

PUBLIC

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UA 133/07 Fear for safety

PAKISTAN Mazhar Abbas (m)
Iqbal Haider (m), Secretary General, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
Asif Hassan (m)
Zarrah Khan (m)
Ten other journalists

An ethnically-based political group linked to one of the parties in the coalition that governs Pakistan has issued a threatening list of 12 named journalists, labelling them “chauvinists” and “enemies” of the Mujahir ethnic group.

The list of journalists was produced by the Mujahir Rabita Council (MRC) political group, and faxed on 22 May from the headquarters of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a coalition partner in the government of President Musharaff.

Subsequently, on 29 May, an envelope containing bullets was reportedly attached to the windscreen of journalist Mazhar Abbas's car, and bullets were found on the driver's seats of cars used by photographers Zarrah Khan and Asif Hassan, all in the city of Karachi.

Mazhar Abbas is a correspondent for the French news agency Agence France Presse (AFP), and Secretary General of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists. Zarrah Khan is a correspondent and photographer for the US news agency Associated Press; Asif Hassan is an AFP photographer. Mazhar Abbas and Zarrah Khan had both been named on the MRC list.

The other journalists listed were: Azhar Abbas of Dawn TV; Zafar Abbas of the daily newspaper *Dawn*; Aneeq Ahmed and Shaheen Sehbai of ARY TV; *Dawn* columnist Ayaz Amir; Asfar Imam of Aaj TV; Zahid Hussain of Geo TV; Dr Shahid Masood of Geo TV; Sajjad Mir of TV One; Irfan Siddiqui of daily *Nawa-e-Waqt*.

According to the Asian Human Rights council, in the fax the MRC denounced the 12 journalists, warning them to change their critical views of President Musharaff and MQM leader Altaf Hussain. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan secretary general, Iqbal Haider, was also named on the list.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The list and death threats follow a prolonged history of violent attacks on journalists in Pakistan, and a recent clampdown on freedom of expression in the country.

For many years journalists and other media workers have faced threats, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, ill-treatment, torture and sometimes death at the hands of the intelligence services, the military and opposition groups. For example in December 2005 journalist Hayatullah Khan was abducted by five armed men, allegedly members of the security forces; he was found dead six months later. Publication of his photographs had proved that, contrary to government claims, the US military had fired a missile in Pakistan territory of North Warizistan (see follow-up to UA 308/05, 20 June 2006, ASA 33/030/2005). In April 2006, the director of TV station Baloch Voice, Munir Mengal, was arrested by intelligence agents and remains in military custody (see UA 92/06, 13 April 2006, ASA 33/011/2006). Mehruddin Mari, a correspondent for the Sindhi-language newspaper the *Daily Kawdish*, was beaten and subjected to electric shocks by military officials in order to force him to confess to links with the Baloch nationalist movement during his four-month detention, July-October 2006.

During 2007 fears of further attacks on journalists increased as political tensions intensified following the suspension of Pakistan's Chief Justice by the government in March. As public protests in support of the Chief Justice gathered pace nationwide, the offices of Geo TV were raided by police for ignoring a government order not to air popular news programme. During riots related to the judicial crisis in Karachi in May, several journalists were prevented from carrying out their professional duties by pro-government activists, allegedly including MQM members, who beat them and damaged their equipment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Urdu, Pashtu or your own language:

- expressing concern that the Mujahid Rabita Council, which has links to the ruling coalition has issued a threatening list of 12 journalists, which increases the risk of attacks on them;
- calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to protect journalists from threats, harassment and attack, and guarantee their freedom of movement;
- calling on the authorities to uphold journalists' rights to freedom of opinion and expression as well as their personal security, as guaranteed by Articles 3 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

President Pervez Musharaff
Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 9221422
E-mail: CE@pak.gov.pk
president@pak.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear President Musharaff

Mr Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao
Minister for the Interior, Ministry for the Interior
Room 404, 4th Floor, Block R, Federal Secretariat, Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92-51 9202624
E-mail: minister@interior.gov.pk
secretary@interior.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr. Justice Rhana Bhagwandas
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Pakistan, Constitution Avenue, Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 9213452
E-mail: scp2000@isb.paknet.com.pk
Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

Mr Muhammad Wasi Zafar
Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights
Room 305, S-Block, Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 9202628
E-Mail: minister@molaw.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Minister

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 July 2007.