

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Pakistan: Dismay after assassination of Ms. Sabeen Mahmud in Karachi

Paris-Geneva, April 27, 2015 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint programme of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture OMCT) expresses its dismay over the assassination of Ms. Sabeen Mahmud on April 24, 2015 in Karachi, and calls upon Pakistan authorities to investigate and bring the perpetrators of this hateful crime to justice.

On April 24, 2015 at around 9 pm, the car of Ms. **Sabeen Mahmud** came under fire from unidentified gunmen. Ms. Sabeen Mahmud, who was driving together with her mother, was shot and died some time later in the hospital from her injuries. Her mother, who was also shot twice, after receiving medical treatment, is said to be out of immediate danger.

Ms. Sabeen Mahmud was the Director of “*The Second Floor*” (T2F), a café cum bookshop set up in Karachi in 2007, as part of a non-profit umbrella called PeaceNiche. T2F holds public talks, discussions, exhibitions, pioneering events (Pakistan’s first hackathon, stand-up comedy acts) with prominent local and international artists, writers and human rights activists on various social matters. A prominent outspoken critic of the human rights situation in her country, she was a voice of pluralism and secularism.

“The murder of Ms. Sabeen Mahmud constitutes yet another example of the silencing of any dissenting voices in Pakistan and of the shrinking of public space for civil society within the country,” said FIDH President, Karim Lahidji.

On the same day of her assassination, Ms. Sabeen Mahmud had organised a round-table on the human rights situation in the province of Balochistan, a province which has over the past decade witnessed severe violations of human rights, included systematic involuntary disappearances¹. She and some of her colleagues had reportedly been concerned about the possible backlash from holding such an event, since a similar public event on Balochistan had been scheduled on April 9, 2015 at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), but had been forcibly cancelled by State agencies².

While at this stage there is no direct evidence linking her murder to the Balochistan debate, the Observatory is appalled by the assassination of Ms. Sabeen Mahmud and is concerned by the threats and attacks directed at those speaking out about the human rights situation in Pakistan.

The day after the killing, FIDH, together with its member organisation the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), sent official communications to the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs³ calling for an independent and impartial investigation into the murder of Ms. Sabeen Mahmud to be carried out.

¹ An HRCP mission to Balochistan in 2011 found strong evidence of the complicity of security forces in killings and enforced disappearances, which have yet to be properly investigated.

² FIDH and HRCP have called on the United Nations to look into the Pakistani government’s repression of freedom of expression and of assembly, in response to the forced cancellation of the academic discussion on Balochistan and enforced disappearances. For more information, see FIDH Press release of April 14, 2015, available at <https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/pakistan/pakistan-government-silences-academics-speaking-about-balochistan>

³ The full list is: Mr. Christoph Heyns, UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mr. Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Mr. David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Mr. Maina Kiai, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

The Observatory recalls that over the past two years, Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) Director, **Perween Rahman**, who was advocating land rights of the poor populations, and HRCP Coordinator **Rashid Rehman**, who publicly defended a person accused of blasphemy, were both killed, and that no investigation has led to the conviction of their murderer so far.

“The Pakistani authorities must promptly and independently investigate the circumstances leading to Ms. Sabeen Mahmud's murder, in order to end this long-lasting climate of impunity, by bringing the perpetrators of this hateful crime to justice”, added OMCT Secretary General, Gerald Staberock.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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