



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: ASA 33/6566/2017
22 June 2017

Pakistan: Investigate Assault on Lawyers

Prominent Human Rights Defender Asma Jahangir Threatened

Pakistani authorities need to ensure a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into a barrage of assaults and threats against lawyers in the premises of the Lahore High Court, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said today. The Government needs to defend the rule of law and prosecute those responsible for any criminal conduct.

On 20 June, during proceedings of a case involving the alleged abduction and subsequent “disappearance” of a 26-year old woman and her two-year old son, supporters of the accused, a prominent lawyer, physically assaulted the complainant’s counsel Shabbir Hussain and Usama Malik, and made abusive remarks and threats against another member of the complainant’s legal team, Noor Ejaz Chaudhry. The attackers were mostly lawyers and members of the local bar association.

The attackers also made abusive and threatening remarks against Asma Jahangir, a notable human rights lawyer, Honorary Commissioner of the ICJ, and former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association. Asma Jahangir was not present in the court but was represented by her legal team comprising of Shabbir Hussain, Usama Malik, Mian Liaquat Ali and Noor Ejaz Chaudhry.

“The legal profession is one of the pillars of the administration of justice. It is deeply worrying that instead of discharging their responsibility to uphold the rule of law, certain lawyers would resort to threats and violence in a clear attempt to obstruct justice,” said Ian Seiderman, ICJ’s Legal and Policy Director.

Under international standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, Pakistan has an obligation to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. Where lawyers are threatened as a result of discharging their functions, authorities must ensure they are adequately safeguarded.

“Lawyers must be able to go to court without fearing violent assaults and abuse,” Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch said. “That such assaults take place with increasing frequency in Pakistan and without accountability represents a serious failure of the Pakistani authorities to ensure rule of law.”

It is the responsibility of the bar councils and associations to ensure that allegations of professional misconduct against their members are promptly, independently and

impartially investigated, and if lawyers are found in breach of their codes of conduct after a fair hearing, disciplinary action is taken against them. Any disciplinary action must be subject to an independent judicial review.

“Threatening and assaulting opposing counsel is not just against the law, but also in breach of lawyers’ professional code of ethics,” said David Griffiths, Amnesty International’s Senior Adviser on South Asia. “The respective Bar Councils must take notice of the allegations, and use this condemnable incident as an opportunity to tackle the culture of impunity which impacts even the legal profession in Pakistan.”

Background

In May 2017, Bilquis Zareena filed a *habeas corpus* petition in the Lahore High Court for the recovery of her daughter Ayesha and grandson Alyan Ali, who have allegedly been missing since November 2016.

The next hearing in the case is on Friday, 23 June 2017.