

PAKISTAN: A fishing community is made hostage by landlords and police

Tuesday 19 August 2008, by [AHRC](#) (Date first published: 14 August 2008).

Dear friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information from Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum that 15 fishing villages around the Chotiari reservoir in Sanghar district, Sindh province have been placed under a curfew by the local administration in order to deprive them of fishing in the reservoir which they have been doing for centuries. The curfew, which has never officially been announced, was imposed on August 13, one day before the 61st Independence Day of the country. Powerful landlords of the district with the connivance of local police and office bearers of the ruling party have stopped local fishermen from operating in the lake and more than 12,000 people are being prevented from leaving their villages. The landlords have hired a man by the name of Mr. Qasim Zardari, who claims to be the chief protocol officer of Mr. Asif Zardari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister, in order to influence the police and local administration to act against the fisher folk.

CASE DETAILS:

Since April 2008, fishermen have not been allowed to operate in the reservoir by the landlords and a prominent religious-cum-political leader, the Pir of Pagara, who has taken over control of the lake illegally. The reservoir, widely known as Chotriari Dam, is in the long desert area of the Sanghar district of Sindh province and provides water for the desert area. This reservoir is also the main source of fresh water fishing for the province. One prominent landlord, Mr. Asif Nizamani, got the fishing license as a sole contractor for the Chotiari dam by the then chief minister in 2004 with the help of the Pir of Pagara. This contract was given for two years and expired in 2006. However, the landlord received an extension of one year.

On 21 August, 2007 the Government of Sindh, Livestock and Fisheries Department issued a notification dated (No.19 (23) SO (Fish) L&F/07) through which the contract system on inland fisheries was abolished from all the water bodies of Sindh. Also on 16 June 2008, the chief minister of Sindh, Qaim Ali Shah, in his budget speech announced the abolition of all licenses to accommodate the poor fisher folk and to eliminate the middleman role from the fishing industry.

However, the landlord Mr. Asif Nizamani refused to accept the cancellation of the contract system. This time, the landlord employed the help of Mr. Qasim Zardari, who claims to be the chief protocol officer of Mr. Asif Zardari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto, and he also receives the protection of the Pir of Paraga. In the latest development the landlord and Qasim Zardari transferred a District Police Officer (DPO), the highest ranking officer of the district, and appointed Mr. Altaf Lighari, who arrested 160 fishermen, including women, who were caught when they were catching fish near their villages. In August 2008, Altaf Lighari was appointed as DPO and immediately started victimizing the fishermen.

The harassment of the fisher folk has been going on since July 2007. A number of them have been tortured and their roads to communicate with other communities have been blocked. Their catches

have also been illegally confiscated. The DPO, Hameer Khan Bhangwar, Sub Police Officer (SPO HQ) Abdul Jabar Rind (SHO Chotiari) and Zameer Baig Lighari (SHO Mangli) and other local police officials, namely, Punhal Zardari, Rahim Hingoro, Zaman Nizamani, Khalique Shar are working on the instructions of the landlords of the area and have registered 180 cases against 200 fishermen (the cases include several women), on different criminal charges for fishing without the permission of the landlord, Nizamani. The fishermen are protesting and holding demonstrations against the administration's inhuman actions against them. On August 3, 2008, fisher folk staged a sit-in at the national high way against the illegal blockade of their areas. The Mangala police stopped two ice-loaded vehicles for fish preservation at the police station, which resulted in the loss of six and half tons of fish. The thugs of the landlords have attacked the fishermen's boats and burned them to spread the terror against the ordinary people.

The recently appointed, DPO in support of landlords, has unleashed the police force against the poor fisher folk and cordoned off the area. In addition the police are continuously searching the villagers when they travel outside of the areas.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Please write to the following authorities urging them to withdraw the unannounced curfew from the 15 villages around the Chotirai dam area and provide free accesses to the poor fisher folk of the area in order that they may continue to fish as they have been for centuries. Please also demand cancelation of the quota or licenses on the catching of fishes which deprive the ordinary fisher folk of the right to earn a livelihood.

To support this appeal, please click here:

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear _____,

PAKISTAN: A fishing community is made hostages by land lords and police

Name of victims: 12,000 fisher folks of 15 villages of Chotiari Dam district Sanghar, Sindh province-Pakistan

Name of alleged perpetrators:

1. Altaf Lighari, District Police Officer (DPO), Sanghar district, Sindh province-Pakistan
2. Hameer Khan Bhangwar, sub district police officer (SPO HQ), Sanghar district, Sindh province-Pakistan
3. Zameer Baig Lighari, station house officer (SHO) Mangali Mangli, Sanghar district, Sindh province-Pakistan
4. Abdul Jabar Rind (SHO) Chotiari, Sanghar district, Sindh province-Pakistan
5. Punhal Zardari, Rahim Hingoro, Zaman Nizamani, Khalique Shar, Police officials of Chotiari police station, Sanghar district, Sindh province-Pakistan

I am writing this letter to inform you that more than 12,000 fisher folk are being deprived of their right to earn a living and provide food for their families as they are virtually under an illegal curfew from local the administration of the Sanghar district. They are being prevented from fishing which

their families have done for centuries.

