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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



Mr. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan
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Dear Interior Minister,

Amnesty International is writing to call on the Pakistani government to take urgent action to protect the lives and rights of journalists, bloggers, civil society activists and other human rights defenders who face constant harassment, intimidation, threats and violent attacks in the country.

We are a Nobel Peace Prize winning global movement of more than seven million members and supporters who promote and defend human rights. One of the priority issues on which our global membership is campaigning is for the rights and protection of human rights defenders.

A chilling example of the current climate is a smear campaign on Bol Television's show '*Aisay Nahi Chalay Ga*'. For several weeks now, this and other shows on Bol have been used as platforms to issue threats against journalists, civil society activists, bloggers and human rights defenders, smearing them as "anti-Pakistan", "anti-ISI", "anti-army", "anti-Islam" and as blasphemers.

People attacked on the show, including activists Jibran Nasir, Beena Sarwar and Sheema Kirmani, as well as journalists Najam Sethi, Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain, Imtiaz Alam and Shahzeb Khanzada have received death threats that the Pakistani government must not ignore.

During one broadcast, the show's host said: "I am warning Geo to shut up, otherwise when I expose the reality then their entire organization will have to flee the country, they will leave the country because I will bring you fatwas against them and their organization from all the factions."

Amnesty International has documented several cases in Pakistan over recent decades where accusations of blasphemy and other smear campaigns have led to threats, attacks and even the killings of journalists, activists and other human rights defenders. Human rights activists including Khurram Zaki, Sabeen Mahmud, Zaman Mehsud and Perween

Rehman were killed in recent years. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 67 journalists and media workers have been killed in Pakistan since 1992. In 2014, two high profile journalists, Raza Rumi and Hamid Mir narrowly survived assassination attempts.

The Pakistani government, however, has failed on its commitment made to the United Nations' Human Rights Council at its last Universal Periodic Review in 2012 to strengthen human rights protections, including developing a national policy to protect human rights defenders. In 2015, Pakistan voted against a UN Resolution to protect human rights defenders. Since then, the Pakistani government has narrowed the space for civil society and human rights groups to operate freely and safely, shutting down many organizations while placing onerous restrictions on others, making it harder for them to secure registration and access funding.

The work of journalists, bloggers, civil society organizations and human rights defenders is crucial to any free and just society. Their activities are not just protected under Pakistan's obligations under international law, but also under Pakistan's Constitution.

Amnesty International therefore urges the Pakistani authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the effective protection of human rights defenders, including by providing security when they are facing risks because of their peaceful human rights work, in close consultation and according to their wishes.

The authorities should take decisive actions to create a safe and enabling environment in which it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation. This must include the explicit and public recognition of the legitimate work carried out by human rights defenders and civil society organizations and other efforts to ensure that they can carry out their work without undue hindrance, including by allowing a swift process of registration and guaranteeing the right of associations to seek and receive funding.

Yours sincerely,

David Griffiths
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