

STATEMENT FROM HINA JILANI

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This statement was sent by Ms. Jilani to the International Commission of Jurists (Canada), to be shared with Canada's legal community during the CBA March in Solidarity with the Defenders of the Rule of Law in Pakistan: Nov. 25, 2007

Friends and colleagues,

On my part and on behalf of the legal community and civil society in Pakistan I thank you for this demonstration of solidarity with our struggle to preserve respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, for the rule of law and for judicial independence in our country. Pakistan has already suffered seven years of military domination and a progressive erosion of democratic values. The suspension of the constitution and demolition of the superior judiciary, including the Supreme Court, as a measure of the emergency rule imposed on 3 November 2007 by General Musharraf, is an extreme and unwarranted action of a military dictator to remove all obstacles to authoritarian rule.

Judges who resisted the attack on their independence and constitute 80% of the superior judiciary, were removed from office and their liberty restrained by placing them under house arrest, a situation that has no precedent anywhere in the world, even in the ugliest of martial laws and dictatorships. Lawyers have refused to appear before hurriedly constituted courts that lack any independence or credibility. Their actions of protest were met with brutal police action, resulting in severe injuries to the protesting lawyers. Thousands of lawyers were arrested, some were severely tortured and humiliated by security forces, others held in solitary confinement; many have been charged under anti-terrorism laws. Those who were not imprisoned or were released face daily intimidation and harassment from government agencies. Attempts are made to compel them to appear before courts that are openly partisan, both in their conduct on the bench and in the pro-government judgments hurriedly delivered to confer legitimacy on every action violating democratic principles and human rights. Human rights defenders were imprisoned and curbs on their freedom to hold peaceful activities to protest continue. The independent media has been gagged and freedom of assembly completely denied to political parties.

Despite the repressive actions of the government and daily threats of imprisonment and bodily harm, the civil society continues to register their protest. We call upon the international community, particularly the lawyers, to support our demands for the revival of the constitution, the restoration of the judiciary with full guarantee of respect for its independence, the lifting of all curbs on the independent media and the release of all lawyers, judges, journalists and others who are imprisoned because of their actions to defend human rights.

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Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.
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