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Pakistan

VERY URGENT CALL FOR SIGNATURES – Release Baba Jan! An International Appeal to the Pakistani and Gilgit-Baltistan Gövernments

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This is a very urgent call for solidarity signatures. Baba Jan, a dedicated activist from Gilgit-Balistan, north of Pakistan, is appealing against a life sentence. His final review petition will be heard by the Supreme Court May 25, 2017. To have an effect, this international call has to be sent Monday 22, 2017 in the evening (European time).

Baba Jan is a political activist in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) facing a life sentence along 12 more at Gahkooch jail. He is a federal committee member of the Awami Workers Party and president of the Progressive Youth Front. He was sentenced on charges of rioting and organising illegal rallies in 2010. His real "crime" was to help the victims of Atta Abad Lake to receive a fair compensation. The lake was established after the land sliding that blocked the path of the river.

In 2010, when the people of Ali Abad, the main city of Hunza Valley, protested for fair compensation for all the genuine victims of the Atta Abad Lake, the police opened fire, killing two protesters, the father and his son. There was immediately very strong protests and people rebelled. Baba Jan was not there at the time. He later joined the protests and tried to cool down the temperature of the mood of the people by organising rallies and demonstrations. It was promised that a police case would be registered against the police officer responsible for firing on the peaceful demonstrators.

Instead, various police cases were registered, under the anti-terrorist laws, against Baba Jan, along over 100 activists from various political parties. Anti-terrorist laws are very often used against political activists in Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan on political grounds.

Baba Jan and his 12 colleagues were sentenced to life in 2014 by the anti-terrorist court – it has never been heard earlier that demonstrators would receive such a sentence for protesting! Later, the High Court of GB acquitted Baba Jan upon his appeal against the verdict.

Baba Jan contested the general elections in 2015 and came second in his home constituency. However, when a bye election was to be held again in the same constituency, after the winner was made governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, and it emerged that no one could match the popularity of Baba Jan, the government went to the Supreme Court and asked that their appeal for Baba Jan acquittal must be heard before the election and the election was postponed.

Later, the Supreme Court restored the life sentence of Baba Jan. Many believed the decision was taken on a political basis, to keep Baba Jan out of the contest.

The Supreme Court will hear a final review petition of Baba Jan on 25th May 2017.

This is to demand that the government of Gilgit-Baltistan withdraw its appeal at the Supreme Court and plead at the Supreme Court for the release of Baba Jan and all others, and to release all of them.

This is also to demand the publication of the judicial commission report on the original incident and the implementation of the recommendations. This judicial commission was established by the GB government itself to investigate the whole incident. Its report was never published.

Fourth update of 25 May 2017.

Signatories

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Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM), Malaysia

Socialist Workers League (Nigeria)

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South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), South Asia

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Working People Party (PRP), Indonesia

Francis Wurtz, Honorary Member of the European Parliament, France

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Faizun Zackariya, activist, Sri Lanka

Edwuard Zapata, Secretario General Sindicato de Hidrocentro, Venezuela

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