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Pakistan: Immediately investigate killing of human rights defender and journalist Zaman Mehsud

Amnesty International condemns the targeted killing of a journalist and human rights defender Zaman Mehsud on 3 November and urges the government to take immediate steps to ensure a prompt, independent and effective investigation and to bring perpetrators to justice.

Zaman Mehsud was a journalist, serving as the president and secretary-general of the South Waziristan's chapter of the Tribal Union of Journalists and also working as a monitor with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in South Waziristan, part of Pakistan's north-west tribal area affected by armed conflict between Pakistan Taliban-affiliated armed groups and state armed forces.

According to police, Zaman Mehsud was shot on 3 November by two unidentified gunmen while riding his motorbike in Tank district, near South Waziristan. He succumbed to his injuries soon afterwards in the District Headquarters and Teaching Hospital in Dera Ismail Khan.

A Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander Qari Saif Ullah Saif claimed responsibility for the attack, telling Reuters: "We killed him because he was writing against us ... we have some other journalists on our hit list in the region. Soon we will target them."

On the day of Zaman's targeted killing, the spokesperson for the TTP Jammāt UI Ahrar, another Taliban faction, warned on Twitter of "severe" consequence if the media does not give "proper coverage to mujahideen".

The attack on Zaman Mehsud highlights yet again the dangers journalists and human rights defenders are facing due to their work, facing attacks and threats from all sides – armed groups and state actors, including military and the security forces. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns over the lack of protection and accountability for attacks against journalists and human rights defenders in Pakistan. In April 2014, Amnesty International issued a report, "A Bullet Has Been Chosen For You – Attacks On Journalists in Pakistan", extensively documenting the harassment and abuse of journalists in Pakistan. In the overwhelming number of cases, the authorities fail to adequately investigate threats or attacks or bring those responsible to justice. This has created a dangerous pattern of impunity, which increases the vulnerability of human

rights defenders and journalists.

The attack on Zaman Mehsud sends a chilling warning to journalists working under extremely difficult conditions in Pakistan's tribal areas, and will have a further negative effect on freedom of expression in Pakistan.

The Pakistan government has the duty to ensure that all those working to protect and promote human rights are adequately protected.

Amnesty International calls on the Pakistan authorities to ensure that a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation is conducted and those responsible are brought to justice in a trial respecting international standards of fairness, and without recourse to the death penalty. The Pakistan authorities must ensure access to effective forms of reparations for the family of Zaman Mehsud.

The government should also fully implement its March 2014 pledges to improve protection of journalists, including the creation of an office of the public prosecutor at the federal and provincial levels tasked with investigating attacks against journalists.

Amnesty International calls on all state and non-state actors in Pakistan to respect international human rights law, and to ensure human rights defenders, including media workers, are not targeted for conducting their legitimate work.