I am appalled to learn that the administration of Sanghar district, Sindh province at the behest of some powerful landlords and political personalities have imposed an unannounced curfew around the 15 villages of the fisher folk of Chutiari Dam to prevent them from fishing in the reservoir. Through this action the administration have deprived more than 12,000 fisher folk of their basic right to food and made them hostages of the police force.

According to the information received, since April 2008, fisher folk are not allowed to operate in the reservoir by the landlords and a prominent prominent religious-cum-political leader, the Pir of Pagara who have taken over illegal control over the lake. The reservoir, widely known as Chotriari Dam, is in the long desert area of the Sanghar district of Sindh province and provides water for a vast desert area. This reservoir is also the main source of fresh water fishing for the province.

One prominent landlord, Mr. Asif Nizamani, got the fishing license as a sole contractor for the Chotiari dam by the then chief minister in 2004 with the help of the Pir of Pagara. This contract was given for two years and expired in 2006. However, the landlord received an extension of one year.

On 21 August, 2007 the Government of Sindh, Livestock and Fisheries Department issued a notification dated (No.19 (23) SO (Fish) L&F/07) through which the contract system on inland fisheries was abolished from all the water bodies of Sindh. Also on 16th June 2008, the chief minister of Sindh, Qaim Ali Shah, in his budget speech announced the abolition of all licenses to accommodate the poor fisher folk and to eliminate the middleman role from the fishing industry.

However, the landlord Mr. Asif Nizamani refused to accept the cancellation of the contract system. This time, the landlord employed the help of Mr. Qasim Zardari, who claims to be the chief protocol officer of Mr. Asif Zardari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto, and he also receives the protection of the Pir of Paraga. In the latest development the landlord and Qasim Zardari transferred a District Police Officer (DPO), the highest ranking officer of the district, and appointed Mr. Altaf Lighari, who arrested 160 fishermen, including women, who were caught when they were catching fish near their villages. In August 2008, Altaf Lighari was appointed as DPO and immediately started victimizing the fishermen.

The harassment of the fisher folk has been going on since July 2007 to April 2008. A number of them have been tortured, and their roads to communicate with other communities were blocked. Their catches have also been illegally confiscated. Altaf Lighari, District Police Officer (DPO), Hameer Khan Bhangwar, sub police officer (SPO HQ) Abdul Jabar Rind (SHO Chotiari) and Zameer Baig Lighari (SHO Mangli) and other local police officials Punhal Zardari, Rahim Hingoro, Zaman Nizamani, Khalique Shar are working on the behest of the landlords of the area and registered 180 cases against 200 fishermen, including women, on different criminal charges for fishing without the permission of landlord, Nizamani.

I urge upon you to investigate the illegal and unconstitutional acts of the local administration of the district Sanghar by the imposition of unannounced curfew around the 15 villages of Chotriari Dam at the behest of the landlords of the area. Please act upon these illegal actions and allow the fishermen to return to their jobs as their basic and fundamental right.

I request you to cancel all the fictitious licenses of arbitrary fishing by some powerful landlords and bring the perpetrators before the law and punish them for running a state within the state.

Yours sincerely,

PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1. Mr. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani

Prime minister

Prime Minister House, Islamabad,

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 51 922 1596

Tel: +92 51 920 6111

E-mail: webmaster.infopak.gov.pk

2. Mr. Rehman Malik

Advisor for Ministry of Interior

Room No. 404, 4th Floor, R Block,

Pak Secretariat

Islamabad

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 51 920 2624

Tel: +92 51 921 2026

E-mail: minister.interior.gov.pk

3. Mr. Farooq Naik

Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights

S Block Pakistan Secretariat

Islamabad

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 51 920 2628

E-mail: minister.molaw.gov.pk or naelaw786@hotmail.com

4. Syed Qaim Ali Shah

Chief Minister House

Karachi

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 21 920 2000

E-mail: pppsindh@yahoo.co

5. Chief Justice of Sindh High Court

High Court Building

Saddar, Karachi

Sindh Province

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E-mail: info.sindhhighcourt.gov.pk

6. Dr. Ishrat-ul-Ebad Khan

Governor of Sindh province

Karachi

PAKISTAN

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Tel: +92 21 920 1201

7. Chief Secretary

Government of Sindh

Chief Secretariat,

Karachi, Sindh province,

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 21 9211946

Tel: +92 21 921950

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8. Ms. Nadia Gabol

Minister for Human Rights

Government of Sindh,

Pakistan secretariat, Barrack 92,

Karachi

PAKISTAN

Tel: +92 21 9207043

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Thank you.

Urgent Appeals Programme

Asian Human Rights Commission (ua ahrchk.org)

View online : [To send letters to the authorities:](#)