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Pakistan: Harassment and police brutality against Afghan refugees

Following the death on Wednesday of an Afghan refugee who was thrown out of a moving car by Pakistani police, Amnesty International is calling on the Pakistani government to take decisive action on the continued persecution of Afghan refugees.

Afghan refugee Salahuddin Samadi had been living in Pakistan since 1996. Two police constables stopped him, his brother and two female relatives in Islamabad on 15 June and ordered them into taxis to go to Margala police station for questioning. The police allegedly demanded \$150 from the brothers in return for their release. The men could not produce the money and were severely beaten. Salahuddin was reportedly beaten on the head with a bottle and thrown out of the moving car. The other three were released after the women had reportedly given \$8 to the police.

Salahuddin Samadi was admitted to hospital and remained in a coma until he died on 27 June. He was one of hundreds, possibly thousands of Afghans subjected to harassment or police brutality in recent months.

"Despite repeated warnings -- including a letter by Amnesty International sent to the Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, raising concern about the deteriorating situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan -- the Government of Pakistan has failed to ensure their safety and security," Amnesty International said.

In recent months, thousands of Afghan male refugees in Pakistan have become the subject of arbitrary arrest, intimidation, beatings and

deportations by the Pakistani police. According to reports, police stop Afghans in the streets demanding bribes. Those who can pay are released, while others are taken to police stations and either released when their families pay a bribe or are beaten or deported.

Afghan families have been living in constant fear that their male members will be picked up by the police. Many reportedly stay indoors to avoid being arrested at random.

Provincial government authorities in the North West Frontier Province have repeatedly been quoted in the Pakistani press saying that Afghan refugees are no longer welcome in Pakistan and should go home. The police appear to have been given a free hand in deciding who should be arrested or deported. Arrests are made without a warrant, reportedly under the guise of Pakistan's Foreigners Act. Those who are detained cannot seek judicial redress against arbitrary detention because complaints have to be made to the police exposing them to further risk of harassment

Amnesty International is urging the government of Pakistan to institute an independent, impartial and competent inquiry to investigate the death of Salahuddin Samadi and the reported ill-treatment of his brother and two relatives who were with him at the time, and to bring to justice those responsible.

Amnesty International is also urging the Government of Pakistan to take decisive action to protect Afghan refugees who have become the targets of systematic harassment and police brutality in recent months.

Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and other countries in the region. In November 2000 the organization urged the Governments of

Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan to open their borders to Afghan refugees and to fulfil their international obligation to provide safety to these refugees.

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