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India: Journalist Aakash Hassan assaulted by Jammu and Kashmir Police

On 17 July **Aakash Hassan**, an independent journalist and human rights defender based in Indian administered Kashmir, was assaulted by Jammu and Kashmir Police in the Anantnag District. The defender was stopped by police while travelling home on Saturday evening, slapped and beaten with poles. The police deliberately targetted the defender while clearing routine traffic congestion, when they identified him through the press pass on his vehicle.

[Aakash Hassan](#) is an independent journalist based in Srinagar in Indian administered Kashmir. He has contributed to reports in the Guardian, Al Jazeera, Intercept and other international publications. His reporting is focused on the impact of the conflict and militarisation on the lives of ordinary citizens in Kashmir, especially women. Recently he has written on increasing surveillance by State police and military on ordinary civilians, and human rights violations including torture by the Jammu and Kashmir police and military. Hassan has been targetted in the past, by local police, through summons and interrogation, based on his reporting on human rights issues.

On 17 July at around 9 pm, Aakash Hassan was travelling home, when he was caught up in traffic congestion near Sangam Bridge in Anantnag town. He was driving slowly, when the police officer directing traffic, saw the press sticker on his vehicle, and shouted 'press press'. Immediately at least two police officers surrounded his vehicle and reportedly beat him including with batons. Aakash Hassan told Front Line Defenders that one officer grabbed him by the collar and beat him on his face and tried to drag him out of the vehicle. The journalist was able to drive away from the scene and seek immediate medical treatment for his injuries. Images shared with Front Line Defenders and also on the journalist's twitter handle show the defender with visible injuries to his face and hands.

Hassan believes that he was targetted due to his identity as a journalist. In response to widespread condemnation of the attack, the district police in Anantnag stated that "Cognisance taken. Circumstances that led to this being looked into...". A local superintendent had also contacted the journalist and informed him that action would be taken. Despite these assurances, at the time of this appeal, the journalist is not aware of any action taken against those responsible.

The attack on Hassan, is emblematic of the violence and impunity for threats, harassment against human rights defenders in the region. Journalists and human rights defenders in Kashmir have been under severe pressure from State authorities especially the police and military, due to their human rights work. Documenting and reporting on violations from inside the region, has always carried significant risk. The dangers include false arrest, prosecution, and violence, increased since the unilateral abrogation of Statehood and lockdown imposed post 5 August 2019. Front Line Defenders has documented cases of journalists and human rights defenders targeted through legal and police action including preventive detention under the draconian National Security Act, which is applied in Kashmir. Surveillance of communications and movement, and intimidation is routine.

Front Line Defenders condemns the violence against Aakash Hassan which it believes is a direct reprisal for his journalism and human rights work. Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned for his safety and that of other journalists and human rights defenders working in the region.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the physical assault of the Aakash Hassan with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to

justice in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;

2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and journalists in India, especially those in Indian administered Kashmir, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of violence, reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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