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JOINT STATEMENT

PAKISTAN: END CRACKDOWN ON POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Authorities must stop clamping down on the political opposition through mass arrests, arbitrary detention and charging people under vague anti-terrorism laws and release immediately all those held solely for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly said Amnesty International, Equidem, CIVICUS and Forum Asia today.

Media reports have [quoted](#) Punjab Information Minister Amir Mir, saying that using video and CCTV footage, geofencing, and WhatsApp surveillance, a list of 25,000 people has been compiled, of which 5,000 will be arrested for being directly involved in the attacks on government and military property. Mir added that 800 of them will be tried in military courts and anti-terrorism courts, raising serious human rights concerns about due process. At least [4,000 people](#) have reportedly been arrested, while the Lahore High Court [ordered](#) the release of 123 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf political workers on 21 May.

Those who are suspected to have committed a crime during the violent clashes following the short-lived arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan may only be charged using Pakistan's ordinary criminal laws, consistent with international human rights standards, without resorting to overly broad and vague anti-terrorism provisions, and authorities must guarantee their constitutional right to a fair trial.

A pall of fear hangs over Khan's supporters following the arbitrary arrests of many opposition leaders, some of whom have been [re-arrested](#) outside the jail after being released and others from the [court premises themselves](#). People's homes have been raided in the middle of the night, where people who participated in the protests have been arrested without a warrant.

Alarmingly, Imran Riaz Khan, a prominent journalist known for his support of the PTI was arrested at the Sialkot airport on 11 May and has not been heard from since. Despite court orders, police have failed to produce him and his fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

On 22 May, the police [told](#) the Lahore High Court that there is no trace of him in any police department in the province. This constitutes an enforced disappearance under international human rights law. Punishing dissenting voices using enforced disappearance has been a worrying trend in Pakistan for many [years](#) and must be ended.

Former Minister of Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari was arrested on May 17, and minutes after being released on the orders of the Islamabad High Court, was re-arrested under fresh charges. Her lawyer says that Dr Mazari requires immediate medical attention owing to her [health condition](#). On May 22, the Lahore High Court ordered her immediate release, but she was detained again for the fourth time. We call upon authorities to release her, unless she has been charged with a legally cognizable offence, and ensure access to medical care without delay.

Those arrested in connection with the recent protests must have their fair trial rights respected, including the presumption of innocence, and independence and impartiality of the tribunal. They should not be tried in military courts or special counter terrorism courts. Respect for the right to liberty also requires a presumption that they be granted bail. Every single person arrested is entitled to protections guaranteed under local and international law, including the right to have their case heard promptly before a judge or official, to be made aware of their charges, and to be treated humanely and with dignity. The courts that try them must be independent, impartial, and competent, and must respect the guarantees of fairness, including those set out in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Pakistan has an obligation to recognize, respect and facilitate the right to freedom of **peaceful assembly** as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The ongoing crackdown is at odds with Pakistan's international human rights commitments.

Signatories:

Amnesty International

Equidem

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation