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Prime Minister, Azad Jammu and Kashmir,
Prime Minister Secretariat, Muzaffarabad,
Muzaffarabad, Pakistan

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Respected Prime Minister, Syed Iftikhar Ali Gilani,

Amnesty International is writing to you to urge your newly formed government to **take steps to ensure the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and to liberty are respected across Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir**. In wake of swift and systematic steps taken by authorities since June in the region to repress civic freedoms, we **call upon your government and all relevant authorities to ensure that the human rights of all those inside the region are upheld**. Amnesty International is also alarmed by the recent crackdown on protests in Rawalakot, particularly on 5 November, during which protesters have alleged that live ammunition and drones were used resulting in the deaths of at least three protesters and injuring over a dozen more.

As the newly elected Prime Minister of the region, it is incumbent upon your government to **ensure undeterred exercise of human rights for all people** as recognized in international human rights law and the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act, 1974. The **arbitrary banning of Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC)**, a grassroots people's movement, by proscribing it under the first schedule of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Anti-Terrorism Act, 2014 violates the right to association, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that "no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." This is interpreted to mean that states have to demonstrate that the limitations "meet the test of necessity and the requirement of proportionality.[1] The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism has stated that, in cases involving proscribing associations, the onus is on the state "to prove that a threat to one of the grounds for limitation exists and that the measures are taken to deal with the threat".[2] While the exceptions in Article 22 do allow for proscribing organizations under narrow grounds, i.e. associations whose "aim [is] the destruction of the State through terrorist means, or banning public demonstrations which call for the use of terrorist means to destroy the State", however, these exceptions must not be used as "smokescreens for hiding the true purpose of the limitations."[3] The **Kashmir government has failed to provide evidence that the restrictions placed on JAAC fall under these exceptions and that this was the least restrictive measure** to achieving the government's own stated goals. The UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern in 2024 regarding "instances in which civil society organizations and ethnic minority grass-roots movements have been arbitrarily placed on the First Schedule list of proscribed organizations under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997",[4] and recommended that the authorities "put an end to the use of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, to criminalize civil society organizations and grass-roots movements".

On 4 September, six UN mandate holders wrote to the Pakistani authorities expressing concern that "the designation [of JAAC] may not be consistent with international standards concerning terrorist listings, and that JAAC may have been unjustifiably listed in retaliation for its political, labour and human rights advocacy, in

[1] UN General Assembly (UNGA), Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, UN Doc. A/61/267, 16 August 2006, para 21.
[2] UNGA, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism (previously cited), para 20.
[3] UNGA, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism (previously cited), para 20.
[4] para. 52.

violation of international human rights law."[5]Amnesty International **urges your government to lift the blanket ban on JAAC and uphold the right to freedom of association** in the region.

Similarly, hundreds of individuals have also been **proscribed under the fourth schedule of the 2014 act** for their connection with JAAC or for exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Journalists have also been placed on this list ostensibly in response to their coverage of the protests in June and July.[6] Amnesty International has also received reports of arbitrary detention of hundreds of protesters, activists and members of JAAC. Individuals have been kept under administrative detention or charged under the anti-terrorism law, while the whereabouts of some remain unknown. Proscription of an individual through section 6 of the act can be done on an ex parte basis, meaning that the individuals are not given an opportunity to contest the allegations against them. Amnesty International has previously noted that these prescriptions are often arbitrary and amount to a violation of the right to due process and rights to liberty, privacy and freedom of movement.[7] Similar to the organizational proscription, once an individual is on the fourth schedule there is limited recourse to independent judicial review to exit such a list. Amnesty International **calls on the Azad Jammu and Kashmir government to immediately remove individuals placed on the fourth schedule and/or arbitrarily detained** simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Reports from the region have estimated that nearly 90 people were killed in June and July,[8] with **allegations of use of lethal force against peaceful protesters** particularly in Rawalakot. This alleged use of force has continued, as on 5 November reports of three protesters being killed by firing from security forces emerged. Further, it has been alleged that armed drones were used in residential areas of Rawalakot. The exact number of these deaths and instances of use of force are unconfirmed given the communications blackout and restrictions on reporting by journalists in the region.[9] The UN High Commissioner has previously called for "prompt, thorough and impartial investigations" into all deaths that occurred during the unrest.[10] Despite these **calls no investigation has taken place**. Further, access to news websites such as Al Jazeera[11] and Daily Jeddojehad[12] has been restricted in Pakistan for their independent reporting on the use of force against protesters. Amnesty **International calls on the authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough, impartial, effective and transparent investigation into the deaths and injuries of protesters** as well as the unlawful use of force including lethal and less-lethal weapons by security personnel.

