

Pakistan, India urged to release fishermen

PFF and NFF started Campaign to release Detain Fisherfolk

Tuesday 29 June 2010, by [Correspondent\(s\)](#) (Date first published: 26 June 2010).

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KARACHI, June 25: The Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum has demanded immediate release of Pakistani and Indian fishermen who have been languishing in the jails of the two countries for fishing in disputed waters.

Speaking at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club on Friday, PFF chief Mohammad Ali Shah urged the governments of both countries to settle this issue on humanitarian grounds through the ongoing high-level bilateral dialogue on a priority basis.

Some Pakistani fishermen had been in Indian jails for the past 15 years, he said.

He said that fishermen from both countries went for fishing but got caught by the marine security agencies since the international border in the disputed Sir Creek between the two countries had not yet been clearly defined. It was for this reason that most fishermen did not know if they were fishing in their own territorial waters or had strayed into the other's jurisdiction.

Till the time the territorial dispute was resolved, the two countries should declare 100 nautical miles as a buffer zone and issue permits to fishermen after proper verification, the PFF chief suggested.

He said that there were 125 Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails and about 17 of them had completed their sentences but were not being released. Similarly, he said, there were over 580 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails and around 450 of them had already completed their sentences but were not being released.

Representing the Legal Aid Committee, an NGO providing free legal assistance, retired justice Nasir Aslam Zahid said that some time back a pundit from Indian-occupied Kashmir filed a petition in the Supreme Court of India for the release of 17 Pakistani fishermen who had completed their sentences. While the court ordered in his favour, the Indian government had not sent back the Pakistani fishermen, he added.

He said that the PFF was also planning to file a petition in the Supreme Court of Pakistan seeking immediate release of the Indian fishermen who had completed their sentence here so that they could be sent back home. He said that a petition would soon be filed, as for now data was being collected and related work was being completed.

He said that prisoners could be detained for three more months under the Pakistani law after they had completed the sentence. However, after the three months, either the prisoners had to be freed or the government had to seek permission from the Supreme Court review board for further detention. In this case, he said, the government sought permission from the review board, which

allowed that these fishermen be kept in jails. He said that he did not know why the review board was allowing the government to keep these fishermen in Pakistani jails.

The families of a few Pakistani fishermen, who are in Indian jails, were also present at the press conference.

Sakina — whose husband Hussain, two brothers Sidiq and Achar and two cousins Wasayo and Hanif had been languishing in Indian prisons for more than a decade — said when her husband was caught their daughter was just a small child. Now so much time had passed that she had kids of her own, she said. Another woman, Basran, said that her brother Bilal, son Sikander and cousins Gul Hasan and Mohammad Ali had also been in Indian prisons for a long time.

The two women urged the two governments to ensure safe and quick return of their relatives.

Iqbal Haider of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Zulfiqar Shah of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research also spoke.

By Our Staff Reporter

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/local/pakistan%2C-india-urged-to-release-fishermen-660>

India, Pakistan urged to release fishermen

Various civil society organisations in Pakistan called on the governments of both India and Pakistan on Friday to immediately release all detained fishermen and solve the long-standing border disputes, including Sir Creek.

Chairman Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum Muhammad Ali Shah, Senior Advocate Supreme Court Syed Iqbal Haider, Chief of Legal Aid Committee Justice (retired) Nasir Aslam Zahid and Joint Director of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research Zulfiqar Shah addressed the audience at Karachi Press Club.

Four women relatives of five fishermen in Indian jails were also present at the press conference and narrated the problems they have been facing since their breadwinners are absent.

They demanded the foreign secretaries of both India and Pakistan, currently meeting in Islamabad, to include the release of detained fishermen and the resolution of Sir Creek issue on their agenda.

“The governments should issue special identity cards to each other’s fishermen to fish in joint areas, the delegation demanded, “Both the countries should stop this practice of releasing each other’s fishermen for political mileage.”

Some visible demarcation signs must be placed at the disputed creeks so that fishermen do not cross the borders accidentally, they added.

Pakistan’s coast is spread over 1,050 kilometres, out of which a 350-km-long coastal stretch is located in Sindh. Around 17 major creeks are located at the coast of Sindh and they are ideal spots

for fishing. One of the creeks is the disputed Sir Creek. Fishermen often enter into Sir Creek and a nearby Kajar Creek but the navies of both countries arrest them on charges of border crossing, even though both countries have placed demarcation. The fishermen defend their position by saying that these demarcations are hardly visible on the water.

After Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, the process of releasing fishermen was stopped, which was later resumed but it is still slow. There are around 125 Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails, they informed, adding that nine of these were sentenced to 13 years in prison. They have served 15 years so far but are still being held by the Indian authorities.

Similarly, 576 Indian fishermen are also languishing in Pakistani jails on similar charges.

Recently, a few Indian civil society members filed petitions in the Indian Supreme Court for the release of those fishermen who have completed their sentence so 19 Pakistanis were released. In return, Pakistan also freed 17 Indian fishermen.

Civil societies in Pakistan have also decided to file a petition in the Supreme Court of Pakistan to release all Indian fishermen in jails. "We think that the arrest of innocent fishermen is violation of international marine laws and human rights conventions," the speakers insisted.

The members appreciated the efforts of the government when they released an Indian boy, who crossed the border by mistake.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 26th, 2010.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/23815/india-pakistan-urged-to-release-fishermen/>

Pak, India govts must resolve fishermen issue

Staff Report

KARACHI: The governments of Pakistan and India must address the issue of releasing fishermen on priority basis in the ministerial meeting being held in Islamabad, demanded civil society and human rights activists during a press conference at the Karachi Press Club on Friday.

Chairman Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum Mohammad Ali Shah said India recently released 19 Pakistani fishermen and in exchange Pakistan released 17 Indian fishermen as a goodwill gesture, adding, "Still there are 125 Pakistani fishermen languishing in Indian jails, including the nine who were awarded a 13-year sentence after trial. Similarly, 576 Indian fishermen are languishing in Pakistani jails. Therefore, both countries must address the issue on priority."

Shah also said the resolution of Sir Creek, which has been a controversy since 1965 was important and needs to be resolved to reduce the hardships for the poor fishermen of both countries. The human rights activists condemned both governments for their cruel actions of first arresting the poor fishermen and then releasing after years and that too only a small number in the name of exchanging prisoners.

Several fishermen are said to have been missing and their names do not even reach the lists both

countries provide each other during their talks, they said, adding as tensions rise between the two sides fishermen have to suffer, as they are easy to arrest and put in jails for years.

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C06%5C26%5Cstory_26-6-2010_pg12_6
