URGENT ACTION

KASHMIRI POET AND JOURNALIST DETAINED

Ahmad Farhad, a Kashmiri poet and journalist, has been under administrative detention since 20 June in Bagh, Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir. His arbitrary detention under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance comes as part of a massive crackdown on the right to peaceful assembly in the region. Concerningly, the authorities are pressuring Ahmad Farhad to record statements denouncing protests taking place in the region. He is currently on a hunger strike to protest his unlawful detention. Amnesty International calls on the Pakistani authorities to immediately release Ahmad and refrain from coercive tactics which curtail his right to freedom of expression.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Asim Khalid Awan
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Dear Deputy Commissioner,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the arrest and administrative detention of Ahmad Farhad, a Kashmiri poet and journalist who is known for his support for social movements. He has been detained at a police station in Bagh, Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir, since 20 June. His detention was ordered by the District Commissioner of Bagh under section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance which allows for detention of individuals accused of speech undermining public safety, but no specific allegations have been made against him.

In detention, Ahmad Farhad is being pressured to record a video denouncing protests in the region and condemning the Jammu and Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a grassroots civil rights movement, as a terrorist organization, as a condition for his release. In protest, on 27 July, Ahmad Farhad went on hunger strike until 10 August, when he was persuaded by the authorities to end his hunger strike with the promise of release. However, he was not released, and he resumed his hunger strike on 11 August. On 22 August he was shifted to a hospital and put on intravenous fluids after his health deteriorated significantly.

Ahmad Farhad has been suffering from severe chronic back pain and was previously also taken to hospital in July after his condition deteriorated. He was given muscle relaxants, however this exasperated other gastrointestinal issues.

Ahmad Farhad's detention comes as part of a larger crackdown on human rights in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir after the JAAC announced a call for protest on 9 June. This is not the first time he has been targeted. On 15 May 2024, he was forcibly disappeared from his home in Islamabad and resurfaced two weeks later in the custody of police in Jammu and Kashmir.

Ahmad Farhad's detention is arbitrary and appears to be solely an attempt to silence his right to freedom of expression and impede his reporting on the ongoing human rights violations in the region.

Therefore, I urge you to:

- ***Immediately and unconditionally release Ahmad Farhad from arbitrary administrative detention.***
- ***Ensure that Ahmad Farhad is protected from torture, other ill-treatment and coercion during his detention.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmad Farhad is a journalist with 15 years of experience and has worked for over 10 mainstream Pakistani TV news channels, including Bol News, Hum News, Neo News and Capital TV. He is also a renowned Urdu poet, who has raised political themes such as enforced disappearances in his poetry. Ahmad has an active presence on social media. He has been an outspoken critic of political interference by the armed forces in Pakistan and has faced threats in the past due to his dissent. He has been working as a freelance journalist after repeatedly being let go by previous employers due to pressure from state authorities.

On 15 May 2024, Ahmad Farhad was forcibly disappeared from his home in Islamabad. He resurfaced two weeks later on 29 May at a check post in Kohala, near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir. He was taken into custody, and a First Information Report (FIR) was filed against him at Dhirkot Police Station under section 186 of the Azad Kashmir Penal Code (APC) for "obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions". He was charged in another FIR filed at Bishmo Division Police Station Sadar, Muzaffarabad dated 13 May 2024 under the Anti-Terrorism Act in connection with social media posts regarding the Kashmir Long March organized by the JAAC in May 2024. He was eventually granted bail in both cases on 14 June 2024.

Hundreds of people have been arbitrarily detained across Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir as part of a larger crackdown against protests calling for the abolition of 12 reserved seats in the legislative assembly. JAAC, a grassroots civil rights movement advocating for economic and political rights in the region, called for strikes and scheduled protests on 9 June after negotiations with the government failed. In retaliation, the government designated JAAC as a "proscribed organization" under the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Anti-Terrorism Act, 2014 on 5 June and shut down mobile internet services across the region. In the immediate aftermath, at least 13 people, including four police officers, were killed. In the weeks since, reports have indicated that dozens have been killed due to excessive use of force by security forces, however exact numbers are difficult to verify. In early August, the Pakistani authorities issued the Foreign Media Facilitation Guidelines which require staff belonging to foreign news outlets, including local staff, to obtain a No Objection Certificate when reporting outside the three major cities, Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. The government has also blocked access to the news website Al Jazeera after raising objections regarding its coverage of the protests.

Pakistani authorities have also cracked down on peaceful assemblies in other parts of Pakistan expressing solidarity with the movement in Kashmir. At least 50 protesters were briefly detained in Lahore for attempting to organize a solidarity protest on 31 July. Furthermore, nearly 100 protesters were arrested in the capital Islamabad, after attending a solidarity protest, including former Senator Mushtaq Ahmad. Previously, journalist Sohrab Barkat was arrested on 6 June under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, for social media posts regarding the situation in Kashmir. He was released on bail ten days later.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Urdu.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 20 February 2027
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Ahmad Farhad (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/8257/2024/en/