

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Pakistan: Amnesty International condemns bomb attacks on political rally in Karachi**

Amnesty International condemns the bomb attacks on a peaceful political rally held by the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Karachi on 18 October which reportedly resulted in the death of more than 130 people and the injury of over 500.

Amnesty International condemns all deliberate attacks against civilians. Such attacks are absolutely prohibited under international law and can never be justified. They demonstrate an utter disregard for the most fundamental principles of humanity, and must be immediately, totally and unconditionally stopped.

The nature of the bomb attacks have yet to be confirmed, but most media reports state that suicide bombers caused the blasts. No group, as yet, has claimed responsibility.

The attacks took place when Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's former Prime Minister, was leading a rally of her party supporters on her return to Pakistan after more than eight years of self-imposed exile.

In recent months, Pakistan has suffered a series of suicide attacks across the country which have killed at least 100 civilians, including in the capital Islamabad and in Rawalpindi and Peshawar. Armed political groups have been suspected of carrying out these attacks, including at least one other peaceful political gathering.

Amnesty International calls upon all parties – state and non state actors – to respect every person's right to life, as well as their right to peacefully exercise their freedom of expression, association and assembly, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The organization regards respect for and protection of these rights as of critical importance as political tension rise in the run up to the general elections expected to be held by January 2008.

Amnesty International urges the Government of Pakistan to ensure that the bomb attacks on the Karachi rally and previous attacks on civilians are investigated promptly, independently and impartially. Those suspected of perpetrating the attacks must be brought to justice, in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness and without the imposition of the death penalty.

#### **Background Information:**

The latest attacks come against a backdrop of increasing political tensions in the country following the suspension by President Musharraf of the Chief Justice in March 2007, which resulted widespread mass protests, with over 40 people killed in violent clashes in Karachi in May. In June hundreds of political activists in Punjab province and other parts of the country were subject to arbitrary arrest and detention as they sought hold peaceful rallies in support of the Chief Justice - who was reinstated in July 2006.

Political violence, including suicide attacks, increased again following operations by the security forces to flush out armed militants from Islamabad's Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in July. In recent months there has been an upsurge in armed attacks in Warzirstan in the Tribal Areas, which border Afghanistan, between radical militants and the Pakistan security forces, with both sides reportedly resorting to indiscriminate attacks in which many of civilians have reportedly died.

Additionally political tensions have mounted in the run-up to Presidential elections (held in October) and general elections (expected by January 2008). There have been repeated reports of excessive use of force by the authorities against largely peaceful demonstrations by political activists, lawyers and others.