

UA 222/00

Fea.

PAKISTAN Bakhtwar (18)

The family of an 18-year-old woman who married without her parents' consent are holding her prisoner and have forced her to divorce. Amnesty International fears that they may kill her to avenge the perceived slight to their honour. Scores of women are killed every year in Pakistan in such "honour killings".

Bakhtwar, a member of the Pathan tribe, married Roshan Junejo, from the Junejo tribe, before a magistrate in June this year. Her family objected strongly, and forced the Junejo tribe to hand her over to a relative in her family's home town of Sanghar in Sindh province on 11 July. She has been held under heavy guard ever since.

Bakhtwar's family and several elders of the tribe gave written assurances to the Junejos that she would not be harmed in any way, and would be allowed to appear in court on 19 July to state whether she wanted to stay with her husband or with her family. However, over the next few days some 200 armed Pathans gathered around the family home in Sanghar and denounced the marriage, saying they would protect the family's honour by not allowing Bakhtwar to appear in court. A spokesperson said: "We will protect our honour. It is our tradition and part of our culture, irrespective of what the people say."

On 18 July, a *jirga* (tribal council) of the Pathans and Junejo tribes decided that Bakhtwar should stay with her parents, in a meeting at the home of a former Member of the National Assembly. The Pathans promised the Junejo tribe that she would not be harmed if her husband agreed to divorce her and allowed her to be returned to her parents. Roshan Junejo, who had gone into hiding believing he would be murdered, was brought to the meeting by Pathan tribesmen. He accepted this assurance and signed the divorce papers, presumably under considerable duress.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, the district administration has not done anything to protect the couple. Bakhtwar is a virtual prisoner of her family, who have not allowed her to contact her husband, to make representations in court or consult a lawyer, and have imposed a divorce on her without considering her wishes.

In April this year the Pakistan Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, condemned the practice of "honour killings", of both women and men, which has continued for centuries in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the police have done nothing to protect Bakhtwar's rights, most importantly her right to life, and to decide for herself about her marriage. On 14 July, when Pathan tribesmen were gathering in Sanghar to protect family honour, police officials reportedly said, "We have taken security measures and will not allow them to take the law into their own hands." However, after the enforced divorce, senior police officials were quoted on 20 July as saying: "They reached an agreement that the marriage was against their tradition and customs".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Bakhtwar's life is in danger;
- urging the state to ensure that she is not held by anyone against her will, and that she is able to exercise her right to family life without undue interference;

- urging the state to use appropriate measures to protect her from further violence;
- urging the authorities to use appropriate means to educate tribal and community leaders about the rights of women, in accordance with the government's undertaking to ensure equal rights for women and end the practice of honour killings.

APPEALS TO:

General Pervez Musharraf
Chief Executive
National Security Council
General Block, Pakistan Secretariat
Islamabad, Pakistan

Telegrams:General Pervez Musharraf, Islamabad, Pakistan

Faxes: + 92 51 922 4768

Salutation:Dear Chief Executive

Ms Zubaida Jalal
Minister for Education, Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special
Education
Ministry of Education
Block D, Pakistan Secretariat
Islamabad, Pakistan

Telegrams:Minister for Education, Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad Pakistan

Faxes: + 92 51 920 2851

Salutation:Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 September 2000.