

13 May 2016

Pakistan – Killing of human rights defender Khurram Zaki

On 7 May 2016, prominent journalist and human rights defender Mr **Khurram Zaki** was murdered in Karachi by two armed, unknown assailants.

Khurram Zaki was a human rights defender, journalist and editor at Let Us Build Pakistan (LUBP), an online news portal established to promote an inclusive and democratic Pakistan, and to support freedom of religion. Khurram Zaki campaigned for the rights of religious minorities and peace among religious groups in Pakistan including on social media where he campaigned against sectarian violence.

Khurram Zaki was shot dead on the evening of 7 May 2016, outside a hotel in the southern city of Karachi. His murder comes at a time when the human rights defender had been vocal on social media in relation to the election of a Pakistani mayor in London. On his Facebook account the human rights defender asked “Can we in Pakistan ever elect an Ahmadi or Hindu or Christian PM?”. Furthermore, in January 2016 the human rights defender lodged a complaint with the police against the radical *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) cleric, Maulana Abdul Aziz, in Islamabad. The complaint however was dismissed. It referred to an audio message which was shared on social media, in which the cleric appeared to incite sectarian hatred and violence against the Shia minority by criticising them for leading a civil society campaign against him and the Red Mosque. In December 2015, Khurram Zaki led street protests asking that Maulana Abdul Aziz be arrested and charged with hate speech for allegedly justifying attacks such as that on the school massacre in Peshwar in 2014.

Over the last number of weeks there had been online campaigns against Khurram Zaki and LUBP. The fact that the human rights defender was reaching an increasingly wider audience across ethnic, sectarian and religious divides in Pakistan seemed to generate the opposition of extremist groups whose hate and violence he exposed. The murder of Khurram Zaki comes at a time when Pakistani human rights defenders have been increasingly under attack. 25 April 2016 marked one year since the murder of human rights defender Ms Sabeen Mahmud who was killed last year in Karachi on her way to a seminar which she organised on human rights violations in Balochistan, particularly forced disappearances. While 7 May 2016 marked two years since human rights lawyer Mr Rashid Rehman was shot dead in Multan.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Pakistan to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of human rights defender Khurram Zaki;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of human rights defender Khurram Zaki, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Pakistan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.