

URGENT ACTION

FEARS FOR DISAPPEARED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

The whereabouts of Muhammad Idris Khattak, a Pakistani human rights defender and independent researcher, remain unknown since he was forcibly disappeared on 13 November 2019. A patient of diabetes requiring daily medication, the health of Khattak is at even greater risk during the COVID-19 outbreak as the conditions of his detention remain unknown. With no information about his fate for six months, Amnesty International fears that Khattak is at real risk of torture or ill-treatment, as is often suffered by other victims of enforced disappearance in Pakistan.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi

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Your Excellency Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi,

*I write to you out of extreme concern for the life and safety of **Muhammad Idris Khattak**, a 56-year-old human rights defender and a former consultant with Amnesty International, who is believed to have been forcibly disappeared more than half a year ago by men in plain clothes on 13 November.*

Mr. Khattak is a human rights defender and independent researcher, who has documented human rights violations faced by people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

I found it distressing to learn that Mr. Kattak is a patient of diabetes, who requires daily medication. As the conditions of his detention remain unknown, and in light of the current global COVID-19 pandemic, I fear that his health and wellbeing are at even greater risk.

Few punishments are as cruel as enforced disappearances and not knowing the whereabouts and fate of their loved one is a source of immense pain and anguish for Mr. Khattak's family. Enforced disappearances have long been a stain on Pakistan's human rights record. As of 30 June 2019, Pakistan government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance has 2,141 cases unresolved.

I call upon your government to immediately disclose the whereabouts of Idris Khattak to his family, and either immediately release him or ensure that he is brought promptly before a judge in a civilian court to rule on the lawfulness of his arrest or detention.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Idris Khattak has worked as a consultant with Amnesty International and other international human rights NGOs. For years, he has documented a wide range of human rights violations and humanitarian crises in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

He was on his way home from Islamabad when his rented car was intercepted near the Swabi Interchange of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The only other person in the car was the driver with whom Idris Khattak has travelled frequently. The driver was also picked up with Idris Khattak on 13 November 2019. His family only found out about his disappearance once the driver was released the night of 15 November 2019.

According to the application submitted by Mr Khattak's family, for the registration of the police case, four men in plain clothes put a black sack on the faces of Mr Khattak and the driver and took them to an undisclosed location.

The disappeared are at risk of torture and even death. If they are released, the physical and psychological scars endure. Disappearances are a tool of terror that strikes not just individuals or families, but entire societies. Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law and, if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack, they constitute a crime against humanity.

In Pakistan, enforced disappearance has been used as a tool to muzzle dissent and criticism of military policies. The individuals and groups targeted in enforced disappearances include Sindhis, Baloch, Pashtuns, the Shia community, political activists, human rights defenders, members and supporters of religious and nationalist groups, suspected members of armed groups, and proscribed religious and political organisations in Pakistan.

Amnesty International has been receiving reports of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions of dissidents, students and other citizens from across the country throughout 2019.

In January 2019, a political dissident Ahmad Mustafa Kanju was forcibly disappeared from his house in Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab province. In October 2019, Suleman Farooq Chaudhry an engineering graduate who was critical of the government on social media was taken from outside Islamabad. The whereabouts of both men are still unknown to their families.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines an enforced disappearance as "the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law."

The current government of Imran Khan promised to criminalize enforced disappearances through legislation, however no such legislation has even been tabled in the parliament. Shireen Mazari, the Minister for Human Rights, has stated that government wants to sign the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, but no progress has been made on this front. Instead, the practice of enforced disappearance continues in the country with impunity.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English, Urdu]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 June 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Muhammad Idris Khattak] (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/1431/2019/en/>