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Pakistan: ensure justice in high profile killings is consistent with human rights

Amnesty International called on Pakistan authorities to ensure justice for victims of high profile killings that is consistent with internationally recognised standards of human rights.

Today the Anti-Terrorism Court sentenced Shahid Zafar, a member of the paramilitary Rangers, to be hanged for the shooting death of Sarfaraz Shah in Karachi last June. Pakistan has not carried out an execution since 2009.

There are currently more than 7,000 prisoners on death row in Pakistan.

Amnesty International opposes all forms of the death penalty in all cases regardless of the nature of the crime. The death penalty violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Four other members of the Rangers were sentenced to life in prison because they did not prevent Zafar from shooting Sarfaraz Shah and did not assist Shah as he bled to death. Under Pakistan law, all five men have a right to appeal the decision heard by the Sindh High Court. Pakistan's Constitution empowers the President to grant clemency to a person sentenced to death.

Shahid Zafar was filmed by a news crew, bringing the incident to national and international attention. Because of the high national and international notoriety of the case, Pakistan authorities, including the federal and Sindh governments and the Supreme Court, were quick to bring the matter before the Anti-Terrorism Court.

The Anti-Terrorism Court reached its decision much more quickly than the majority of criminal trials.

Amnesty calls on Pakistan authorities to ensure justice is delivered without delay in other high profile cases consistent with internationally recognised standards of justice. In contrast to the sentencing of the Rangers in the Sarfaraz Shah case, the trial of Governor Taseer's self-confessed killer appears to have stalled while authorities have yet to bring those responsible for the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti to justice.

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