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Pakistan: Sialkot lynching – justice must be served

Amnesty International is calling on Pakistan authorities to ensure a prompt, fair and transparent trial of those accused in the brutal lynching death of teenage brothers Mughees and Muneeb Butt in Sialkot, Punjab province, that occurred a year ago this week.

On 15 August 2010, an angry crowd beat teenagers Mughees, aged 17, and Muneeb, aged 15, to death using hockey sticks, iron rods and other improvised weapons. The crowd believed them to be armed robbers who had earlier murdered 20-year-old milkman Bilal Shaukat Ali and injured his 30 year old brother Javed Shaukat Ali in the course of a robbery. Although the claims have yet to be brought before a court, a judicial inquiry ordered by the Chief Justice to investigate the matter held the two boys to be innocent.

Video footage of the lynching vividly shows the boys being killed by a mob in the presence of several police officials and rescue workers. After the footage was broadcast on national television, eleven police officials and 17 others were arrested on suspicion of involvement. The case is currently before a special anti-terrorism court in Gujranwala, Punjab.

Under international law, Pakistan authorities have an obligation to protect the rights of those accused of crimes, including the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Under Pakistan's constitution citizens have the inalienable right "to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with law" (Article 4 (1)) and no action detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person shall be taken except in accordance with law (Article 4 (2)(a)).

Ensuring the accountability of all those directly or indirectly involved in the incident, including police officials, is integral to maintaining the rule of law. Pakistan authorities must ensure members of the police who failed to prevent the lynching and those who carried it out are brought to justice in fair trials which comply with international human rights standards without recourse to the death penalty. Failure to do so will send the message that those who wish to take matters into their own hands can act with impunity, risking further instances of mob violence across the country.

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