

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Pakistan: Amnesty International condemns bomb attack at a lawyers' rally in Islamabad**

Amnesty International condemns the bombing that took place at a lawyers' rally on the evening Tuesday, 17 July near the Supreme Court in Islamabad, that claimed at least 15 lives and injured more than 40 others.

The Chief Justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, suspended by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in March 2007 for alleged misconduct, had been due to give a speech to lawyers of the Islamabad District Bar Association. It remains unclear which group carried out the bombing.

Amnesty International's thoughts and sympathies are with the victims of this attack, which, according to reports, took place near to where opposition supporters of the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had gathered for the rally.

In the present climate of political tension in Pakistan, it is important that individuals from across the spectrum of civil society can exercise their right to peaceful assembly and expression without fear or threat of violence.

Those responsible must be brought to justice in proceedings that meet international standards of fairness, and without the imposition of the death penalty.

#### **Background**

The attack comes at a time of continuing political tensions in Pakistan. The judicial crisis that began with the suspension of the Chief Justice in 9 March 2007 has prompted a series of rallies across the country in support of Mr Chaudhry by most opposition parties. The protests are being perceived as potentially the most serious threat to the stability of President Musharraf's government since he took power in a military coup in 1999.

In addition in recent days there has been an upsurge in violence in north-west Pakistan. Four suicide attacks by pro-Taliban militants opposed to President Musharraf have left dozens dead. The violence comes after the breaking down of a peace agreement between local militants and the Pakistani government following the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) siege.

Government troops stormed the Lal Masjid mosque in central Islamabad on 10 July 2007 in an operation that left 102 dead, including 91 militants. The mosque authorities and armed supporters, demanding the imposition of Sharia law in the country, had been implicated since January 2007 in a series of incidents of vigilante abductions of police officers and other people they accused of involved in "immoral" acts such as prostitution. Efforts by the authorities to enter the mosque grounds and to secure the release of the abductees were resisted by force.