

URGENT APPEAL

Pakistan: Punjab authorities respond weakly to another violent attack on a university professor by radical religious students

Wednesday 21 April 2010, by [AHRC](#) (Date first published: 21 April 2010).

ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - URGENT APPEALS PROGRAMME

Urgent Appeal Case: AHRC-UAC-050-2010

21 April 2010

PAKISTAN: Punjab authorities respond weakly to another violent attack on a university professor by radical religious students

ISSUES: Education; police negligence; administration of justice

Dear friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission has learned that police in Lahore made no effort to protect university staff from violent attacks by expelled students from a conservative Muslim organization earlier this month. One professor sustained serious head injuries and bone fractures. Local police then avoided filing an FIR for a week and when pressured by civil society, filed cases under minor offences. Just two of the six culprits named in the FIR were arrested fifteen days after the incident.

Punjab university staff report having received more threats from the group and no protection from the authorities, which have reportedly not responded to the case at all. Provincial governments in Pakistan continue to be exposed for their tolerance of violence by Islamic groups. In the field of education it remains a damaging yet little addressed problem. Please help call for the strong, assertive protection of academic staff by the national government.

CASE DETAILS:

According to information from the victim and from civil society group The Joint Action Committee, Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch was severely injured during an attack by students on 1 April 2010.

The professor is the chairman of the disciplinary committee at Punjab University (and the principal

of the Earth and Environment college, affiliated with Punjab University) and some of his attackers are reported to have been expelled students, most of them members of Islami Jamiate Tuleba (IJT), the student wing of militant Islamic political party, Jamate Islami (JI). On 31 March university administration had notified Hafiz Qasim, Malik Tariq, Saqibur Rehman, Hafiz Wajid Ali, Mamoonur Rehman and Rehan Khan that they were to be expelled.

University officials have described dozens of IJT activists, including the six men above, ransacking and destroying the office and the home of the university's Vice Chancellor, before they moved onto the office of Professor Iftexhar at about 3.30pm. There they began to attack the building and nearby cars while calling out threats to the professor, before pulling him from his office and beating him with iron bars and their fists; some are reported to have carried knives. The professor collapsed bleeding and the group moved on, chanting, according to eyewitnesses, that an infidel had been killed. Colleagues took the professor to hospital where he received 20 stitches to three head wounds. His right hand and leg were fractured.

However during the incident there was no response from the authorities. Police officers arrived at the hospital two and a half hours after the incident.

Following an organised protest by teachers, professors and students in Lahore, police at the Muslim Town police station took the professor's statement at the hospital, which included the names of his assailants; yet we are told that no FIR was initially filed.

In a press conference Punjab University Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Mujahid Kamran labeled the crime as a murder attempt, and released information about an attack on another professor the day before (found in Additional Information, below). More civil protests followed, along with class boycotts by professors, and an FIR was filed a week later; it was reportedly illegally back-dated to 1 April.

Along with the questions raised by the lack of immediate police action and protection, the resistance of police to adequately file the case, and the lack of intervention on the part of the authorities, the AHRC also questions the adequacy of the cases that were filed by police. They do not appear to be in proportion to the crime committed. Instead of filing a case of attempted murder and intentional attempt to murder (sections 307 and 324 of the Pakistan Penal Code), police used more minor offences, ranging from public disturbance (sections 290 and 29), the continuance of the disturbance despite orders to stop, plus the obstruction of a public servant in the discharge of public functions, along with criminal intimidation and rioting (sections 148 and 149). There are also charges related to the use of a deadly weapon (427 and 337).

It also took police more than two weeks to arrest two persons who were involved in the attack, (on 16 April); the others named in the FIR remain at large.

Considering the gravity of the crime and the pattern of abuses against academic staff in Pakistan (see Additional Information below), it is the direct responsibility of the provincial government to intervene to ensure that the police are adequately handling the case. Political will must be demonstrated.

Furthermore we are told that the vice chancellor of the university has been further threatened with reprisals from Mr. Munnawar Hassan, who heads JI. Other professors and teachers report being too afraid to become involved with the case; their family members have been threatened and some of the attackers are still seen displaying arms in the university hallways and on motorbikes in the city. Actions must be taken swiftly and all measures of necessary protection be taken to ensure the safety of Punjab university staff, and the non-obstruction of the investigation into the crimes against them.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The day before the attack on Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch, another professor in the same university was attacked and humiliated. According to media reports one Professor of Shaikh Zayed Islamic Center was stripped naked by former students – also from JI, according to the victim – and was forced to appear in photographs, some of which were with women; he was then allegedly blackmailed. A FIR was lodged at Muslim Town Police station later that day.

JI and its student branch have a history of abuse against professors that stretches back to the 1970s when the leader of the Punjab chapter, Mr. Hafiz Mohammad Salman Butt, beat Punjab University's Vice Chancellor Alluddin Siddiqui, and the JI secretary himself, Mr. Liaquat Baloch notoriously beat and abused another former Vice Chancellor there, Dr. Ajmal, in front of staff and students. A strident response from the authorities is clearly required for this pattern of violence against academics to be conclusively disrupted.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Please write to the authorities listed below asking that stronger cases be lodged against the attackers of Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch, and the issue of attacks against academics be adequately addressed by the national government. Protection must be provided to those under threat in the case.

The AHRC has written to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education drawing their attention to this case.

To support this appeal please click here:

<http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/support.php?ua=UAC-050-2010>

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear _____,

PAKISTAN: The authorities respond weakly to another attack on a university professor by radical religious students

Name of victim: Professor Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch, chairman of the disciplinary committee and principal of the College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Punjab.

