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Pakistan

Why Tariq Mehmood was arrested in Gojra?

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On the 9th of August 2009, Tariq Mehmood, a human rights activists and general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan in Toba Tek Singh district issued a press release to journalists in Toba Tek Singh. He alleged that eight Christian women were raped in the attack on Korian village in Gojra Tehsil on the 28th of July attack by Muslim fanatics.

He also alleged that 40 women are still missing and no clue is yet found about their presence. He condemned this atrocious and horrific act and demanded that the government probe the case. Over 60 houses were burnt by Muslim fanatics in the village on the accusation of blasphemy. This act led to another attack on the Gojra Christian community and nine were burnt alive.

On the 10th of August, a First Investigation Report (FIR) was registered by Gojra police and Tariq was invited by the police officer in Toba Tek Singh district for “talks” and as he arrived, he was arrested. Several serious charges have been labelled against him including seven ATA (Anti Terrorist Act) and 13 MPO and so on. He was produced in the court of an Anti Terrorist judge in Faisalabad and police asked a physical remand. The judge denied the physical remand and sent him to Toba Tek Singh jail on judicial remand.

The fact that a press release issued to journalists reached the police immediately has to be investigated yet.

Who is Tariq Mehmood?

A young activist (24) from Basti Danishmandan village in Toba Tek Singh district, he has been active with Labour Party Pakistan for five years already. He is also an official representative of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in the district. He has been active in the social and labour movement and has brought thousands of youth, brick kiln workers, and public employees onto the streets of Toba Tek Singh on issues related to violation of human rights. Tariq has been helping all the cases where women have been sexually assaulted, raped, tortured or been subject to violence after choice marriages. He has publically condemned the Muslim fanatics when they attacked a village of Ahmadis. In fact, he and his comrades have been on the back of every battle involving the working class. He helped rebuild the movement of Bhatta (brick kiln) workers and thousands have been on the streets demanding an end to bonded labour and the Pershgi (advance) system. He has helped the textile, shoe makers, and public employees in their struggle for a better life. A brave young man was followed by intelligence agencies and fanatics all the time. Yet he refused to stop his activities in favour of minorities and the working class. Many Fanatics termed him as Christian and not as a Muslim because of his consistent voice in their favour.

The Gojra Incident

Tariq Mehmood and his comrades were first to arrive at the spot in Korian village after the incident and had first hand information. He immediately issued press releases and condemned the action of Muslim fanatics. He helped many journalists from outside the districts cover the story. He also played an important role alongside his party members and Christian youth leaders to blockade the train services by bringing the seven bodies in protest to demand a case registered against District Police Office and District Coordination officer on the 2nd of August. This was international news and the protesters blocked the railway line for several hours until the government was forced to accept the demand. In a very unusual act, the police registered a case against their top police and administrative officers for

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failing to protect the lives of the Christians. The DCO and DPO were called back from their duties and a judge of Lahore High Court is now investigating the case.

The police and administration were looking for an excuse to attack him and other LPP activists in the district. Instead of looking into the allegation of rape and disappearances of the Christian women, police arrested him on very serious charges that can lead to the death sentence. The journalists are also angry with him. Most of them are saying that when Christian community leaders are not bringing these allegations of rape and disappearances, why is Tariq Mehmood doing that? In normal practice, a press release of this nature was to be investigated by the journalists. They have every right not to print it and say that they were false charges. But instead the press release has been handed over to police who have taken very drastic actions.

Labour Party Pakistan demands an immediate release of Tariq Mehmood and calls on the government to check the facts if women were raped and over 40 have disappeared. LPP will not let this incident go unnoticed. We have launched an international campaign for the release of Tariq Mehmood.

Send this letter

Please sign the following and send it to the addresses pasted below

Subject: release Tariq Mehmood, a human rights activist in Toba Tek Singh

Honorable Prime Minister,
Islamic Republic of Pakistan,

Dear Sir,

We wish to draw your attention to the illegal and totally unnecessary arrest of Tariq Mehmood, a well known human rights activist and the general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan in Toba Tek Singh on the 11th of August which is being commemorated as the Day of Minorities in Pakistan. It is ironic to note that a staunch defender of the rights of minorities should have been arrested on a day officially dedicated to the rights of minorities, while the perpetrators of violence against innocent Christians of Gojra remain at large.

It is even more reprehensible that the Toba Tek Singh Police has framed absurd charges of terrorist activities against a peaceful and conscientious activist who risked his life to defend poor victims of religious intolerance.

He has consistently highlighted the case of the brutal burning to death at Gojra. He had also been demanding the arrest of those who were responsible for the killings. On the 6th of August, he was targeted and threatened of dire consequences by a group of religious fundamentalist at a press conference in Toba Tek Singh. Instead of protecting those who are in the forefront of a fight against religious extremism, the police are arresting them.

We demand Tariq Mehmood's immediate release and a probe into police behavior that has led to an unnecessary arrest of a human rights activist.

Please email and fax the appeal to the following addresses

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Mr. Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani
Prime Minister of Pakistan
Prime Minister House
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 51 9221596
E-mail: secretary@cabinet.gov.pk

a copy to all the following addresses

Minister for Interior
R Block Pak Secretariat
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Tel: +92 51 9212026
Fax: +92 51 9202624
E-mail: ministry.interior@gmail.com
or
interior.complaintcell@gmail.com

Mr. Mian Shahbaz Sharif
Chief Minister of Punjab
H-180 Model Town
Lahore
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 42 5881383

Minister of Law
Government of Punjab
Punjab Secretariat
Ravi Road
Lahore
PAKISTAN
E-mail: law@punjab.gov.pk

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