

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ABDUCTED WITHOUT TRACE

Seengar Noonari, Labour Secretary of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) and lifelong activist, was abducted from his home at 3am on 26 June 2021 in front of his wife and three young children. 15 men in plain clothes ransacked his house before blindfolding and taking him away. The abduction came the day before a National Day of Action was being organized by AWP to protest alleged illegal land grabs by private property developers. His wife has filed a petition in the Sindh High Court demanding the disclosure of his whereabouts and for him to be presented in a civilian court, in lieu of an immediate release.

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

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah

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Dear Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah,

I write to you out of concern for the safety and life of **Mr Seengar Noonari**, a human rights defender from Nasirabad who was abducted from his home at 3:00 am on 26 June, Seengar is currently the Sindh Labour Secretary of the Awami Workers Party.

I am alarmed to learn that no information has yet been released as to where Seengar has been detained, the charges being laid against him or even if he will be presented in civilian court. While a petition for his release has been filed in Sindh High Court, it is crucial that his family is immediately notified about his current status.

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 Seengar's family.

Seengar Noonari has spent his life fighting for girls' education, fair wages and proper working conditions. It is distressing that his abduction - which may amount to enforced disappearance, a crime under international law, comes after he began organizing his community against illegal land grabs.

At a time when there have been announcements from the Federal Government about criminalizing enforced disappearances, events like Seengar's abduction serve to only undermine those intentions and inhibit crucial progress against this tool of terror.

I call upon your government to immediately disclose the whereabouts of Seengar Noonari to his family, and either 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. I urge you to uphold justice, truth and reparation for him and his family. He must be granted access to his lawyer and family immediately.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Seengar Noonari is a grassroots activist who has been engaged in social work and uplifting his community. This has included work to promote the education of girls, calling for more government schools to be built in his district of Nasirabad in Sindh. He has also been engaged with groups that promote social and religious harmony. In 2009, he joined the Awami Workers Party, a political organization that works to promote the rights of workers, peasants, students, women and ethnic and religious minorities. Through that he has been campaigning to improve working conditions and most recently, has been organizing his community to push back against allegedly illegal land grabs by a private property developer. It is widely believed by his supporters that this is what resulted in his forced abduction.

Fouzia, Seengar Noonari's wife, told Amnesty International that at 3:00 am on the morning of 26 June 2021, about 15 armed men broke into their small house while they were asleep. Her children, aged between 15 months and 10 years, were with them as they ransacked their house. They seized two mobile phones, an internet device, a USB and a few books before blindfolding Seengar and taking him away.

His wife submitted a petition to the Sindh High Court on 2 July, calling for Seengar to be produced in court. Notices were issued to the Sindh police, the chief of Rangers (a paramilitary force under the command of the Pakistan army) and the station house officer of Nasirabad Police Station, alongside the Deputy and Additional Attorney Generals, seeking their response by July 13. In previous cases, however, such orders have not been adhered to. Court orders from all over the country surrounding the whereabouts of a disappeared person have been flouted or face extraordinary delays.

In Pakistan, enforced disappearance has been used as a tool to muzzle dissent. 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.

The current government of Imran Khan promised to criminalize enforced disappearances through legislation. After families staged a sit-in in Feb 2021 for days, Imran Khan met with the families, pledging to bring an end to the practice. According to victim groups, there have been some returns in recent months.

However, these seem to be ad hoc, and returnees are reluctant to share their experiences and never press charges. Dr Shireen Mazari, the Minister for Human Rights, introduced a bill in the National Assembly criminalizing enforced disappearance in June 2021, but the practice of enforced disappearance continues in the country with impunity.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 September 2021

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Seengar Noonari (he/him)