

India: End Reprisals Against Kashmiri Human Rights Defenders Irfan Mehraj and Khurram Parvez

(Bangkok/Kathmandu – 30 March 2023) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is gravely concerned by the arrest of Kashmiri human rights defenders Irfan Mehraj and Khurram Parvez by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA). Their arrest is the latest instance of continued reprisals against human rights defenders, including journalists, in Indian-Administered Kashmir.

Mehraj is an [independent journalist](#) and the founding editor of the online long-form magazine, *Wande*. Mehraj was previously associated with the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) as a researcher. On 20 March, Mehraj was told to [appear](#) at the NIA office for enquiry. He was then arrested for a case registered by the NIA in 2020 for allegedly funding terrorist groups through non-governmental organisations in Jammu and Kashmir. Two days later, he was taken to court in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, Khurram Parvez – coordinator of JKCCS – was also re-arrested in the same case as Mehraj. Parvez has already been in arbitrary detention for over 16 months. He was earlier arrested by the NIA in 2021 for a different case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. On 22 March, Parvez was also produced in a court in New Delhi along with Mehraj and both were sent to [10-day custody](#) of the NIA.

Misuse of Repressive Laws Against Kashmiri HRDs

As per [NIA's](#) information, the charges in the First Information Report in which Parvez and Mehraj are arrested were registered in October 2020 on charges of criminal conspiracy and sedition under the Indian Penal Code and various sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), relating to offences such as raising funds for terrorist activities, conspiracy to commit terrorist activities, membership and supporting of terrorist organisations.

"The continued spree of arrests against Kashmiri HRDs and journalists is indicative of the repressed civic space in Indian-Administered Kashmir post the abrogation of Article 370. Implicating Parvez—who is already incarcerated in prison—in a new case shows that Indian authorities are persistent in their targeted judicial harassment of HRDs under fabricated charges" said FORUM-ASIA.

Such arrests—made through various repressive laws—are used by Indian authorities to intimidate, persecute, and prevent Kashmiri HRDs and journalists from doing their human rights documentation and journalistic work. Ever since the revocation of special status (under Article 370) of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, the targeting of HRDs and journalists has significantly increased in the region. This targeted [harassment](#) started in October 2020 when the NIA raided the offices of JKCCS and the residence of human rights defenders, including Parvez’.

“India should end targeting and judicial harassment of human rights defenders under the repressive Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and other laws. We also call upon the international community, to intervene in this ongoing crackdown against human rights defenders from Kashmir” said FORUM-ASIA.

FORUM-ASIA calls upon Indian authorities to immediately release and drop all charges against Mehraj and Parvez. India must stop the criminalization of human rights work and ensure enabling environment for Kashmiri HRDs to carry on their work without any fear of reprisals.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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