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Letter to the High Commissioner for Pakistan in Australia: for the release of Mr Baba Jan and other political prisoners detained in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan

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September 22, 2011

To: Mr Abdul Malik Abdullah
High Commissioner for Pakistan
4 Timbarra Crescent, O'Malley ACT 2606
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Cc: Mr Azam Mohammed
Consul General for Pakistan
Level 7, 32 Martin Place, Sydney 2000
parepsydne_comcen.com.au

Dear Mr Abdul Malik Abdullah,

We are writing to ask for your urgent intervention with the government of Pakistan to secure the release of Mr Baba Jan and five other political prisoners currently detained in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan. Mr Baba Jan is a leader of both the highly respected Labour Party Pakistan and the Progressive Youth Front in the region.

During a peaceful demonstration on August 11 by local residents of Gilgit-Baltistan demanding the payment of compensation allowances due to them following the devastating flood and landslide in the valley of Hunza on July 4, 2010, the police opened fired on the protesters, killing Afzal Baig (22 years old), then his father, Sher Ullah Baig (50 years old) who was trying to protect him. The following day, the population of Aliabad and other localities of Hunza rose up, clashing with the police. On August 19, in an attempt to silence the protesters and conceal these murders from public view, 36 people were picked up by police, then another 33 were picked up on September 16.

After initially avoiding arrest, Baba Jan gave himself up to authorities - not because he has committed any crime, but under threat of being "disappeared" if he was captured, a victim of an "extrajudicial execution". The judge had sent Baba Jan to prison on judicial remand. However, he dragged from his by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and tortured for two days - suspended by ropes and severely beaten - in an attempt to extract false confessions from him.

We are aware that these events in Gilgit-Baltistan have featured on the front pages of Pakistan's national press, as they should have: the inhumane treatment of Baba Jan and the other prisoners, whose only "crime" was to speak up for the basic human rights of fellow Pakistanis, has outraged all those who respect democracy and justice.

We in Australia have joined the international campaign to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Jan Baba and the other prisoners.

We also join with the Asian Human Rights Commission in calling for an end to the repression in Gilgit-Baltistan, and insist that the government of Pakistan prosecutes the police and intelligence officials responsible for these violations of human rights.

We ask you to insist to your government that the false charges against the demonstrators be dropped, and that full compensation be paid to all the people affected by the landslide of July 4, 2010.

We look forward to your swift response on this issue, and to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Boyle
National Convener
Socialist Alliance
