

**Pakistan: End the cycle of detention and judicial harassment of lawyers Imaan
Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha**

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*Joint statement by international civil society organisations working on
the protection of lawyers, human rights defenders and freedom of expression*

We, the undersigned international civil society organisations, express grave concern at the continued arbitrary detention of Pakistani human rights lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha since January, despite the Supreme Court of Pakistan suspending their sentences and granting them bail on 17 September 2026.

The Supreme Court's intervention followed months of delay in the determination of their applications for suspension of sentence arising from their conviction under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) in relation to “anti-state” social media posts. Yet, within hours of the Supreme Court ordering their release, the two lawyers were arrested again in connection with an earlier case registered in March 2025 concerning their alleged participation in a protest in Islamabad. An Anti-Terrorism Court, whose jurisdiction was invoked through the arbitrary addition by Islamabad Police of a section of the Anti-Terrorism Act to the First Information Report (FIR), rejected a request by police for 30 days' physical remand and instead sent them to jail on judicial remand for 14 days.

A further obstruction emerged in the fresh anti-terror proceedings. Jail authorities reportedly failed to facilitate the signing of the required powers of attorney (POA), preventing Mazari-Hazir and Chattha's lawyers from filing bail applications. As a result, the Anti-Terrorism Court returned the bail petitions. Legal counsel challenged this non-facilitation, prompting the Court to issue notices to the jail authorities. At the 24 September hearing, a POA for Hadi Chattha was produced, but the jail deputy contested its validity on the basis of the jail authority's signature on it not being his — rendering it invalid — while Mazari-Hazir's POA was not processed at all, raising concerns about her whereabouts and well-being. At the subsequent 26 September hearing for Imaan Mazari-Hazir, the Court issued a contempt notice to the jail authorities for their continued failure to get the power of attorney documents signed and attested.

The sequence of events is a clear indication that successive criminal proceedings are being weaponised to prolong their arbitrary deprivation of liberty despite judicial orders granting relief.

Serious due process concerns

The proceedings against Mazari-Hazir and Chattha must also be viewed in the context of longstanding and well-founded allegations regarding their treatment as accused persons and as practising human rights lawyers.

Five independent experts mandated by the UN Human Rights Council have previously [raised concerns](#) about reported procedural irregularities in the PECA proceedings, including hearings

conducted at unusually short intervals, attempts to impose state-appointed counsel despite the accused having sought representation of their choice, the recording of prosecution evidence in the absence of the accused and their lawyers, and circumstances that allegedly impeded their ability to prepare an effective defence.

Their prosecution under overly broad provisions relating to "cyber terrorism", "glorification" and "false information" arose from social-media expressions concerning matters of significant public interest, including human rights violations and the treatment of minority communities. Restrictions on freedom of expression, to be permissible under international human rights law, must be provided by law, pursue only legitimate aims such as national security, public order or public health, and satisfy the cumulative requirements of necessity, and proportionality.

The use of anti-terrorism legislation in the latest case, reportedly arising from allegations concerning participation in a protest, slogans, and obstruction of roads, also requires particularly rigorous judicial scrutiny. Terrorism legislation must not be used to criminalise peaceful assembly, protected expression, freedom of association, or legitimate professional activity.

Pakistan's international obligations

Pakistan is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It is therefore required to respect the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention under Article 9, the guarantees of a fair and public hearing and adequate defence rights under Article 14, the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 and the right to peaceful assembly under Article 21.

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers are equally relevant. They require governments to ensure that lawyers are able to perform their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference (Principle 16(a)). Lawyers must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a consequence of carrying out their professional duties (Principle 18). They are also entitled, like other persons, to the rights of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including the right to participate in public discussion concerning the law, the administration of justice, and human rights (Principle 23).

These protections are especially important in the case of Mazari-Hazir and Chattha, whose professional work has included representing victims of enforced disappearances, alleged custodial abuse, abuse of blasphemy laws and other serious human rights violations.

The arrest, prosecution or prolonged detention of lawyers because of their professional representation, human rights advocacy and exercise of their right to freedom of expression not only violates their individual rights; it creates a wider chilling effect on Pakistan's legal profession and undermines the ability of other lawyers to represent clients in politically sensitive or human rights cases without fear of retaliation.

We call on the Pakistani authorities to:

- Immediately release Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha, give full effect to the Supreme Court's order of 17 September 2026, and ensure that any continued deprivation of liberty is subject to a clear legal basis and rigorous, independent judicial scrutiny.
- Drop all charges based on the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, human rights advocacy, and the lawful performance of their professional duties as lawyers.
- Disclose the factual and legal basis for their re-arrest and ensure rigorous judicial scrutiny of the arbitrary use of the Anti-Terrorism Act in the latest proceedings.
- Guarantee their full fair-trial rights, including access to counsel of their choosing, adequate time and facilities to prepare their defence, their physical presence during proceedings, the ability to challenge prosecution evidence, and decisions through reasoned judicial orders.
- Ensure their safety and dignity while detained, including confidential and unrestricted access to legal counsel, appropriate medical care, contact with their families, and protection from torture or other ill-treatment.
- End any pattern of reprisals, intimidation or persecution through judicial processes against Mazari-Hazir and Chattha and other lawyers and human rights defenders for carrying out legitimate professional work, including human rights work.
- Review the use of PECA and anti-terrorism legislation against journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, and peaceful critics, and bring domestic laws and enforcement practices into conformity with Pakistan's obligations under the ICCPR.
- Ensure that all lawyers in Pakistan can carry out their professional functions independently and safely, including representing unpopular or politically sensitive clients, without being associated with their clients' causes or subjected to retaliation.

The independence of lawyers is an essential component of the right to a fair trial and of the rule of law itself. Judicial remedies cannot be meaningful if a grant of liberty by one court is followed immediately by detention through another proceeding without compelling and independently scrutinised justification.

We call on the Government of Pakistan and all relevant judicial and law-enforcement authorities to uphold Pakistan's international obligations and ensure that Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha are able to practise their profession and exercise their human rights without intimidation, retaliation or improper interference.

SIGNATORIES

1. Alliance for Lawyers at Risk (ALR)

2. ARTICLE 19
3. Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE)
4. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
5. Front Line Defenders
6. International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL) Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers
7. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
8. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
9. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
10. International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)
11. The Law Society of England and Wales
12. Lawyers for Lawyers
13. The New York City Bar Association
14. PEN Norway
15. World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders