**Pakistan: International civil society organisations condemn the sentencing of human rights lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha**

6 November 2026

*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, strongly condemn the recent sentencing of prominent Pakistani human rights lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha to ten years' imprisonment under anti-terrorism legislation and three years' imprisonment under the Pakistan Penal Code. The convictions mark a significant escalation in the extensive misuse of the criminal justice system against the two lawyers and raise serious concerns about the anti-terrorism legislation used to criminally punish and intimidate lawyers undertaking permissible human rights work.

On 29 October, the Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) convicted Mazari-Hazir and Chattha on three counts under section 7(h) of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 (ATA) and sections 186 and 353 of the Pakistan Penal Code for "serious coercion or intimidation of a public servant in order to force him to discharge or to refrain from discharging his lawful duties" to create terror in society, "obstructing any public servant while they are carrying out their official public duties," and "assaulting or using criminal force to deter a public servant from discharging their duty." The convictions relate to an incident in October 2024 when the two lawyers allegedly removed security barriers on a road in Islamabad during the transportation of the visiting England cricket team. The lawyers were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and ordered to pay fines totalling 200,000 Pakistani Rupees. Although the prison sentences were imposed under all three provisions, they are to run concurrently.

The ATC proceeded to deliver its verdict on 29 October despite the fact that Mazari-Hazir and Chattha had petitioned the Supreme Court of Pakistan on 26 October, contesting the Islamabad High Court's decision to deny a stay of proceedings and seeking a transfer of the case to a different court, but the petition was not heard by the court. Proceedings in these circumstances raise concerns about respect for due process and the right to an effective judicial remedy.

We are concerned that the trial, which took place inside Adiala prison in Rawalpindi, failed to meet fair trial standards. According to reports, Mazari-Hazir and Chattha were kept in a cage-like structure inside the courtroom throughout the trial, preventing effective communication with their legal counsel and the court. Their lawyers also reported that they were not given sufficient access to Mazari-Hazir and Chattha to adequately prepare their defence. The prosecution relied primarily on police testimony to establish the offence, while the defence were denied adequate opportunity to reasonably challenge prosecutorial evidence. Both Mazari-Hazir and Chattha denied the charges and maintain that the case was fabricated to target them for their professional work and peaceful activism.

The misuse of overbroad anti-terrorism legislation in relation to the alleged removal of security barriers raises serious questions about the proportionality of the charges. Anti-terrorism legislation must not be

applied arbitrarily or disproportionately, nor used to intimidate individuals or punish permissible conduct or activities that do not meet the applicable threshold.

These latest convictions must be viewed in the context of successive, politically motivated, criminal proceedings that appear to have been brought against Mazari-Hazir and Chattha solely to punish them for, and deter them from, continuing their peaceful, permissible human rights work. As highlighted in a previous civil society joint statement, on 17 September 2026, the Supreme Court of Pakistan granted them bail and suspended their 17-year sentences imposed under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) for "anti-state" social media posts criticising the military and expressing solidarity with Baloch and Pashtun activists. However, on the same day (before the lawyers could be released), the authorities re-arrested them under the ATA in a case relating to a protest in 2025 and ordered their detention for 14 days under judicial remand. Their bail application in the case was repeatedly stalled and only heard after their conviction in the barrier removal case. They were eventually granted bail in the protest case on 3 November.

The successive proceedings in the barrier removal case, and their prolonged deprivation of liberty despite the Supreme Court's intervention, reinforce our concern that the criminal proceedings are calculated to make an example of the two lawyers and risk creating a chilling effect on the independence of the legal profession in Pakistan and on access to justice more broadly.

Article 10A of the Constitution of Pakistan expressly guarantees every person the right to a fair trial and due process. Pakistan is also a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and is therefore obligated to respect, protect and fulfil the rights guaranteed under the Covenant. Article 9 prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; Article 14 guarantees the right to a fair and public hearing before an impartial tribunal, including adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence and effective access to legal counsel of one's choosing; Article 19 protects the right to freedom of expression; and Article 21 guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Anti-terrorism legislation must not be used to criminalise peaceful assembly, protected expression, freedom of association, or permissible professional activity.

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

These protections are especially important in the case of Mazari-Hazir and Chattha, whose professional work has included representing victims of enforced disappearances, custodial abuse, abuse of blasphemy laws and other serious human rights violations. The arrest, prosecution or prolonged detention of the lawyers because of their professional representation, human rights advocacy and exercise of their right to freedom of expression not only violates their personal human rights – it also sends a stark warning to other legal professionals and human rights defenders. The successive actions have a wider chilling effect on Pakistan's legal profession and undermine the ability of other lawyers to represent clients in politically sensitive or human rights cases without fear of reprisal.

We call on the relevant authorities in Pakistan to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha, and take appropriate steps to have the convictions against them quashed;
- End the misuse of the criminal justice system to target the two lawyers and drop any charges and cases against them arising solely from their work and defence of human rights;
- Review the use of PECA and anti-terrorism legislation against lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and peaceful critics, and bring domestic laws and enforcement practices into conformity with Pakistan's obligations under the ICCPR; and
- 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, including through criminal prosecution.

The independence of the legal profession is a fundamental safeguard for access to justice, fair trials, human rights, judicial independence and the rule of law. Lawyers must be able to defend these principles, represent their clients, challenge unlawful government action, participate in assemblies and public debate and speak out on matters concerning the administration of justice, without fear of detention or imprisonment. Judicial remedies cannot be meaningful if a grant of liberty by one court is followed immediately by detention through another proceeding without sufficient credible evidence.

We stand in solidarity with Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha, and with all lawyers in Pakistan who continue to defend human rights and the rule of law despite the fear of reprisals. We call on the Pakistani authorities to respect their international obligations, uphold the independence of the legal profession and ensure that lawyers can exercise their profession and their human rights without intimidation, retaliation or improper interference.

**SIGNATORIES**

1. Alliance for Lawyers at Risk
2. Amnesty International
3. Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE).
4. Défense Sans Frontière – Avocats Solidaires (DSF-AS)
5. Deutscher Anwaltverein (German Bar Association)
6. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
7. Front Line Defenders
8. Geneva Bar Association
9. Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL)
10. International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL)
11. International Association of Russian Advocates
12. International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
13. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
14. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

15. Lawyers for Lawyers
16. National Union of Peoples' Lawyers
17. New York City Bar Association
18. PEN Norway
19. Progressive Lawyers Association, (ÇHD), Turkey
20. The Defense Commission of the Barcelona Bar Association
21. The Foundation Day of the Endangered Lawyer (DEL)
22. The Law Society of England and Wales
23. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders