

Pakistan: Afghan Intellectuals at risk

Until the government of Pakistan takes decisive action to end the harassment and political intimidation of Afghan intellectuals living as refugees in Pakistan, dozens of prominent Afghans will remain at risk of deportation and human rights abuses, Amnesty International warned today.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety and whereabouts of noted Afghan scholar and former lecturer at Kabul University, Professor Mohammad Rahim Elham, who was deported to Afghanistan by the Pakistani authorities on 21 June.

The Pakistani authorities have said Mr Elham was deported for making anti-Pakistan statements and accusing Pakistan of interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. However Amnesty International believes he was deported for exercising his right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The deportation of Mr Elham to Afghanistan has created anxiety amongst prominent Afghans living as refugees in Pakistan.

The Taleban Foreign Minister has said that Mr Elham will be safe in Afghanistan provided he respects the law. However, over the past two years scores of prominent Afghans advocating an end to the war and the establishment of a government representing all ethnic groups have been detained by the Taleban and tortured. Over a dozen have been killed after their arrest. Dozens of Afghans living in Pakistan have received death threats and several of them have been assassinated.

Mr Elham's deportation is in breach of a recent agreement between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the

Government of Pakistan for joint assessment of Afghan refugee claims prior to deportation . The government of Pakistan has yet to respond to a call by the UNHCR for an assessment of Mr Elham's case, the first case under the new agreement. Pakistan has also breached the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, considered to be a rule of international customary law.

Two weeks before the deportation of Mr Elham, another Afghan writer living in Pakistan was shot and wounded at his home in Peshawar, Pakistan. Mohammad Enam Wak, also a leading member of the nationalist party Afghan Mellat, had just published a book written in which he debated the formation of a state on the basis of ethnic identity. There has been no investigation into the shooting.

Both writers appear to have been targeted on the basis of their political views.

Amnesty International is urging the Pakistani government to allow Mr Elham to re-enter Pakistan to seek protection; to investigate the attempted assassination of Mr Enam Wak and bring those responsible to justice; and to ensure that no Afghans living as refugees in Pakistan are subjected to deportation for exercising their right to freedom of opinion.

Amnesty International is also calling upon the Taleban authorities to ensure the safety of Mr Elham.

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