July 15, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

On July 22, President Trump will host Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan for his first official White House visit. As non-partisan, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working actively to build peace and protect human rights in Pakistan and around the world, we write today to express our deep concern over the growing crackdown on peacebuilders and human rights defenders in Pakistan. **We urge you to speak out publicly against the persecution of civil society activists in Pakistan during Prime Minister Khan’s visit, and to press the White House to directly raise these issues during the visit.**

Specifically, we urge you to raise concerns over the treatment of internationally recognized peacebuilder and women’s rights activist Gulalai Ismail, who is under immediate threat of indefinite detention for speaking out against cases of harassment and sexual assault by Pakistani security forces. Gulalai has been charged along with other activists who have been part of a nonviolent movement seeking a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate human rights abuses by Pakistani forces during counterterrorism operations.

After years of harassment by Pakistan’s authorities, Gulalai now faces charges under Pakistan’s anti-terrorism law, which allows for indefinite detention without access to lawyers. In their pursuit of Gulalai, Pakistan’s security forces have repeatedly raided her family’s home and violated their rights. Pakistani authorities have even now unjustly brought similar charges against her parents. Her father is a long-time respected human rights leader within the Pakistan NGO community and her mother is a devoted homemaker who have done nothing wrong. Other individuals who have spoken out in defense of Gulalai have also been harassed, detained, and even tortured.

The State Department’s latest Human Rights Report states forthrightly that Pakistan’s military and intelligence services have regularly “operated without effective civilian oversight” and that “[a]uthorities seldom punished government officials for human rights abuses.” The State Department’s own report also describes:

> “credible reports of extrajudicial and targeted killings; forced disappearances; torture; arbitrary and lengthy pretrial detention; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; censorship, site-blocking, and arbitrary restrictions on journalists’ freedom of movement; severe harassment and intimidation of and high-profile attacks against journalists and media organizations; government restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including overly restrictive nongovernmental organizations (NGO) laws; restrictions on religious freedom and discrimination against members of religious minority groups; restrictions on freedom of movement; corruption within the government; recruitment and use of child soldiers by nonstate militant groups; lack of criminal investigations or accountability for cases related to rape, sexual harassment, so-called honor crimes, female genital mutilation/cutting, and violence based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; legal prohibitions of consensual same-sex sexual conduct; forced and bonded labor and transnational trafficking in persons; and the worst forms of child labor.”

According to the White House, the goal of President Trump’s visit with Prime Minister Khan will be to help create “the conditions for a peaceful South Asia and an enduring partnership between our two countries.” The White House’s press announcement says the visit “will focus on strengthening
cooperation between the United States and Pakistan to bring peace, stability, and economic prosperity
to a region that has seen far too much conflict.”

With these goals in mind, the United States cannot turn a blind eye to the growing abuse and
harassment that Pakistani human rights defenders and peace activists like Gulalai face under Prime
Minister Khan’s administration in the name of counterterrorism. To advance peace and security in
South Asia, the United States must make the promotion of human rights and protection of civil society
space top priorities in its relationship with Pakistan. The unjust persecution of Gulalai for standing up for
the rights of women and girls demonstrates that Pakistan’s authorities still refuse to accept the
fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and synonymous with
American values.

We urge you to stand with Gulalai Ismail and other peacebuilders and human rights defenders at risk
in Pakistan by speaking out on the floor of Congress during Prime Minister Khan’s visit. We urge you
to communicate directly with the White House to ask President Trump to raise Gulalai Ismail’s case
with Prime Minister Khan and request that all charges against her and her parents be dropped
immediately.

Please find here detailed information on Gulalai Ismail and the threats she now faces. For further
information, contact Bridget Moix at Peace Direct, bridget.moix@peacedirect.org, (202 406 0131).

Sincerely,

1. 2-2 Consulting Group LLC
2. Alliance for Community Based Organisations
3. Alliance for Peacebuilding
4. American Friends Service Committee
5. Asian-American Network Against Abuse of Human Rights
6. Association for Women's Promotion and Endogenous Development
7. Aware Girls
8. Benenson Society
9. Catalyst for Peace
10. Center for Advocacy in Gender and Social Inclusion (CAGSI)
11. Cepaz - Centro de Justicia y Paz
12. Charity & Security Network
13. Community Initiatives and Research
14. Cultura Democrática
15. Equity Now for Women and Girls
17. Humanists International
18. Idea Ghar
19. Institute for Young Women Development
20. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
21. Journalistes pour la Promotion de la Démocratie et des Droits Humains (JPDDH)
22. JuventudLAC
23. Karuna Center for Peacebuilding
24. Nest
25. Nonviolent Peaceforce
26. Organization for Community Civic Engagement
27. Organizing for Zimbabwe Trust
28. Pakistan NGOs Forum
29. PCDN
30. Peace Direct
31. PRBB Foundation
32. Radial Show Cara & Sello
33. RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in War)
34. Roshan Democratic Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
35. Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal)
36. SUSTAIN Cameroon
37. The Business Plan for Peace
38. The Kota Alliance
39. United Network of Young Peacebuilding
40. Virtueconomy
41. World Youth Movement for Democracy
42. Youth 21 for community development