

Statement on the arrest of the lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir

Lawyers for Lawyers is deeply concerned about the situation of human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari (full name Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir) from Pakistan. Our organization has strong reasons to believe that the successive arrests of Imaan Mazari are directly linked to her professional legal activities and her vocal stance against human rights abuses.

Imaan Mazari is a distinguished human rights lawyer, widely respected for her advocacy on behalf of persecuted religious and ethnic communities, especially perpetrated by the Pakistani military and security forces. Her commitment to addressing human rights violations and abuses is celebrated, with a particular emphasis on being one of the few lawyers representing missing persons in the courts of Islamabad. Due to her substantial contributions and unwavering dedication she has recently experienced two successive arrests.

The first arrest took place on 20 August 2023, when Imaan Mazari was charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act, with serious offences like sedition and incitement to riot under the Penal Code, and “interference in State Affairs”. The arrest, which was conducted without showing an arrest warrant or stating a reason for arrest, followed a public speech she delivered at a rally organized by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) on 18 August 2023. This organization advocates for the rights of ethnic Pashtuns affected by Pakistan’s war against the Taliban in the northwest. During her speech, she courageously addressed alleged human rights violations related to the military, including strong criticisms of enforced disappearances. Following her initial arrest, Imaan Mazari was granted bail on 28 August, only to face a subsequent arrest a few hours later on different charges: the funding of terrorism. She was ultimately released on bail on 2 September 2023 but continues to fight the charges against her. It is reported that Imaan Mazari had previously assisted in securing the release of the organisers of the rally where she gave her speech, highlighting a direct connection between her work as a lawyer and her arrest following the rally speech.

This series of events underscores the challenges faced by lawyers like Imaan Mazari as they execute their professional duties while also exercising their freedom of expression. It accentuates the critical importance of upholding the [principles](#) outlined in the [United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#). These principles are vital in ensuring that lawyers like Imaan Mazari can fulfil their professional responsibilities and express their views without the looming threat of reprisals. In this context, two of these principles hold significance.

First, under article 16 of the United Nations (UN) Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, governments must ensure that lawyers “*are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference*” and requires that they “*shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.*”

Second, article 23 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers states that: “*Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization.*”¹

¹ Basic Principle 23.

In view of the above, Lawyers for Lawyers calls upon the authorities of Pakistan to:

- Put an end to all acts of harassment against Mazari-Hazir;
- To drop the charges and end criminal proceedings against Mazari-Hazir;
- Guarantee that all lawyers in Pakistan who work on cases involving human rights violations or other politically sensitive cases can carry out their legitimate professional activities without intimidation, harassment, improper interference or reprisals.