না। এই গবেষণার ফলাফল এবং এই বিষয়ে প্রতিবেদনে জরিপে অংশগ্রহণকারী কোনও ব্যক্তির ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য থাকবে না। জরিপের যে কোনও প্রশ্ন আপনি উত্তর নাও দিতে পারেন এবং এই জরিপ থেকে যদি আপনি নিজেকে প্রত্যাহার করতে চান তবে অনুগ্রহ করে জানাবেন।

Serial number :

সিরিয়াল নম্বর :

Division বিভাগ	
District জেলা	
Name of the interviewer সাক্ষাৎকার গ্রহণকারীর নাম	
Date of interview সাক্ষাৎকার গ্রহণের তারিখ	

Put a Cross (X) mark on the preferred answer in the empty boxes. Write elaborately where needed

পছন্দসই উত্তরের জন্য খালি বক্সগুলোর ভেতরে ক্রস (X) চিহ্ন দিন। যেখানে বিস্তারিত লেখার প্রয়োজন সেখানে লিখুন।

#### Part 1: Demographic and general information

পর্ব ১: জনসামাজিক ও সাধারণ তথ্য

101	Age of the respondent উত্তরদাতার বয়স		
102	Gender লিঙ্গ		
	Male পুরুষ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Female মহিলা	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Religion ধর্ম		
	Muslim মুসলিম	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Hindu হিন্দু	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Buddhist বৌদ্ধ	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Christian খ্রিস্টান	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	5	

104	Ethnic Identity জাতিগত পরিচয়		
	Bengali বাঙ্গালি	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Indigenous/Ethnic Minority আদিবাসী/ক্ষুদ্র নৃগোষ্ঠী	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	3	
105	Profession পেশা		
106	Organization (if not involved with any organization, write independent) সংগঠন ( কোন সংগঠনের সাথে জড়িত না থাকলে স্বতন্ত্র লিখুন)		
107	Designation (if any) পদবী (যদি থাকে)		
108	Region of activities কার্যক্রমের অঞ্চল		
	National জাতীয়	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Local স্থানীয়	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Both উভয়	3	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Part 2: Experience

### পর্ব ২: অভিজ্ঞতা

**I will now ask you about personal experience of working as a human rights defender.**

**Please answer based on your experience.** আমি এখন আপনাকে মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে কাজ করার ব্যক্তিগত অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞাসা করব। আপনার অভিজ্ঞতার উপর ভিত্তি করে উত্তর দিন।

201. How many years have you been active as a human rights defender? আপনি কত বছর ধরে একজন মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে সক্রিয় আছেন?

Less than 1 year ১ বছরের কম	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
1-5 Years ১-৫ বছর	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
6-10 years ৬-১০ বছর	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 10 years ১০ বছরের বেশি	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

202. What kinds of issues do you or your organization work on? (Multiple answers are accepted)  
আপনি বা আপনার সংগঠন কী ধরনের বিষয় নিয়ে কাজ করেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Corruption দুর্নীতি	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Law enforcement আইনের প্রয়োগ	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Labor শ্রম	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environment পরিবেশ	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land/Property জমি/সম্পত্তি	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indigenous/Ethnic Minority আদিবাসী/ক্ষুদ্র নৃগোষ্ঠী	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious minorities ধর্মীয় সংখ্যালঘু গোষ্ঠী	7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Migrants/Refugee অভিবাসী/শরণার্থী	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children শিশু	9	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women নারী	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
LGBTQ+ এলজিবিটিকিউ+	11	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons with disabilities প্রতিবন্ধী	12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	13	

203. As a human rights defender, have you received or been receiving support or any form of assistance to facilitate your activities from any source? একজন মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে আপনি কি কোনো উৎস থেকে আপনার কার্যক্রম সুষ্ঠুভাবে চালানোর জন্য কোনো সমর্থন বা সহায়তা পেয়েছেন?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 204 and 205 (২০৪ এবং ২০৫ এ যান)
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 206 (২০৬ এ যান)

204. What types of support or assistance have you received or been receiving in your capacity as a human rights defender? (Multiple answers accepted) একজন মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে আপনি কী ধরনের সমর্থন বা সহায়তা পেয়েছেন বা পাচ্ছেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Legal আইনি	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial আর্থিক	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political রাজনৈতিক	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protection নিরাপত্তা	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training প্রশিক্ষণ	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	6	