[5] Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Allegation letter by UN experts on information concerning Pakistan-administered Kashmir, 4 September 2026, https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=31223.

[6] International Federation of Journalists, "Pakistan: Journalist placed on anti-terror watchlist in Azad Jammu and Kashmir", 26 August 2026, https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/pakistan-journalist-placed-on-anti-terror-watchlist-in-azad-jammu-and-kashmir

[7] Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Inclusion of Baloch activists on terrorist watchlist an affront to human rights", 23 October 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/pakistan-inclusion-of-baloch-activists-on-terrorist-watchlist-an-affront-to-human-rights

[8] BBC, "Why have so many people died in the run-up to an election in Pakistan-administered Kashmir?", 24 July 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czxekn33d5wo
Guardian, "Pakistan accused of fatally shooting 30 unarmed protesters in Kashmir", 28 July 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jul/28/pakistan-accused-firing-unarmed-protesters-kashmir-killings

[9] BBC, "Pakistan restricts international media reporting", 5 August 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn0n9w95n70o
Amnesty International, Pakistan: International and Local Civil Society Appeal to End Restrictions on Freedom of Expression in Pakistan (Index: ASA 33/1351/2026), 4 August 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/1351/2026/en

[10] Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Wave of unrest in Pakistan-Administered Kashmir", 17 July 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2026/07/wave-unrest-pakistan-administered-kashmir

[11] Guardian, "Pakistani authorities ban international media from reporting in most of country", 5 August 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/aug/05/pakistani-authorities-ban-international-media-from-reporting-in-most-of-country

[12] The Diplomat, "Pakistan's Kashmir Crackdown", 26 August 2026, https://thediplomat.com/2026/08/pakistans-kashmir-crackdown

Lastly, the prolonged internet shutdown since 5 June[13] constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR respectively.[14] Internet shutdowns in most parts of the region have lasted nearly three months and areas such as Bagh, Dhirkot, Kotli Rawalakot and Sudhnoti remain deprived of mobile and internet services.[15] Access to internet services is an integral part of the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. In their General Comment 37 on the right to peaceful assembly, the UN Human Rights Committee states that state parties must not "block or hinder internet connectivity in relation to peaceful assemblies" and any restrictions must comply with the test for restrictions on freedom of expression.[16] The blanket,[17] prolonged and arbitrary nature of this shutdown, which is still ongoing in some parts, does not meet the test of pursuing a legitimate aim, legality, and necessity and proportionality.

Amnesty International urges you to ensure that the arbitrary proscription of JAAC and inclusion of hundreds of individuals in the fourth schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act are reversed, all those arbitrarily detained are immediately released, transparent and independent investigations are conducted regarding the allegations of use of lethal force against protesters, and internet and mobile network services are fully restored in all parts of Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir. After the elections in late July and early August, the people of Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir look towards your government for justice and accountability – we hope that they are not disappointed.

We await your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Isabelle Lassée
Deputy Regional Director, South Asia Regional Office
Amnesty International

[13] Al Jazeera, "Internet shutdown crosses 100 days in Pakistan-administered Kashmir", 15 September 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/15/internet-shutdown-crosses-100-days-in-pakistan-administered-kashmir
[14] Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Authorities must protect the right to peaceful protest and lift communications blackout amid Jammu & Kashmir protests", 2 October 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/pakistan-authorities-must-protect-the-right-to-peaceful-protest-and-lift-communications-blackout-amid-jammu-kashmir-protests
[15] Dawn, "AJK govt announces phased restoration of internet services", 1 September 2026, https://www.dawn.com/news/2026476
[16] UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment 37 on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 34.
[17] UNHRC, Resolution 44/20 (2020), adopted on 17 July 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/44/20, para. 24.