

31 May 2016

Pakistan – Harassment of and attack on human rights defender Imran Anjum

On 20 May 2016, a group of brick kiln owners displayed banners around the city of Gojra, Toba Tek Singh District, Punjab province, calling human rights defender Mr **Imran Anjum** 'a blasphemer' and insisting on his execution.

[Imran Anjum](#) is a human rights defender from the city of Sahiwal, Punjab province. He is the Founder and the Executive Director of **Peaceful & Active Center for Humanity (PEACH)**, a non-governmental organisation working on the social and economic development of some of the most disadvantaged communities in Pakistan. Imran Anjum is directly involved in the provision of legal aid to people from these communities and carries out advocacy work on the rights of bonded labourers, including child labourers and brick kiln workers. Currently, PEACH is running a campaign across the Punjab province aimed at raising awareness among brick kiln workers about their rights.

On 20 May 2016, a group of brick kilns owners from Gojra placed banners with the slogan “Arrest and hang up blasphemer Imran Anjum” next to the city's mosques. The owners are also allegedly planning to file a complaint with a court accusing the Christian human rights defender of blasphemy. Pakistani law, however, empowers the police to open an investigation into blasphemy on its own initiative; no separate complaint is needed. In the case of Imran Anjum, the smear campaign against him, started by the brick kiln owners, already serves as sufficient grounds for the police to open such an investigation. Should an investigation be opened and the human rights defender is found guilty of blasphemy, he could be sentenced to life imprisonment or death.

On 9 May 2016, the human rights defender lodged a complaint with the Deputy Superintendent of Police of Gojra, requesting to register a First Information Report and open an investigation into an attack on him and his colleagues which happened earlier that day. To date, however the police have not taken any action. On 9 May 2016, Imran Anjum, along with two of his colleagues, was travelling home to Sahiwal from a conference in Gojra devoted to the protection of the rights of brick kiln workers, when his car was chased by two people on motorbikes without registration plates on Samundri Road, in the city of Faisalabad. The men forcibly stopped the human rights defender's car, dragged him and his colleagues out of the vehicle and threatened them at gunpoint, stating that they would kill the human rights defender and his colleagues if they did not stop their labour rights work or if they went back to Gojra. On the morning of 9 May 2016, Imran Anjum held a conference in Gojra Press Club with the workers of Gojra brick kilns, attempting to draw government attention to violations of their rights. Earlier that day the human rights defender had visited four brick kilns in the area to discuss working conditions with labourers. Two months earlier, on 26 March 2016, Imran Anjum organised another conference for brick kiln workers in Gojra, in order to raise awareness among them about their labour rights and the existing labour laws.

Imran Anjum has long been persecuted for his work on labour rights. In May 2012, he was beaten at a court premises in the city of Arifwala, Pakpattan district, and spent 45 days in detention following false accusations of blasphemy and a murder attempt, brought by brick kilns owners from Arifwala.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the attack on Imran Anjum and his colleagues, which it believes is solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in the promotion and protection of the labour rights of brick kiln workers in the Punjab province of Pakistan.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Pakistan to:

1. Ensure the registration of the First Information Report and carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack on human rights defender Imran Anjum, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of human rights defender Imran Anjum;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Pakistan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.