

5 November 2020

India: Raids and police harassment of Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan

On 29 October 2020, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) raided the residence of human rights defender and former chairperson of the Delhi Minorities Commission **Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan** and the office of the NGO 'Charity Alliance' headed by him. The raid is part of a series of raids carried out by the NIA on 28 and 29 October, on homes and offices of several human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and aid organisations related to alleged funding of terrorism in Kashmir.

[Zafarul Islam Khan](#) is a scholar, journalist and the former Chairman of the Delhi Minorities Commission (DMC) – a statutory body which works under the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. He is the current Chairperson of the Charity Alliance, an organisation that provides education, relief, development and welfare programmes for minorities in India. He has worked extensively on minority rights, including Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Parsis. The 72 year old human rights defender is a respected scholar and intellectual and has been vocal against all forms extremism, including in his own community. He has spoken out against right wing extremism and violence against minorities in India. The report produced by the DMC on the Delhi riots, clearly implicates far right wing elements, and state collusion in the violence that took place in February 2020. His work, especially as former-Chairperson of the DMC, has made him a direct target for the State and extremist groups.

On 29 October 2020, at around 7 am, NIA officers scaled the exterior wall of Zafarul Islam Khan's compound and entered his residence in Dehli. No physical search order or warrant was produced, although the defender was shown what officers purported to be a search order on an NIA officer's mobile phone. The order stated that the office premises of Charity Alliance was to be searched, having been linked to terrorist militants in Kashmir. The officers ordered the defender and his family members to hand over their mobile phones, and searched the bedrooms and residence on the first floor of the building. Around two hours later, the office of Charity Alliance, located on the ground floor was also searched. Items seized from the residence and the office include documents, laptops, hard drives of desk top computers, cash from the residence, and mobile devices. The raid ended at around 11 am and the defender's son was asked to accompany the officers to Shaheen Bagh police station to fill out a seizure memo, where he remained until 7 pm.

The human rights defender has been previously targeted by Indian authorities for his work. On 6 May 2020, Delhi police entered Zafarul Islam Khan's home and attempted to arrest him in relation to a post he had made to social media, which the police claimed was seditious. The 72 year old defender was granted anticipatory bail in this case by the Delhi High Court in July 2020, considering his age, risks posed by COVID-19 to prisoners, and because police had completed their inquiries into his case.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern about the ongoing harassment and intimidation of Zafarul Islam Khan. It believes that allegations of "funding terrorism" are baseless and have been construed to intimidate those working on human rights and advocating against religious extremism in Kashmir. Recent NIA actions appear to be aimed at silencing and punishing Zafarul Islam Khan and other human rights defenders for speaking out on human rights and minority issues in India.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Immediately cease all further intimidation and harassment of Zafarul Islam Khan, and return the items seized from him, as it believes that the raid was carried out to intimidate him for his legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions.