

28 January 2020

### **Pakistan: Manzoor Pashteen arrested**

On 27 January 2020, human rights defender **Manzoor Pashteen** was arrested by Pakistani police in Peshawar on baseless allegations of criminal conspiracy and sedition.

Manzoor Pashteen is a human rights defender and a key leader of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), a peaceful human rights movement against extra judicial killings, enforced disappearances, discrimination and surveillance of the Pashtun community by the Pakistani authorities. Pashtuns in North-West Pakistan have been made especially vulnerable by the war against terror, unwillingly caught up and targeted in the battle between State security forces, the Taliban, and US – Afghanistan regional tensions. Their demand for the protection of the constitutional rights of Pashtuns, and their peaceful human rights work for the protection of their community have been met with hostility, criminalization and often violent reprisals by the Pakistani authorities. As a leader of PTM, Pashteen has been a vocal critic of human rights violations by the military and has led public campaigns and peaceful protests calling for peace, accountability and redress for human rights victims, and an end to discrimination.

On 27 January 2020, Manzoor Pashteen, along with nine others from PTM, was arrested by Pakistani police from Shaheen Town in Peshawar, north-western Pakistan. A First Information Report (FIR) was filed against the human rights defender following a speech he gave at a student gathering on 16 January 2020. Subsequent to his arrest, Manzoor Pashteen has been remanded in police custody for fourteen days and is to be produced before a magistrate in Dera Ismail Khan, where charges against him have been filed. While Manzoor Pashteen continues to remain in jail, the others have been released from custody. Further arrests of human rights defenders, including two parliamentarians who are senior PTM members and were peacefully protesting Pashteen's arrest in Islamabad on 28 January 2020, have taken place.

Over the past months, there has been increased surveillance, targeting and criminalization against PTM members and those supporting or associated with their peaceful struggle for human rights. In May 2019, two PTM members were arrested and detained for over three months, before being released on bail for lack of sufficient evidence. In April 2019, the Pakistani military warned the movement that their "time is up" and accused them of being funded by foreign intelligence agencies. Human rights defenders working with PTM have reported increased surveillance and threats of enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention and threats against family members.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the ongoing judicial harassment of members of the PTM and it condemns the detention of, and charges against, human rights defender Manzoor Pashteen, as it believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his human rights activities and his exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Pakistan to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Manzoor Pashteen, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Manzoor Pashteen, while in detention, adheres to all the conditions set out in the 'Basic Principles for Treatment of Prisoners, adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/111 of 14 December 1990';
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security and

integrity of Manzoor Pashteen;

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

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