

## **Pakistan: Legitimate protest must not be stifled**

*As political parties in Pakistan are planning to hold public rallies in Karachi on 1 May and reports that at least 300 opposition activists have already been arrested, Amnesty International urges the Government of Pakistan to withdraw its ban on such activities and to immediately and fully restore the right to peaceful assembly.*

*"To ban all forms of public political activity not only breaches international human rights standards, the experience of the last months has also shown it to be counterproductive with protestors and police resorting to violence," Amnesty International said.*

*Several hundred members of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy were arbitrarily arrested in Lahore last month when they intended to call for general elections on the occasion of Pakistan Day. On 9 April, police used batons to break up a procession of 15 journalists who were protesting issues affecting their profession.*

*Hundreds of people, including women and children, were arbitrarily arrested in late March and early April in Sindh when political activists and environmentalists conducted a protest march against the government's failure to ensure the supply of irrigation and drinking water in the province. Many were injured as a result of tear gas, being hit with sticks or dragged into police vans.*

*Most of those arrested were released within hours or days. Amnesty International regarded them as prisoners of conscience and urged the government to immediately and unconditionally release them.*

*"The continued ban on public political activities cannot be justified. None of the peaceful protesters posed a danger to public order, none ought to have been arrested. The authorities should lift the ban and allow people in Pakistan to enjoy the full range of their human rights," Amnesty International said.*

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A six page report on mass arrests is available from [mcatsani@amnesty.org](mailto:mcatsani@amnesty.org)

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>