

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 33/041/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 222
15 November 2007

Pakistan: Amnesty International's Secretary General presents petition demanding human rights and justice in Pakistan

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan today led a delegation of top lawyers, judges and journalists to present a petition to Pakistan's High Commission in London demanding the restoration of human rights and justice in Pakistan

The petition, addressed to General Pervez Musharraf, demanded full respect for freedom of expression in Pakistan, the release of all those arbitrarily detained under the State of Emergency, reinstatement of the independent judiciary, justice for the victims of enforced disappearance and no introduction of military tribunals for civilians.

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan said:

"General Musharraf must put an end immediately to his outrageous assault on Pakistan's vibrant human rights community, institutions of justice and independent media. In the name of the "war on terror" he is destroying the very guarantors of the stability that he claims to be defending."

General Secretary of the UK's National Union of Journalists Jeremy Dear said:

"Sales of satellite dishes and radios in Pakistan have skyrocketed in recent days, showing just how highly people value independent news. A free media is vital in maintaining public confidence in democracy and President Musharraf's actions will only add to the country's problems, creating a climate of fear and suspicion. Journalists must be able to work free from threats and harassment. Pakistan must abide by its international obligations and stop its assault on the media."

In presenting the petition, Irene Khan and Jeremy Dear were also joined by the Chair of the England and Wales Bar Council's Human Rights Committee Mark Muller QC.

Amnesty International is also calling for all other states to suspend immediately all forms of security cooperation, including military assistance, until Pakistan lifts the emergency measures which violate international human rights law.

Background Information

Acting in his capacity as army chief of staff, on 3 November General Musharraf suspended the bulk of the Constitution, including the rights not be arbitrarily deprived of life and to be guaranteed a fair trial. He assumed powers to amend the Constitution without any parliamentary procedure and proclaimed a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO). This order prohibits any court issuing an order against the President, Prime Minister or any person exercising powers under their authority.

Under the order, existing members of the superior judiciary are effectively suspended until they take a new oath to uphold the PCO. Only five of 17 Supreme Court Justices have taken the oath. Many Supreme Court and Provincial High Court Justices are now effectively under house arrest.

Since then hundreds of lawyers, human rights activists and political workers had been arrested or arbitrarily detained across Pakistan. Independent TV and radio news channels have been prevented from broadcasting within the country. New laws restricting freedom of print and electronic media were issued, breach of which attracts three to four years imprisonment and heavy fines.

Public Document

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