

6 August 2020

India: Kashmir journalist and human rights defender Qazi Shibli detained

On 31 July 2020, journalist **Qazi Shibli** was detained by police after he was asked to report to the Shergari police station in Srinagar. The defender has been detained under Section 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CRPC).

[Qazi Shibli](#) is a journalist and human rights defender. He is the editor of the news website, The Kashmiriyat, that focuses primarily on issues regarding development and human rights. In his capacity as a journalist, Qazi Shibli has reported widely on the situation on the ground in Kashmir, including the increasing militarisation in the valley and the human rights violations that those living there are subjected to.

On 30 July 2020, Qazi Shibli received a call from the cyber police in Srinagar, asking him to present himself at the Shergari police station for interrogation. The following day, on 31 July 2020, after being interrogated for two hours, the defender was detained under Section 107 of the CRPC, which relates to 'security for keeping the peace in other cases'. He was since moved to Srinagar Central Jail, where he is currently being detained.

This is the second time that Qazi Shibli has been detained, after he was previously detained in July 2019 and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment under the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA), for tweeting about the deployment of additional troops in Jammu and Kashmir. His detention was revoked on 13 April 2020, during the decongestion of prisons across the country in the context of COVID-19.

Human rights defenders from the region believe that Qazi Shibli is being targeted for his documentation of the lives of those living in Kashmir, where human rights defenders and journalists live and work under highly militarised and hostile conditions. In the months following the unilateral abrogation of statehood in 2019, defenders and journalists who reported on violations were threatened, harassed and intimidated in a climate of isolation and impunity. They face constant surveillance and are regularly summoned to police stations and questioned about their reports and sources of information, whilst new restrictions in response to COVID-19 have only added to the difficulties that they already face. Front Line Defenders has previously [highlighted](#) the harassment of journalists by the police, as seen by the case of [Masrat Zahra](#), [Peerzada Ashiq](#) and [Gowhar Geelani](#).

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest of Qazi Shibli, as it believes he is being targeted as a result of his work in defence of human rights and exercising his right to freedom of expression. It particularly condemns the use of the PSA against journalists and human rights defenders, with the aim of terrorising them and silencing their work. Front Line Defenders is concerned about the particular timing of the police harassment during the pandemic, when the state must enable the media to report without fear. Front Line Defenders calls on the Indian authorities to fulfil their international commitments and uphold the right to freedom of expression as well as other fundamental rights and freedoms in Kashmir, which are enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Qazi Shibli, and drop all charges, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful

work in the defence of human rights and journalism;

2. Cease the harassment and intimidation of journalists covering the situation on the ground in Kashmir;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions including police and judicial harassment.

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