



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية و الاجتماعية و الثقافية

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URGENT APPEAL: threats and attacks against human rights defenders and fisher folk leaders in Pakistan

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) is the largest global network of organizations and activists devoted to achieving economic, social and environmental justice through human rights. Our membership is comprised of over 230 organizations and individuals from 66 countries.

We write to express our grave concern regarding the acts of violence and continued threats against leaders of ESCR-Net member, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), who have mobilized to defend the human rights of Pakistani fisher folk and workers. We denounce the recent raid of the home of the Chairman of the PFF, the abduction of several PFF leaders last July, the assassination of two PFF leaders in May and the ongoing threats and harassment against leaders of the PFF and the filing of baseless criminal charges (FIRs) against PFF leaders and members in recent months.

On February 9, the home of the Chairman of the PFF, Mr. Muhammad Ali Shah, was cordoned off apparently in retaliation for his activities in defense of the human rights of workers who were protesting outside of a garment factory in Karachi. According to reports received, the protesting workers were fired on from the air and the ground, resulting in several injuries. Mr. Shah condemned the violence committed against the protesters, after which his home was raided by rangers.

This recent act represents a deeply troubling trend of attacks, arbitrary arrests and threats against Mr. Shah and the other leaders of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum in the past year. ESCR-Net has been monitoring these incidents since May of 2011, when fisher folk were attacked and subjected to repeated threats and intimidation in an apparent response to their efforts to resist forcible land acquisition and the clearing of the mangroves in coastal

villages in and around Karachi. These acts, as well as the recent raid on Mr. Shah's home, constitute serious violations of internationally recognized human rights standards established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

On 1 June, 2011, ESCR-Net transmitted a communication to the Government of Pakistan and the UN Special Procedures, calling for justice for the murders of two fisher folk leaders in May. Following inaction by the Pakistani authorities and renewed threats and false criminal charges against PFF leaders, ESCR-Net sent a second communication on 23 June to underscore our continued concern. Then, following the abduction of fisherfolk leaders in July, on 22 August, 2011, ESCR-Net transmitted a third communication, together with specific complaints for the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

This present communication represents the fourth Urgent Action that ESCR-Net has undertaken related to this case within the past year, and represents our deep concern at the unconscionable actions that continue to be taken against PFF leaders in response to their activities to defend human rights in Pakistan .

We strongly condemn these threats and attacks against Mr. Shah and other PFF human rights defenders, and deplore the continued impunity for these crimes. We urgently appeal to the competent federal, state and municipal authorities in Pakistan to:

1. Take immediate action to ensure that further abuses committed against human rights defenders is prevented and that due protection is provided for these individuals, their families and their homes.
2. Put an end to measures to intimidate and silence Mr. Shah, including the invasion of his property, unlawful arrests and ongoing threats, harassment and violence against him and other fisher folk leaders
3. Guarantee justice for abuses perpetrated against Mr. Shah and other fisher folk leaders and an end to impunity for these crimes
4. Undertake all possible measures to promote the full realization of human rights – including economic, social and cultural rights – for its people, including politically and economically marginalized groups such as rural fisher folk.

Finally, we request to be kept us informed about any measures taken.



Suad Elias Atala, Acting Director