

Pakistan: Invisible agencies take the life of another well known journalist Saleem Shahzad

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

PAKISTAN: Invisible agencies take the life of another well known journalist Saleem Shahzad

Saleem Shahzad, who had earlier announced the danger to his life from the intelligence services (ISI) in Pakistan was abducted last Sunday, May 29, and his body was discovered on May 31. This is one more of the mysterious abductions and extrajudicial killings that have been taking place in Pakistan on a regular basis. He is the 70th journalist to meet this fate since the year 2000. Many other civilians have also been abducted and disappeared and their numbers are counted in the thousands. The state has failed to recognise these large scale abductions and killings and take any effective action to prevent them from occurring. In fact, the popular perception is that these abductions and killings take place with the knowledge of the country's intelligence services and other authorities.

Mr. Saleem Shahzad was known to the Asian Human Rights Commission. He was shocked by many of the happenings related to security operations and was engaged in exposing these through his journalism. He was a committed journalist who defended the freedom of expression and called for accountability and protection for the people. It was his commitment to truth and the belief of his own duties to his community that cost him his life.

As in all such occasions there are calls for investigations and the prosecution of the offenders. However, as the government lacks any kind of commitment to ensure justice there is hardly any possibility of the discovery of the perpetrators of this heinous crime. It is the duty of the international organisations of journalists and those who are committed to the freedom of expression to make the call for an investigation louder and to intervene in order to prevent further killings.

The Asian Human Rights Commission in the past has constantly warned that the rule of law in Pakistan has been severely undermined and that the very meaning of the law is losing its significance in the country. Life is becoming more and more senseless each day as the citizens can do nothing else except to watch helplessly the kind of kidnappings, killings and disappearances that take place almost daily.

Shahzad's body, which bore marks of the severe tortured he had endured at the hands of his captors, was found two days after his abduction and disappearance. His mutilated body was found in the suburbs of Mandi Bahouddin, 160 kilometers from the place of his abduction

It is widely suspected that Shahzad was abducted by members of the country's intelligence agencies shortly after he published an article linking the Pakistan Navy with Al-Qaida. Two days before his abduction he told his friends that he had been receiving threatening calls from intelligence officers because of the article which had been published in Asia Times Online.

For the Urgent Appeal issued by the AHRC on his abduction and disappearance please see:

PAKISTAN: A senior journalist is missing after exposing the Al-Qaida network in the navy

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-112-2011>

This extrajudicial killing after disappearance is just one of many hundreds that have taken place in the past years and a clear demonstration of the total collapse of the rule of law in the country. The citizens have no rights or freedom of expression and media personnel are being terrorised into silence. The tolerance at the state level has reached the point where journalists are intimidated and murdered if their stories touch on any subject that might be considered sensitive by the invisible intelligence agencies.

The country has become a state where even a small voice of dissent is unacceptable to those who are truly in power. This is not the elected government but rather the armed forces and intelligence agencies who have ruled for 34 out of the 63 year history of the country and continue to rule today.

While the ISI and intelligence agencies are suspected as being responsible for Shahzad's disappearance and death the government cannot be absolved of its responsibility. Following his abduction on May 29 no action was taken to locate him, investigate the abduction or close the exit points of Islamabad. This is yet another example of the government turning a blind eye to the actions of the security forces and the blanket impunity they are offered.

The announcement by the government of an inquiry into Shahzad's killing holds no hope for his family and friends as it is unlikely to be unbiased or in any way fair. The results of such inquiries will invariably show that he was killed in a terrorist action and no responsibility will be laid at the feet of the intelligence agencies. Or, if by some miracle some intelligence officers are actually named they will be offered impunity by the inquiry as the blame will be transferred to the terrorists. As normally happens, the inquiry may well discover that certain intelligence agents were present however, no evidence will be produced that they were responsible for his death.

The Asian Human Rights Commission urges the government of Pakistan to see Saleem Shahzad's abduction and death, not in the light of an isolated incident, but rather as part of a conspiracy by the armed forces and intelligence agencies to silence anyone they consider to be a threat to their existence. The government must stand up for the people that elected them and remove the blanket impunity that they offer these torturers and murderers. By merely ordering a puppet inquiry into the matter the government will not serve the purpose of justice and truth which the Pakistani nation desperately needs at this moment when all the venues of justice, accountability, fair trial and transparency are nowhere to be seen.

The AHRC is saddened to have lost a good friend and pays tribute to a dedicated journalist whose talents and vigor have also been lost to Pakistan. The AHRC joins Saleem Shahzad's family in praying that God may grant his soul peace.

Asian Human Rights Commission