205. From which sources have you received or been receiving support or assistance as a human rights defender? (Multiple answers accepted) মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে আপনি কোন কোন উৎস থেকে সমর্থন বা সহায়তা পেয়েছেন বা পাচ্ছেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Your organization আপনার সংগঠন	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other human rights organization or NGOs অন্যান্য মানবাধিকার সংস্থা বা এনজিও	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Law enforcement agencies আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থা	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent benefactors স্বাধীন সাহায্যকারী	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government organizations/Agencies সরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান/সংস্থা	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	6	

206. While working as a human right defender, do you face any kind of obstacles from any sources? মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে কাজ করার সময়, আপনি কি কোনো ক্ষেত্র থেকে কোনো ধরনের বাধার সম্মুখীন হন?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 207 and 208 (২০৭ এবং ২০৮ এ যান)
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 209 (২০৯ এ যান)



207. From where have you encountered or been facing obstacles in your role as a human rights defender? (Multiple answers accepted) মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে আপনার ভূমিকা পালনে আপনি কোথা থেকে বাধার সম্মুখীন হয়েছেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Law Enforcement Agencies আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থা	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
State Intelligence Agencies গোয়েন্দা সংস্থা	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ruling Political Party ক্ষমতাসীন রাজনৈতিক দল	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opposition Political Party বিরোধী রাজনৈতিক দল	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government Officials সরকারী কর্মকর্তা/কর্মচারী	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Businesses/Business interest groups ব্যবসা/ব্যবসায়িক স্বার্থা্বেসী গোষ্ঠী	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-State Actors (religious, extremist, criminal, etc) রাষ্ট্রের বাইরের শক্তি (উগ্রবাদী, ধর্মীয়, অপরাধী ইত্যাদি)	7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	8	

208. What types of obstacles have you encountered or been facing in your role as a human rights defender? (Multiple answers accepted) মানবাধিকারকর্মী হিসেবে আপনার ভূমিকায় আপনি কোন ধরনের বাধার সম্মুখীন হয়েছেন বা সম্মুখীন হচ্ছেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Government Repression সরকারি দমন-পীড়ন	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enforced Disappearances জোরপূর্বক গুম	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Judicial Harassment and Arrests বিচার বিভাগীয় হয়রানি এবং গ্রেপ্তার	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Attacks শারীরিক আক্রমণ	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threats of Harm ক্ষতির হুমকি	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extortion or bribery চাঁদাবাজি অথবা ঘুষ	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restrictions on Activities কার্যকলাপের উপর বিধিনিষেধ অথবা সীমাবদ্ধতা	7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	8	

If you have faced or know anyone who has faced or believe human rights defenders face harassment, intimidation or threat in their work, answer to 209 to 217 আপনি যদি কোনো বাধার মুখোমুখি হয়ে থাকেন, অথবা এমন কাউকে চেনেন যিনি তাদের কাজে হয়রানি, ভীতি বা হুমকির সম্মুখীন হয়েছেন বা হচ্ছেন অথবা আপনি মনে করেন যে মানবাধিকারকর্মীরা তাদের কাজে হয়রানি, ভীতি বা হুমকির সম্মুখীন হয়েছে বা হচ্ছে, তাহলে ২০৯ থেকে ২১৭ নম্বরে উত্তর দিন।

209. How the human rights defenders are usually harassed or threatened? (Multiple answers accepted) কিভাবে মানবাধিকারকর্মীরা সাধারণত হয়রানি বা হুমকির সম্মুখীন হয়? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Facing cases মামলা মোকাবিলা	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intimidation ভয় দেখানো	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Death Threat মৃত্যুর হুমকি	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical attacks শারীরিক আক্রমণ	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threats of physical harm শারীরিক ক্ষতির হুমকি	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being followed/watched অনুসরণ করা/ নজরদারি করা	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Online Harassment/Hacking অনলাইন হয়রানি/হ্যাকিং	7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends/family members are harassed/intimidated/persecuted বন্ধু/পরিবারের সদস্যরা হয়রানি/ভীতিপ্রদর্শন/নির্যাতনের শিকার হয়	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	9	

