

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 33/052/2006 (Public)  
News Service No: 314  
8 December 2006

**Embargo Date: 8 December 2006 00:01 GMT**

## **Pakistan: Growing anger at continuing enforced disappearances**

Despite growing anger in Pakistan at the practice of enforced disappearances, the government has still not acknowledged its responsibility for hundreds of people arbitrarily detained in secret locations -- and reports of enforced disappearance continue to emerge.

In a week of demonstrations organised by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) against enforced disappearances, Amnesty International is releasing an update to its September report that reveals new cases and describes how families searching for their relatives have begun to organise themselves into protest groups.

"The Pakistani government needs to treat this issue with the gravity and urgency it deserves -- we are talking not only about the fate of hundreds of people but also the devastating effect on their families. The situation involves serious breaches of international law," said Angelika Pathak, South Asia researcher at Amnesty International.

President Pervez Musharraf dismissed the September report out of hand, refusing to reply when questioned on it by a BBC journalist. Other government officials were similarly offhand. Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammed Khan told Amnesty International delegates that legal procedures were too longwinded to be followed in Pakistan in a political context in which results were needed quickly.

"Politics, economics, security -- all have variously been given as excuses as to why the government needs to break international law. But there is never an excuse for violating human rights. Human rights are the bedrock -- the starting point for approaching politics and security," said Angelika Pathak.

The day Amnesty International released its report -- 29 September -- magazine editor Abdur Rahim Muslim Dost was arrested as he left a mosque in Peshawar. His fate and whereabouts are still unknown. He had just published a book describing how he was arrested by Pakistani military in 2001, transferred into US custody and detained in Guantánamo Bay. The book recounted his torture in Pakistani and US custody.

Family members continued to face harassment even as parliamentarians, lawyers and NGOs gathered for a workshop organised by the HRCP and Amnesty International in Islamabad in early October. At least one relative was stopped by intelligence agents on the morning of the workshop and questioned as to why he was attending it.

Abid Raza Zaidi, a researcher at Karachi University, was detained by Military Intelligence agents after giving a speech at the workshop. He said he was taken to the Red Fort in Lahore and threatened with dire consequences if he spoke publicly about his experiences again. In his speech he had described being detained for over three months without charge and being beaten to make him confess to taking part in a suicide bomb attack at Nishtar Park in April 2006. Abid Raza Zaidi was not charged and was released after 24 hours at the intervention of the HRCP.

Several people subjected to enforced disappearances have reappeared in recent weeks after being arbitrarily detained in secret locations for over two years on average. Each was warned not to speak publicly about their experiences and detention.

"Of course the Pakistani government has a duty to protect people from security threats. At the same time it must follow national and international law in doing so -- anyone suspected of terrorism should be charged, given access to a lawyer and their family, and given a fair trial," said Angelika Pathak.

"To prevent anyone else being subjected to enforced disappearance, the government must set up a central register of detainees and publish regular lists of all recognised places of detention."

To see the report update, *Pakistan: Working to stop human rights violations in the 'war on terror'*, please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa330512006>.

To see the September report, *Pakistan: Human Rights Ignored in the 'war on terror'*, please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGASA330362006>

For more information on enforced disappearances in Pakistan, please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-061208-features-eng>.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

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>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>