Name of alleged perpetrators:

1. Mr. Wajid Mamoon,
2. Mr. Usman Ashraf,
3. Mr. Aurangzeb,
4. Mr. Abdul Manan,
6. Mr. Mr. Anjum,

All students expelled from Punjab University and members of the Islami Jamiate Tulab, residing in Lahore.

7. Mr. Munawar Hassan, the Amir (Chief) of Jamate Islami Ichra, Lahore.
8. Mr. Shaoib, Station Head Officer (SHO) of Muslim Town Police Station, Lahore, Punjab

Date of incident: April 1, 2010.

Place of incident: College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Punjab, Lahore, Punjab.

I am writing to voice my deep concern regarding the lack of action taken by police to protect university staff from violent attacks by expelled students from a conservative Muslim organization.

According to the information I have received Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch was severely injured during an attack by students on 1 April 2010. The professor is the chairman of the disciplinary committee at Punjab University (and the principal of the Earth and Environment college, affiliated with Punjab University) and some of his attackers are reported to have been expelled students, most of them members of Islami Jamiate Tuleba (IJT), the student wing of militant Islamic political party, Jamate Islami (JI). On 31 March the university administration had notified Hafiz Qasim, Malik Tariq, Saqibur Rehman, Hafiz Wajid Ali, Mamoonur Rehman and Rehan Khan that they were to be expelled.

University officials have described dozens of IJT activists, including the six men above, ransacking and destroying the office and the home of the university's Vice Chancellor, before they moved onto the office of Professor Iftekhhar at about 3.30pm. There they began to attack the building and nearby cars while calling out threats to the professor, before pulling him from his office and beating him with iron bars and their fists; some are reported to have carried knives. The professor collapsed bleeding and the group moved on, chanting, according to eyewitnesses, that an infidel had been killed. Colleagues took the professor to hospital where he received 20 stitches to three head wounds. His right hand and leg were fractured.

However I was surprised to learn that during the incident there was no response from the authorities. Police officers arrived at the hospital two and a half hours after the incident. Following an organised protest by teachers, professors and students in Lahore, police at the Muslim Town police station took the professor's statement at the hospital, which included the names of his assailants, yet we are told that no FIR was initially filed.

In a press conference Punjab University Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Mujahid Kamran labeled the crime as a murder attempt and released information about an attack on another professor in the university the day before (Dr. Iftekhhar Hussain Baloch, reportedly by persons from the same group). More civil protests followed, along with class boycotts by professors, and an FIR was filed a week later, which was illegally back-dated to 1 April.

Along with the questions raised by the lack of immediate police action and protection, the resistance of police to adequately file the case and the lack of intervention on the part of the authorities, I question the adequacy of the cases that were filed by police. They do not appear to be in proportion to the crime committed. Instead of filing a case of attempted murder and intentional attempt to murder (sections 307 and 324 of the Pakistan Penal Code), police used more minor offences, ranging from public disturbance (sections 290 and 29), the continuance of the disturbance despite orders to stop, plus the obstruction of a public servant in the discharge of public functions, along with criminal intimidation and rioting (sections 148 and 149). There are also charges related to the use of a deadly weapon (427 and 337).

Notably it also took police more than two weeks to arrest two persons who were involved in the attack, (on 16 April); the others named in the FIR remain at large.

Considering the gravity of the crime and the pattern of abuses against academic staff in Pakistan (see Additional Information below), it is the direct responsibility of the provincial government to

intervene to ensure that the police are adequately handling the case. Political will must be demonstrated.

Furthermore I hear that the vice chancellor of the university has now been further threatened with reprisals from Mr. Munnawar Hassan, who heads JI. Other professors and teachers report being too afraid to become involved with the case; their family members have been threatened and some of the attackers are still seen displaying arms in the university hallways and on motorbikes in the city.

Actions must be taken swiftly and all measures of necessary protection be taken to ensure the safety of Punjab university staff, and the non-obstruction of the investigation into the crimes against them. Please also intervene to ensure that police are acting independently, and according to the laws of the land, rather than, as strongly suggested by their actions, at the behest of a political religious group. Accountability is required.

Provincial governments in Pakistan continue to be exposed for their tolerance of violence by Islamic groups. In the field of education it remains a damaging yet little addressed problem and strong, assertive is long overdue from the national government.

Yours sincerely,

PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1. Prime Minister

Prime Minister House

Islamabad

PAKISTAN

Fax: +92 51 922 1596

Tel: +92 51 920 6111

E-mail: secretary cabinet.gov.pk

2. Mr.Syed Mumtaz Alam Gillani

Federal Minister for Human Rights

Ministry of Human Rights

Old US Aid building

Ata Turk Avenue

G-5, Islamabad

PAKISTAN

Fax: +9251-9204108

Email: sarfraz_yousuf yahoo.com

3. Dr. Faqir Hussain

Registrar

Supreme Court of Pakistan

Constitution Avenue, Islamabad

PAKISTAN

Fax: + 92 51 9213452

E-mail: mail supremecourt.gov.pk

4. Minister of Law
Government of Punjab
Punjab Secretariat
Ravi Road
Lahore
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92-42-99212004
E-mail: law punjab.gov.pk

5. Chief Secretary of Government of Punjab
Punjab Secretariat
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PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 42 7324489
E-mail: chiefsecy punjab.gov.pk

6. Mr. Salman Taseer
Governor of Punjab
Governor House
Mall Road
Lahore
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 42 99203044
Email: governor.sectt punjab.gov.pk

Thank you.

Urgent Appeals Programme
Asian Human Rights Commission (ua ahrc.asia)

Asian Human Rights Commission
19/F, Go-Up Commercial Building,
998 Canton Road, Kowloon, Hongkong S.A.R.
Tel: +(852) - 2698-6339 Fax: +(852) - 2698-6367