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Threats to Asma Jahangir

# 'In Pakistan, human rights activists are never safe'

Civil society urges government to act, laments attitude towards social workers

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Civil society organisations, human rights activists, lawyers, academics and leading intellectuals came together to condemn the recently unearthed plot to assassinate leading human rights activist and lawyer Asma Jahangir.

During a press conference at Rozan's office on Monday, Rozan, Sungi and Aurat Foundation expressed solidarity with Jahangir and demanded that the government to urgently set up an impartial judicial commission to investigate the matter in a fully transparent manner and make its findings public.

Furthermore, they called for exemplary punishment for her conspirators, as "this is not only a threat to Jahangir's life but also to the sanctity

of humanitarian work and democracy". Speaking with *The Express Tribune*, Jahangir profusely thanked the participating organisations and individuals for their efforts. She said, "This is not on a matter of my safety but a much larger issue - individual's right to raise their voice". She further noted that this is another example of civil society and activists being muffled to silence by threats that often lead to activist's leaving the country.

Through the conference, many expressed scepticism about relying on the government for sanctuary. Sungi Programme Director Sheikh Asad Rehman commented, "Starting from Liaqat Ali's as-

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Participants commended Jahangir's iconic role in championing democracy and the rule of law, peace, and human rights causes

sassination leading up to assassinations after him, there has been no satisfactory resolution of any cases...how can we trust the government?" He further noted that this is not a value judgement but a conclusion that can be derived from historical trends. "Whenever an injustice has occurred in Pakistan's history, the government has not taken it seriously."

Rehman further attributed the callousness to the power dynamic shift from the judiciary to political leaders and the military. "Articles 245, 119 and 186 all exonerate civil power and allow the military to go unquestioned," he said.

Sungi Gender Issues Manager Arifa Mazhar noted that Jahangir was threatened during Musharraf's regime as well, with Musharraf openly calling for Jahangir's removal. "These threats still persist. Democracy or dictatorship, human rights activists aren't safe," commented Mazhar. She further shed light on how human rights activ-

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ists, particularly those working for women's rights, are shunned by the government for promoting a 'bad image' of Pakistan. Mazhar argued that there is no shame in bringing the nation's internal problems to the forefront for addressal, but rather there is shame in hiding them.

Rozan Assistant Program Coordinator Adeel Pathan mentioned how threats to public activists affect social workers working at local levels in far-flung areas.

Participants further commended Jahangir's tireless and iconic role in championing democracy and the rule of law, peace, and human rights causes.