

Ref: TG ASA 33/2015.001
Index; ASA 33/1148/2015

Mr. Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister of Pakistan
Prime Minister House
Pakistan Secretariat
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INTERNATIONAL**



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6 March 2015

Dear Prime Minister Sharif

RE: RESTRICTION OF BALOCH ACTIVISTS LEAVING PAKISTAN

We have come to learn with utmost concern that three Pakistani nationals from Balochistan were told by the authorities at Karachi airport on 4 March 2015 that they could not travel to the United States where they were due to attend a human rights conference.

The three are known human rights activists with a track record of peaceful activity. As with other Pakistani nationals, they have the right to leave the country and return.

We are therefore appealing to you to ensure that they are able to travel to the United States as they had planned. For this purpose, we urge you to ensure that Exit Control authorities are instructed to permit them from leaving the country.

According to our information, on 4 March, Abdul Qadeer Baloch, Farzana Majeed and Faiqa Baloch were due to depart from Karachi airport to the United States to attend a weekend conference organized by the Sindhi and Baloch community in New York. The three activists were invited to highlight human rights violations in Sindh and Balochistan provinces. As you will appreciate, both Pakistan law and international human rights law safeguard their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly including attendance at this conference.

Accordingly, they have a legitimate right to speak about human rights violations in Balochistan. Political activists from the ethnic Baloch and Sindhi communities have been subjected to abductions, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions in the provinces. Activists, journalists, lawyers, and student leaders as well as members of armed groups are among those who have been targeted for enforced disappearance, abduction, torture and unlawful killing. The violence takes place in a context of increasing political unrest and state military operations in Balochistan, whilst there has been a gradual increase in the number of Sindhi activists abducted and found dead with bullet-holes and marks consistent with torture.

The three activists' non-refundable return tickets were paid for by family and friends. All three were issued visas by the United States Embassy in Pakistan to travel for this conference.

After checking-in their baggage and obtaining their boarding passes, Abdul Qadeer Baloch and his companions were not permitted to proceed to the departure lounge by an officer working for the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Abdul Qadeer Baloch and Farzana Majeed were told that they were on the country's Exit Control List (ECL) while Faiqa Baloch was barred from leaving because she was travelling as part of the group.

The three activists were taken to a room where they were detained for up to three-and-a half hours. During which time, various FIA agents accused the men of engaging in terrorism and anti-state activities. No charges were filed against them. Abdul Qadeer Baloch was repeatedly told there were charges filed against him at a police station in Pakistan. But no one was able to tell him what the charges were or where the charges had been registered. Abdul Qadeer Baloch has described the ordeal they experienced to Amnesty International as "mental torture". The three activists were permitted to leave the airport after their United States-bound plane departed from Karachi airport.

Abdul Qadeer Baloch is a prominent and respected Baloch activist. He has held peaceful protests and marches for the recovery of disappeared Baloch men, women and children. His own son, Jaleel Reiki, disappeared in 2010 and was found dead almost three years later, bullet-ridden and with torture marks. Jaleel Reiki was the Information Secretary of the Baloch Republican Party and a campaigner raising awareness about the disappeared in Balochistan.

As stated above, freedom of expression is a human right enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Pakistan ratified in June 2010. The ICCPR also protects the right to freedom of movement, including the right to leave any country, including one's own. The imposed travel ban therefore violates their rights to the freedom of expression and freedom of movement and peaceful assembly.

We call on your government to urgently take the following steps:

- Abide by Pakistan's human rights obligations under domestic and international law and respect the activists' rights to freedom of expression, movement and peaceful assembly.
- Remove Abdul Qadeer Baloch and Farzana Majeed's names from the country's Exit Control List unless the authorities promptly provide a legal basis for their inclusion and allow the opportunity to challenge their inclusion in a hearing that complies with international standards for fairness.
- Permit Abdul Qadeer Baloch, Farzana Majeed and Faiqa Baloch to exercise their right to leave the country.

Thank you for your attention to our request. We look forward to hearing that Mr Baloch, Ms Majeed and Ms Baloch are free to travel as a result of your intervention.

Yours Sincerely,

Rupert Abbott
Asia-Pacific Deputy-Director