210. How are threats or harassment usually carried out? (Multiple answers accepted) কিভাবে সাধারণত হুমকি বা হয়রানি দেওয়া হয়? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

In-person সামনাসামনি	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone/Mobile টেলিফোন/মোবাইল	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, etc) সোশ্যাল মিডিয়া (ফেসবুক, হোয়াটসঅ্যাপ, ইত্যাদি)	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Email ইমেইল	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters চিঠিপত্র	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parcels প্যার্সেল	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	7	

211. What was the purpose of the threats or harassment? (Multiple answers accepted) হুমকির বা হয়রানির উদ্দেশ্য কী? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

To stop a specific activity নির্দিষ্ট কোনো কার্যকলাপ বন্ধ করা	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
To cause psychological or physical harm মানসিক বা শারীরিক ক্ষতি করা	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
To warn of future acts of violence against the recipient ভবিষ্যৎ আক্রমণ করা হবে এই মর্মে সতর্ক করা	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
To warn of damage to reputation সুনামের ক্ষতি করা হবে বলে সতর্ক করা	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	5	

212. Are the threats reported to any relevant authority? এ সকল হুমকি কি যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের নিকটে রিপোর্ট করা হয়েছিলো?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 207 and 208 (২০৭ এবং ২০৮ এ যান)
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 209 (২০৯ এ যান)
Don't Know/Don't Respond জানিনা/ জবাব দিতে চাইনা	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	If you click 3 in 212, you should click 3 in 213 and 214 too ২১২ নম্বর প্রশ্নে ৩ নম্বরে ক্লিক করলে ২১৩ ও ২১৪ প্রশ্নেও ৩ এ ক্লিক করুন

213. If the threat was reported, was there an investigation carried out after the threat was reported? যদি হুমকির কথা রিপোর্ট করা হয়, তাহলে কি রিপোর্ট করার পর কোনো তদন্ত করা হয়েছিল?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 214 (২১৪ এ যান)
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 216 (২১৬ এ যান)
Don't Know/Don't Respond জানিনা/ জবাব দিতে চাইনা	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	If you click 3 in 213, you should click 3 in 214 too ২১২ ২১৩ নম্বর প্রশ্নে ৩ নম্বরে ক্লিক করলে ২১৪ প্রশ্নেও ৩ এ ক্লিক করুন

214. If there was an investigation, would you consider the response of the authorities adequate?  
যদি তদন্ত হয়ে থাকে, তাহলে কর্তৃপক্ষের সাড়া প্রদানকে কি আপনি যথেষ্ট মনে করেন?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 216 (২১৬ এ যান)
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to 216 (২১৬ এ যান)
Don't Know/Don't Respond জানিনা/ জবাব দিতে চাইনা	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	

215. What do you believe are the reasons the threats are not reported? (Multiple answers accepted)  
হুমকির বিরুদ্ধে রিপোর্ট না হওয়ার কারণ কী বলে আপনি মনে করেন? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Not being aware of legal options against such threats এই ধরনের হুমকির বিরুদ্ধে আইনি পদক্ষেপ সম্পর্কে সচেতনতা না থাকা	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
No proper investigation সঠিক তদন্ত হয়না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigations never lead to sufficient results তদন্ত কখনই পর্যাপ্ত ফলাফল দিতে পারে না	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of retribution by the perpetrators for going public রিপোর্ট করলে অপরাধীদের দ্বারা প্রতিশোধের ভয়	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of trust on the legal system আইনি ব্যবস্থার উপর আস্থার অভাব	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	6	

216. There are allegations that these threats against human rights defenders are not investigated. What are the reasons that threats against Human Rights Defenders are not duly investigated in Bangladesh? মানবাধিকারকর্মীদের বিরুদ্ধে এসব হুমকির তদন্ত হয় না বলে অভিযোগ রয়েছে। বাংলাদেশে মানবাধিকারকর্মীদের বিরুদ্ধে হুমকির যথাযথ তদন্ত না হওয়ার কারণ কী? (একাধিক উত্তর গ্রহণযোগ্য)

