

24 October 2019

Pakistan: Muhammad Ismail, father of woman human rights defender Gulalai Ismail, abducted in Peshawar

On 24 October 2019, **Muhammad Ismail**, the father of Pakistani woman human rights defender **Gulalai Ismail**, was abducted by a group of unidentified men as he was leaving the Peshawar High Court. The family, supporters and colleagues of Gulalai Ismail have been subjected to relentless threats, intimidation and harassment by officers of the Pakistani Military and Intelligence service since 25 May 2019.

[Gulalai Ismail](#) is an award-winning woman human rights defender and the co-founder of Aware Girls, who has been compelled to flee Pakistan after two First Information Reports (FIRs) were filed against her on 22 and 23 May 2019 by police in Islamabad. The FIRs accuse her of serious offenses including “sedition” under the Penal Code and Sections 6/7 of the regressive Anti-Terrorism Act.

Her father, Muhammad Ismail is a well known human rights defender in Pakistan, and has been critical of human rights violations in the country, particularly the treatment of his daughter by the State apparatus.

Front Line Defenders has previously issued an [urgent appeal](#) expressing its concern against the filing of false and baseless allegations against Gulalai Ismail and a [further appeal](#) condemning the threats against her family, especially her elderly parents and sister.

Since May 2019, the family home in Islamabad has been raided by armed military on at least four occasions. During these raids the officials questioned and harassed her parents, confiscated their mobile phones, and photographed Gulalai Ismail’s younger brother, without his consent. The family was placed under strict surveillance.

On 12 July 2019, an FIR was filed against Gulalai Ismail’s elderly parents by the Peshawar police, falsely alleging offences under the Anti-Terrorism Act. It is clear by the timing of the FIR that it is aimed at intimidating and silencing Gulalai Ismail in response to her human rights work. An application to quash the FIR is currently pending before the Peshawar High Court and a hearing on this case was scheduled on 24 October 2019.

On 24 October 2019, Muhammad Ismail traveled to the Peshawar High Court for the hearing, which had been routinely postponed. Muhammad Ismail parted company with his lawyer and was leaving the premises when he was abducted at around 3.30pm. According to eye witnesses he was accosted immediately outside the court premises by unidentified men dressed in black militia uniform. The men grabbed him and forced him into a black vehicle. Muhammad Ismail screamed to nearby witnesses that they inform his lawyer, who he could still see walking away in the distance.

Previously, on 18 October 2019, Muhammad Ismail survived an attempt to abduct him from his home in Islamabad. At around 1.45am, armed men, some in police uniform and others in civilian clothes with their faces hidden, arrived at their home, and ordered Muhammad Ismail to come out. Fearing for his safety, Muhammad Ismail refused to leave his home, and requested them to come back during the day time. The armed group remained outside his house for approximately an hour in a tense stand off until they eventually left the premises. Following this incident he was compelled to leave his home, fearing for his own safety.

Gulalai Ismail's parents have also been informed unofficially that they have been placed on a Government Exit Control List (ECL), effectively preventing them from leaving the country. The couple never received any official notification of this, and only found out when an immigration official refused to renew Gulalai's mother's passport on the basis of a purported ECL.

Following the abduction, Muhammad Ismail's family have unofficially received information that he is currently being held at the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crimes Unit. At the time of writing, the family have no official information regarding his whereabouts or the basis for his abduction .

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned about the safety of Muhammad Ismail. It is also concerned for the safety of Gulalai Ismail's mother.. Front Line Defenders condemns the ongoing harassment of Gulalai Ismail as it believes she is being targeted solely as a result of her legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders calls on the Pakistani government to:

1. Investigate the whereabouts of Muhammad Ismail and if he is found to be in police custody, take all necessary measures to ensure his immediate and unconditional release and guarantee his physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of his family;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the abduction of human rights defender Muhammad Ismail with a view to ensuring his protection and release, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Immediately revoke the FIRs against Gulalai Ismail and her parents and ensure their safety and security;
4. Guarantee to Muhammad Ismail his constitutionally protected fundamental freedoms, and ensure that he is given all due process rights in accordance with national law and international standards, including access to legal representation, medical treatment and access to family while in custody;
5. Ensure the safety and security of the family members, associates and colleagues of Gulalai Ismail and cease all forms of harassment and threats against Gulalai Ismail's family and supporters;
6. Guarantee all human rights defenders a safe and enabling environment in which to carry out their peaceful work.

