

**29 January 2026**

## **Pakistan: Imaan Zainab Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha sentenced to 17 years imprisonment**

On 24 January 2026, the Sessions Court in Islamabad sentenced human rights lawyers **Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir** and **Hadi Ali Chattha** to 17 years' imprisonment under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). The case was based on tweets published between 2021-2025 which highlighted human rights violations in Pakistan. The human rights defenders are presently held in Adiyala Jail, Rawalpindi.

[Imaan Mazari](#) is a human rights lawyer who has represented countless victims of human rights violations, taking up cases of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and custodial violations. Through her work, she has guaranteed access to justice, redress for human rights defenders, victims and their families against the oppressive practices of state authorities, especially the military, police, and intelligence agencies. [Hadi Ali Chattha](#) is a human rights lawyer who has represented countless victims of false blasphemy cases, sexual violence, rape and enforced disappearances in Pakistan. He has worked with the Justice Project Pakistan on cases involving death-row prisoners and the Asma Jahangir Legal Aid Cell. The human rights defenders have faced repeated reprisals by the Pakistani state, including attempts to implicate them in false anti-terror and blasphemy cases as punishment for their human rights work.

On 24 January, the Sessions Court in the 'tweets case' sentenced Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha to 17 years' imprisonment under PECA. The sentencing comes at the end of a flawed and accelerated trial in a baseless case targeting freedom of expression and human rights advocacy. Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha were systematically denied their due-process rights including the right to mount an effective defence. The human rights defenders are presently held in Adiyala jail, Rawalpindi.

The trial was marred by arbitrariness and raises serious concerns about the fairness and independence of judiciary. Throughout the trial, there were repeated attempts to arrest the human rights defenders on false claims of non-appearance in court and/or failure to cooperate with the judicial process.

On 23 January 2025, the human rights defenders were violently arrested by Islamabad police while traveling to the Sessions Court where they were due to appear in the tweets case. Failure to appear would have been grounds to cancel their bail and once again deny the right to cross-examine witnesses. The defenders were violently dragged out of their vehicle in the presence of senior members of the Islamabad Bar, and taken to an undisclosed location before being placed in judicial remand by the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC). The human rights defenders were not represented by a lawyer before the ATC, and there are credible reports of due-process violations indicating that Imaan Mazari, and Hadi Ali Chattha were not physically present or produced before the ATC prior to remand.

On 21 January 2026, the Islamabad High Court granted the human rights defenders relief from arrest in the case, reinstated their bail and granted the right to cross-examination. Following the decision of the Court, Pakistani police resurfaced several old FIRs in which Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha are named, including a complaint against 150 lawyers for a protest outside the Islamabad High Court in 2025. The FIRs abused the criminal-justice process, as they were

produced with the motive of arresting the human rights defenders by any means, despite the order of the Islamabad High Court.

In August 2025, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) filed a case against Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha under [Sections](#) 9, 10, 11, and 26A of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). The case is linked to tweets published between 2021 and 2025 that are critical of human rights violations particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On 29 October 2025, Hadi Ali Chattha was briefly arrested during the case, despite being present in court. On 15 January 2026, the Sessions Court cancelled bail for Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha, ordered their immediate arrest, and dismissed their right to cross-examine witnesses.

The Sessions Court order sheds dangerous insights into the approach of the Pakistani state towards free speech, human rights work and the safety of human rights defenders as well as the lack of effective safeguards over the authority of the military and security forces resulting in near-total impunity.

Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha were targeted repeatedly over the past several years due to their advocacy for victims of violations – especially Baloch human rights defenders and victims of false blasphemy cases. In 2023 and 2024, there were attempts to implicate Imaan Mazari in a false anti-terror case. In 2025, there was serious concern that the human rights defenders would be arrested in a false blasphemy case. They were threatened several times to stop their work or face serious consequences.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its concerns, as the filing of the PECA case - targeting legitimate speech and tweets that speak out against human rights violations – is a clear reprisal for their human rights work; and a message to the human rights community that expressing legitimate dissent means being at risk of losing their liberty as punishment.

### **Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities of Pakistan to:**

1. Immediately release Imaan Zainab Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha and dismiss all criminal cases against them;
2. Pending release, ensure that Imaan Zainab Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha are guaranteed their safety in detention, immediate access to lawyers, family members and medical attention;
3. Conduct an immediate and effective inquiry into the violent arrest of Imaan Zainab Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha by the Islamabad police with a view towards holding those responsible to account for their arbitrary actions;
4. Review the conviction and order a retrial in accordance with due-process and fair trial guarantees;
5. Cease the abuse of laws including PECA and the Anti Terrorism Act as well as counter terror measures to target human rights defenders in Pakistan and move towards repeal or reform of regressive legislation.
6. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Pakistan are able to free carry out their human rights work without the fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions.

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