

June 19, 2005

SANSAD Condemns the Persecution of Mukhtar Mai in Pakistan

On June 10 a court in Lahore freed the 14 men who had gang raped Mukhtar Mai, an unmarried teacher in Meeranwalla, Punjab three years ago because her 12 year old brother had been seen walking with a girl from the dominant Mastoi tribe. One man, who had been sentenced to death, had his sentence reduced to life imprisonment.

While the Lahore judiciary's decision shocked all concerned with women's rights and human rights in Pakistan and in the world, the Pakistan Government put Mukhtar Mai on the Exit Control List to prevent her going to the UK at the invitation of Amnesty International to talk about her case and to the US at the invitation of ANNA, an organization of expatriate Pakistani women, to talk about the condition of women in Pakistan. Mukhtar Mai was put under house arrest with 40 policemen guarding her house and 4 policewomen following her every move inside it. Her telephone lines were cut.

Following intense and widespread national and international protest, Mukhtar Mai was taken off the Exit Control List. Her passport was returned from the American embassy without a visa and seized by the Government. She was escorted to Lahore and Islamabad, where she was allowed contact with human rights activists and permitted to appear at a news conference where she declared that she was canceling her trip to the West because her mother was ill. President General Pervez Musharraf acknowledged to the media in Auckland on June 17 that he had ordered the travel ban on Mukhtar Mai to protect Pakistan's image abroad.

The entire community of human rights and women's rights activists in Pakistan and the world as a whole is outraged by the repressive action of the Pakistan Government in curtailing Mukhtar Mai's freedom and intimidating her into silence. We, South Asians living in the Vancouver area of British Columbia share this outrage and strongly protest these actions of the Pakistan Government. We urge President General Musharraf and the Government of Pakistan to immediately restore all freedoms of speech and movement to Mukhtar Mai. We further urge them to ensure that Mukhtar Mai, a victim of the gruesome violence against women inflicted by a tribal society's way of maintaining the absolute supremacy of men, receive the justice due to her as a citizen of a modern state.

(Adopted by the Annual General Meeting of the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) on June 19, 2005 at Vancouver; British Columbia, Canada.)

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