

(Web feature)

General Musharraf cracks down on opposition

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The crackdown against pro-democracy activists in Pakistan continued on Tuesday with reports of more arrests of protesters and police beatings of lawyers.

President Musharraf has appointed new judges to enforce his declaration of a State of Emergency. These judges have reversed their predecessors' decisions making emergency rule illegal. Following his dismissal, former chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and a range of senior lawyers have urged protesters to step up efforts to restore the constitution.

Acting in his capacity as army chief of staff, on 3 November, General Musharraf suspended the bulk of the constitution and acquired powers to amend it without any parliamentary procedure.

Amnesty International (AI) has called for the immediate return to constitutional rule and the release of hundreds of people detained under the current measures, including human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and political party activists. The state of emergency declared by Musharraf is a blatant breach of international law that paves the way for escalating human rights abuses.

"General Musharraf's actions constitute a direct assault on Pakistan's judiciary, its vibrant human rights community, independent media and peaceful political dissent," said AI Secretary General Irene Khan, following the weekend's military crackdown.

"Measures that have been portrayed as necessary to protect Pakistan are in fact a wholesale abrogation of fundamental human rights protections and dismantle the very institutions and checks and balances that underpin the country's stability."

General Musharraf has bypassed constitutional provisions for declaring a state of emergency. This means key rights, such as not being arbitrarily deprived of life and elements of the right to a fair trial, have been suspended.

Under international law and human rights standards, reflected in the Constitution of Pakistan, these rights must be fully and unconditionally respected in all circumstances, whether or not a public emergency exists.

"Musharraf's actions also fly in the face of commitments set out in the emergency declaration itself to uphold the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law," said Ms Khan.

The suspension of judges and their effective house arrest plainly violates core provisions of the UN Principles for the Independence of the Judiciary.

"Amnesty International fears that this assault on key institutions of accountability, combined with sweeping emergency powers, will exacerbate existing patterns of human rights abuse, including torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and use of excessive force to suppress peaceful dissent," said Ms Khan.

Read more:

[Pakistan: State of Emergency paves way for escalating human rights abuses](#) (Press Release, 5 November 2007)

[Picture caption] Police officers in uniform and plain clothes push a lawyer into a police van in Multan, Pakistan

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