Failure to report threats by victims ভুক্তভোগীদের হুমকির বিষয়ে রিপোর্ট করতে ব্যর্থতা	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biasness of the authorities কর্তৃপক্ষের পক্ষপাতিত্ব	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of a clear legal provision against threats হুমকির বিরুদ্ধে সুস্পষ্ট আইনি বিধানের অভাব	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relation between perpetrators and government অপরাধী ও সরকারের মধ্যে সুসম্পর্ক	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involvement of state actors in threats হুমকির সাথে রাষ্ট্রীয় ক্রীড়নকে/ব্যক্তির জড়িত	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of technical capacity of the investigating authorities তদন্তকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের প্রযুক্তিগত সক্ষমতার অভাব	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	7	

217. How did the threats impact your (and if you know of any other victim) daily activities? হুমকিগুলো কীভাবে আপনার (এবং আপনি যদি অন্য কোনও শিকারের বিষয়ে জানেন) দৈনন্দিন কার্যকলাপকে প্রভাবিত করে?

Continued to defend human rights as before পূর্বের মতো মানবাধিকার রক্ষায় কাজ করে যাচ্ছেন	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had to reduce the scale of work কাজের পরিধি কমাতে হয়েছে	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had to request protection from the state রাষ্ট্রের কাছে সুরক্ষার অনুরোধ করতে হয়েছে	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had to leave the area এলাকা থেকে চলে যেতে হয়েছে	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had to stop human rights defence activities মানবাধিকার রক্ষা কার্যক্রম বন্ধ করতে হয়েছে	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify) অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)	6	

## Part 2: Experience

### পর্ব ২: অভিজ্ঞতা

I will now ask your observations, perceptions and opinions about overall human rights situation in Bangladesh.

আমি এখন বাংলাদেশের সামগ্রিক মানবাধিকার পরিস্থিতি সম্পর্কে আপনার পর্যবেক্ষণ, উপলব্ধি ও মতামত জিজ্ঞাসা করব।

301. How do you describe the state of the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh? (In a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the worst and 10 being very good) বাংলাদেশের সামগ্রিক মানবাধিকার পরিস্থিতি কে আপনি কীভাবে বর্ণনা করেন? (১ থেকে ১০ এর স্কেলে, ১ সবচেয়ে খারাপ এবং ১০ খুব ভাল)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

302. How safe is Bangladesh currently for human rights defenders, that is those who work on human rights issues? যারা মানবাধিকার ইস্যুতে কাজ করে, সেসব মানবাধিকারকর্মীদের জন্য বাংলাদেশ বর্তমানে কতটা নিরাপদ?

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very safe খুব নিরাপদ	Moderately safe মাঝারি নিরাপদ	Neutral নিরপেক্ষ	Moderately unsafe মাঝারিভাবে অনিরাপদ	Very unsafe খুবই অনিরাপদ

303. Do you think Bangladesh has policies, protocols, or specific practices to investigate threats against human rights defenders? আপনি কি মনে করেন যে মানবাধিকারকর্মীদের বিরুদ্ধে হুমকির তদন্ত করার জন্য বাংলাদেশের নীতি, প্রোটোকল বা নির্দিষ্ট পদ্ধতি রয়েছে?

Yes হ্যাঁ	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
No না	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know জানি না	3	<input type="checkbox"/>

304. Do you agree that Human Rights Organizations in Bangladesh actively provide safety and support for human rights defenders? আপনি কি একমত যে বাংলাদেশে মানবাধিকার সংস্থাগুলি সক্রিয়ভাবে মানবাধিকারকর্মীদের নিরাপত্তা এবং সহায়তা প্রদান করে?

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Agree দৃঢ়ভাবে একমত	Agree একমত	Neutral নিরপেক্ষ	Disagree অসম্মত	Strongly Disagree দৃঢ়ভাবে অসম্মত

#### Part 4 :

#### পর্ব ৪ :

401. Other than what was asked in the questions above, are there any particular issues or challenges that are commonly faced by human rights defenders in their work?

উপরের প্রশ্নগুলিতে যা জিজ্ঞাসা করা হয়েছে তা ছাড়া, মানবাধিকারকর্মীরা তাদের কাজের ক্ষেত্রে সাধারণত কোন বিশেষ সমস্যা বা চ্যালেঞ্জের সম্মুখীন হয়?

**Answer: উত্তর:**

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