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Open Letter Demanding the Release of Baba Jan Hunzai in Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan)

Tuesday 8 May 2012, by [ALI Tariq](#), [BARSAMIAN David](#), [CHOMSKY Noam](#), [CRITHCLEY Simon](#), [GUARDIOLA-RIVERA Oscar](#), [KARIAPPER Amanullah](#), [MEMON Qalandar Bux](#), [Petition / Sign-on Letter](#), [PRASHAD Vijay](#), [SHIHADI Magid](#), [TARIQ Farooq](#), [TOOR Saadi](#), [VANDAL Pervaiz](#), [YOUNG R.C.](#) (Date first published: 7 May 2012).

For the past 8 months Baba Jan Hunzai and four fellow activists have languished in various jails of Gilgit. Twice in this period he has been removed from jail and tortured by military and police agents. He and his colleagues have been charged under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Ordinance. Baba Jan, however, is not a terrorist. He is a respected political activist of Gilgit-Baltistan (the mountainous north of Pakistan). He is being held due to his activism in support of the oppressed of the region and must be released immediately.

In January 2010, a mountain collapsed into Hunza River and created what is now termed the Attabad Lake. As the lake formed, village after village was submerged. In total, over 1000 were displaced and over 25,000 were cut off from the rest of the country (the lake had destroyed the one road that connects the area to Pakistan). The plight of Gilgit-Baltistanis was ignored. Baba Jan, an activist of Labour Party of Pakistan, toured the country lobbying for the government to drain the lake and create transport facilities for the affected. The Pakistan Peoples Party government acted too late. The lake is now a permanent feature of the area. To off-set the protests of the displaced, the government promised compensation.

For some, compensation never arrived. An official list of those who were to receive compensation named 457 families. However, over a hundred of these families did not receive their compensation. Allegedly, the compensation, instead, went to families who were sympathizers of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

On 11th August around 200 people protested for the rights of those families who had not received compensation as the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Mehdi Shah, was visiting the town of Aliabad. The police, instructed to remove the protesters by any means, started with a baton-charge, then used tear gas before opening fire with live ammunition. Their first victim was Afzal Baig, a 22 year old student. Then, when Baig's father tried to retrieve the body of his son, he too was shot. Both died. The valley erupted and a police station was burnt down by the protesters.

Baba Jan arrived 6 hours later. He organised the protesters and they were promised an investigation and firm action against the police officers responsible for the killing. The protesters waited for the government to act.

It acted a week later. Arrest warrants were issued for numerous protesters including Baba Jan. While most of those arrested have been released on bail, Baba Jan and 4 activists remain behind bars. Twice they have been picked up from jail and tortured. First, starting on the 12th of September 2011, for three nights for three to four hours at a time, he was beaten with sticks and had his feet crushed under boots, while, another activist (Iftikhar) had candle wax dropped on his genitals. Again on the 28th of April 2012, Baba Jan was tortured. Police and Pakistani Rangers (a paramilitary force) entered his jail cell and beat him up. They then whisked him to an unknown location where he was

again brutally beaten, and to humiliate him, had his head shaved. He has fractured fingers and is being denied medical treatment. Further, he has been moved to Zulfiqarabad Jail, Gilgit, and put in a cell with hardened criminals. There is reason to believe that he may be killed 'accidentally' while in this cell.

Meanwhile, a judicial inquiry into the killing of Afzal Baig and his father was conducted. Its findings have not been made public but journalists who have seen it claim it lays the blame on the police force and local bureaucracy for the incident.

We, the undersigned, call on the Government of Pakistan to publish the findings of the judicial inquiry into the killing of Afzal Baig and Sher Ullah Baig. We call on the Government of Pakistan to treat Baba Jan and fellow activists as political prisoners and kept in separate cells from other prisoners. Further, we ask the Government of Pakistan to drop the charge it has manufactured against Baba Jan and fellow activists. We also demand compensation for the families affected by the Attabad landslide.

Tariq Ali, Writer

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Amanullah Kariapper, Activist

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David Barsamian, Journalist

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Saadi Toor, Writer

Farooq Tariq, Labour Party of Pakistan

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Please go sign petition here: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/free-baba-jan>



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P.S.

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