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## **Pakistan: Arrests of peaceful political activists must stop**

*The pre-dawn sweep, in which scores of political activists from the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) were arrested in and around Lahore prior to a rally planned for 8 July, is a blatant crackdown on basic human rights, Amnesty International said today.*

*In April this year, the Chief Executive promised "the creation of an environment in which each Pakistani can find an opportunity to lead his life with dignity and freedom".*

*"The arbitrary arrests of peaceful political activists does not accord with this promise," the organization said.*

*"The exercise of the rights to freedom of association and expression must be respected. We urge the immediate release of all those detained for exercising these rights and call on the Government of Pakistan to lift the ban on public political activities which was imposed in March 2000," the organization said.*

### **Background**

*Leaders of the PML have stated that some 300 party members including former parliamentarians have been arrested without charge and that arrests were continuing. Punjab home ministry sources have reportedly confirmed to the media that 93 PML members had been arrested to stop a procession planned by the wife of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.*

*Kulsoom Nawaz had said she intended to lead a procession from Peshawar to Lahore on 8 July to collect donations for the drought affected people in Sindh and Balochistan. She has risen to political prominence since the overthrow of her husband's government and his imprisonment for hijacking and his trial on corruption charges.*

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