

PAKISTAN: Daughters of Asma Jehangir assaulted and threatened by gunmen of the ruling party

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

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The two daughters of Ms. Asma Jehangir, a well known lawyer, human rights activist and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief, were assaulted and illegally held for several hours along with their friends by armed persons of the Pakistan Muslim League Q (PML-Q); they were beaten severely and threatened to be killed. One of the girls was pushed into a room and this was only prevented due to the intervention of their mother. Ms. Asma. Ms. Asma herself was also threatened by the gunmen who used very filthy language against her. When police were called to the scene they took the side of the gunmen who claimed to be police officers. However, only two out of this group were policemen and the 20 other gunmen belonged to the PML-Q.

This incident happened at 1.30am when Ms. Muneeza Jehangir, Asma's eldest daughter along with her younger sister Ms. Sulema Jehangir and other friends, were making a video clip for her television channel, the Geo TV. She was filming the ripped posters and banners of the political parties in Lahore city, Punjab province, after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the former premier who was killed on December 27.

When they were filming the torn posters of the ruling party, which contained photographs of President Musharraf and other party leaders, some armed men arrived and held the two sisters and their companions at gun point. They were then ordered to follow the gunmen and when they resisted the gunmen beat them in public and dragged them to the PML-Q main election office of the province. At the office they were once again beaten and the men trained their guns on them. Someone then told the gunmen that the girls were the daughters of Asma Jehangir. The leader revealed that he was aware of their identities and then four of the gunmen started dragging the youngest one into a small room.

When she heard about this incident Ms. Asma Jehangir reached the party office but was refused entry as they physically restrained her and threatened her with their guns. Fortunately she managed to climb the iron gate of the party office and she saw that her eldest daughter and her friends were detained by more than ten armed persons and her youngest daughter was being carried by some other persons to a separate room. She immediately informed the Ghalib police station who reached the scene after some time. The police took the side of the armed men and pressurized the parents of the friends of her daughters to hand over the video tape which they did. The police then threatened the parents that they should not report this incident otherwise the girls would be kidnapped, raped and killed. The police also pressured the parents to stop Ms. Asma Jehangir from making this incident know and claimed that she would bear the responsibility for whatever might happen in the future.

The Asian Human Rights Commission condemns this incident of kidnapping, the illegal holding and threats of violence against the daughters of Ms. Asma Jehangir by the armed elements of the PML-Q. This incident is an attempt to harass human rights activists and their family members for speaking out against the military regime.

The AHRC condemns this attack and calls upon the government of Pakistan to conduct an inquiry into this matter and to arrest the culprits. However, at the same time the AHRC is quite skeptical as to whether any inquiry will be made into this matter unless there is pressure from the civil rights movement in the country and the international community. In the aftermath of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto it is quite likely that the military regime and the ruling party will attempt to silence the human rights and democratic activists. As the judges who defied the imposition of the state of emergency have been virtually dismissed from their posts there is little to be expected from the present judiciary of Pakistan by way of protection to citizens against acts of the regime and the ruling party. The AHRC calls upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to cause an inquiry into this incident and to take other appropriate action.

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