

Pakistan: Human Rights Defender killed; Government failing to protect activists and end impunity

(Bangkok, 11 May 2016) - The assassination of human rights defender Khurram Zaki is a big loss for the human rights movement in Pakistan and a grim reminder of the extremely difficult conditions human rights defenders face in the country, says the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) today.

FORUM-ASIA calls on Pakistani authorities to undertake a credible investigation into Khurram Zaki's assassination and do more to protect human rights defenders in Pakistan.

Khurram Zaki was shot dead by unidentified assailants at a restaurant in Karachi on 8 May. His friends and other civil society members in Pakistan suspect some banned sectarian groups were involved in his murder.

Khurram Zaki was a human rights campaigner who advocated for the rights of religious minorities and sought to build harmony among various religious groups. He led a campaign seeking action against an influential cleric of Lal Masjid (or Red Mosque) in Islamabad, who was accused of inciting religious hatred against minority Shia Muslims. A case was filed against the cleric, which is when campaigners, including Khurram Zaki, started receiving death threats from extremists groups. Khurram Zaki was also a former journalist, popular blogger and online activist.

Khurram Zaki's killing comes close to the anniversaries of the murders of two other prominent human rights defenders in the last 2 years. Woman Human Rights Defender Sabeen Mahmud was murdered in Karachi on 24 April 2015, while human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman was assassinated in his office in Multan on 7 May 2014. The Government has failed to bring perpetrators of either of those two murders to justice.

"Khurram Zaki's murder is yet another reminder of how the Pakistani state is failing to protect human rights defenders who are risking their lives to uphold human rights and strengthen Pakistan's democracy," says Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

"There seems to be de-facto impunity for attacks on human rights defenders and civil society members. This has emboldened hostile actors who are opposed to everyone enjoying basic freedoms in Pakistan. It is crucial and essential for the Government of Pakistan to break this culture of impunity."

FORUM-ASIA and its 58 members in 19 Asian countries condemn this murder and pass on their condolences to the family and friends of Khurram Zaki. We hope his activism and perseverance will be carried forward by his allies.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA

addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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