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Pakistan: UN recognizes Asma Jahangir for her contribution to human rights

Amnesty International congratulates Asma Jahangir, one of Pakistan's foremost human rights advocates, for winning a UN award for her outstanding contribution to promoting human rights around the world.

Irina Bokova, The Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) selected Ms Jahangir yesterday for this year's Bilbao Prize for the Promotion of Culture of Human Rights in recognition of her work as a leading human rights defender.

As an outstanding human rights lawyer, Ms Jahangir has championed the rights of women and children, religious minorities and bonded labourers. She has also defended the right to religious freedom and freedom from discrimination in Pakistan by challenging the Hudood and blasphemy laws that are respectively discriminatory in practice against women and religious minorities. She was placed under house arrest for her criticism over the State of Emergency declared by then President Pervez Musharraf in November 2007 and has faced several death threats for her work to protect and promote the rights of the Pakistani people.

In late October she was elected the first woman President of Pakistan's Supreme Court Bar Association. Her election to the highest legal forum can only serve to strengthen the independence of Pakistan's judiciary and rule of law.

Her prestigious legal career has seen her embrace a variety of high profile international positions. In 1998 Ms Jahangir was appointed to the role of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions. In 2004 she served as the United Nations Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. She was recently chair of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan before resigning in July to contest elections for the Supreme Court Bar Presidency.

The award will be presented to Ms Jahangir on Human Rights Day on 10 December in Bilbao in Spain.

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