

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST AND POET FACES CHARGES AFTER ABDUCTION

On 15 May 2024, Ahmad Farhad, a Kashmiri journalist and poet, outspoken critic of enforced disappearances and known for his support for social movements, was forcibly disappeared from his home in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad. Two weeks later, on 29 May 2024, Ahmad resurfaced in the custody of police in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir. A criminal case was filed against him for “obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions” at a check post in Kohala, near Muzaffarabad. Subsequently, he was implicated in another case on charges related to terrorism and unlawful assembly. Ahmad was released on bail on 14 June; however, the charges against him remain and the investigations into these allegations are ongoing.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Chaudhry Anwar-ul-Haq,
Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir
Prime Minister Secretariat,
Muzaffarabad
Pakistan, 13100
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Dear Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar-ul-Haq,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the charges against Pakistani **journalist and poet, Ahmad Farhad**, and his previous enforced disappearance from his home in Islamabad on 15 May 2024 by four men in plain clothes. Despite a First Information Report (FIR) regarding his disappearance being filed on orders of the Islamabad High Court, his whereabouts remained unknown until 29 May when he resurfaced in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, at a check post in Kohala, near Muzaffarabad. He was then taken into custody and a case was filed against him for “obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions”, at Dhirkot Police Station. He has since also been implicated in another case dated 13 May 2024, in which he is not named, on charges of posting probative and hateful content on social media, especially Facebook, regarding the Kashmir Long March.

While I appreciate the government's efforts to recover Ahmad, I remain deeply concerned about the trumped-up charges filed against him and the ongoing investigations under the Azad Kashmir Penal Code and Anti-Terrorism Act. If found guilty, he can spend up to 10 years in prison. In addition to the current cases and his recent enforced disappearance, Ahmad has long endured various forms of intimidation from state authorities and is now being targeted for his social media activities. As a journalist covering social movements and peaceful protests, and for advocating against enforced disappearances, he should not be subjected to criminal charges. Furthermore, no investigation into Ahmad's enforced disappearance has been opened.

Therefore, I urge your Government to:

- **Drop all criminal proceedings against, and end the harassment and intimidation of, Ahmad Farhad for exercising his right to freedom of expression;**
- **Ensure that anyone suspected of criminal responsibility for their involvement in Ahmad's enforced disappearance is investigated and tried before civilian courts through principles of fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmad Farhad is a 38-year-old Pakistani journalist of Kashmiri origin who was abducted from his home in Islamabad at 1 am on 15 May 2024 by four men. His family witnessed him being taken away into an unknown vehicle. The family filed a habeas corpus petition at the Islamabad High Court to produce him in court and the police subsequently started the investigation on the orders of the Court. The High Court has ordered the police to report its progress in the investigation to the court. On 17 May, Ahmad's wife received a call allegedly from his unidentified abductors to withdraw her petition at the High Court to secure Ahmad's return. He was not released after an application to withdraw was filed by her lawyers the next day.

Ahmad resurfaced on 29 May at a check post in Kohala, near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He was taken into custody and an FIR was filed against him at Dhirkot Police Station under section 186 of the Azad Kashmir Penal Code (APC) for "obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions". He applied for bail before Sessions Judge, Muzaffarabad on 30 May 2024 but was denied bail on 4 June 2024.

Meanwhile, he was charged in an FIR filed at Bishmo Division Police Station Sadar, Muzaffarabad dated 13 May 2024. The charges against him, among others, relate to criminal conspiracy (120-B), rioting (147/148), unlawful assembly (149), attempt to murder (324), assault to prevent public official from completing their public duty (353), destruction of property (427/436) of APC and charges of terrorism under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. The FIR was filed against "unknown persons" in connection with the Kashmir Long March organized by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) demanding economic rights, reduced electricity tariffs, wheat subsidies and increased taxation for high income groups, in which 4 people were killed, among them a police official. Ahmad was not present at the protests; however, he was reporting on them from Islamabad. He has been implicated in the case on allegations of posting "probative and hateful content on social media, especially Facebook" as per the bail order dated 14 June 2024.

Ahmad was granted bail on 14 June 2024 while the case was being investigated. The charges against him remain and the investigation continues.

Ahmad is a journalist with 15 years of experience and has worked for over 10 mainstream Pakistani TV news channels, including Bol News, Hum News, Neo News and Capital TV. He is also a renowned Urdu poet, who has raised political themes such as enforced disappearances in his poetry. Ahmad has an active presence on social media. He has been an outspoken critic of political interference by the armed forces in Pakistan and has faced threats in the past due to his dissent. He was currently working as a freelance journalist after repeatedly being let go by previous employers due to pressure from state authorities. Ahmad had been under surveillance for the last two years, and his laptop was confiscated last year by the authorities. Ahmad has four children, the youngest among them is four years old. His health deteriorated while he was disappeared. He visibly lost a lot of weight. Upon his release, he has been recovering.

Enforced disappearances have been [used in Pakistan](#) to silence journalists, human rights defenders, dissenters and groups belonging to minority populations, particularly from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There is no law criminalizing enforced disappearances and there persists a lack of accountability from the state. Families of the disappeared are regularly subject to [harassment](#), surveillance and intimidation by the state for demanding accountability for their loved ones. The practice of enforced disappearances violates the right to liberty, right to a fair trial and right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Pakistan has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 28 October 2024

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ahmad Farhad (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/8072/2024/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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