

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 17, 2023

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As Members of Congress dedicated to upholding human rights and international law, we write to express our deep concern about the ongoing human rights violations in Pakistan and to urge you to conduct a comprehensive review of the Leahy Act and Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as they pertain to U.S. assistance to Pakistan.

Pakistan is a long-standing ally of the United States, and we recognize the importance of our relationship for regional stability and counterterrorism efforts. However, we are unable to ignore the persistent reports of human rights abuses including restrictions on freedom of expression, speech, and religion and belief, as well as enforced disappearances, military courts, and harassment and arrest of political opponents and human rights defenders. These violations not only violate the fundamental rights of the Pakistani people but also undermine the principles of democracy, justice, and rule of law.

We are extremely concerned about [the passing of the Criminal Law \(Amendment\) Bill, 2023](#) which will strengthen the existing blasphemy law, [which has historically been used to persecute religious minorities](#), if signed by the President. The Bill was passed in haste despite repeated calls from many lawmakers for a thorough parliamentary procedure. On August 16, eight days after the Bill was passed, [a mob desecrated churches and set fire to homes of Christians in Jaranwala](#). There have been reported protests against the Bill, including by the Shia community in Gilgit-Baltistan. Religious persecution remains rampant in Pakistan, and we are concerned about future restrictions on freedom of religion and belief should this Bill become law.

Equally, we remain concerned about the [ongoing harassment and arrests](#) of political opponents, including members of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, and human rights defenders who are charged with bogus cases to trample their right to free speech. Such acts of harassment do not only impact individuals, but deeply traumatize their families. This includes the former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is [reportedly facing](#) the death penalty.

Recently, Imaan Mazari, a human rights lawyer on who represents families of those forcibly disappeared, works on issues of forced evictions and media freedom, [was taken from her home by men in plainclothes and elite security forces at 3am without an arrest warrant after speaking at a rally against enforced disappearances](#). Mazari was charged under the broad Anti-Terrorism Act including sedition, rebellion against the state, and terror-financing.

Given the above, we request a legal determination from the Department under the Leahy Laws, Section 502(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act, and all other relevant statutes as to whether U.S.-origin security assistance has been used for gross violations of human rights.

We further request that future security assistance be withheld until Pakistan has moved decisively toward the restoration of Constitutional order, including by holding free and fair elections in which all parties are able to participate freely.

Finally, we ask for Embassy Islamabad to send observers to hearings and other legal proceedings of human rights defenders and political dissidents, including for emblematic cases such as Imaan Mazari, Khadija Shah, and Imran Khan.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you to promote human rights, democracy, and stability in Pakistan. We believe that the United States can play a constructive role in supporting positive change, and it is our hope that our cooperation can contribute to a more just and equitable future for the people of Pakistan.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Summer Lee
Member of Congress



André Carson
Member of Congress




Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress