

# **Free Baba Jan and All Hunza and Faisalabad 9 Political Prisoners; Democracy and Welfare to all Pakistani People!**

Thursday 24 May 2012, by [Sekber Buruh Jabodetabek](#) (Date first published: 24 May 2012).

## **Letter to Pakistani Embassy Jakarta, Indonesia**

To: Mr. Sanaullah

Ambassador of Pakistan

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## **Free Baba Jan and All Hunza and Faisalabad 9 Political Prisoners; Democracy and Welfare to all Pakistani People!**

Dear Sir,

1. We are writing you regarding several supporters and members of Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) whom locked up in different jails of Pakistan, as well as 9 textile workers, in Faisalabad jail. 15 activists are in Gilgit jail including Baba Jan, an elected member of LPP Federal Committee. They are NOT terrorists. They are political activists. However, all of them are charged with anti-terrorist laws.

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on 14<sup>th</sup> November speaking at Mandi Bahuldin, that there are no political prisoners at this time in Pakistan. But in fact, there are at least 24 members and supporters of Labour Party Pakistan are in jail for political reasons. There are many other languishing in jails of Baluchistan apart from those who are missing.

2. 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 2011 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 fire 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, and 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 demand. However, he dragged from his prison 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.

In the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> of April, these five political prisoners were violently beaten and tortured by the police and the agents of the security services. They were left for at least a week without any treatment for their injuries, without seeing a doctor, in violation of a court injunction demanding that they be examined with only dry bread to eat. They were forcibly transferred to a prison reserved for hardened criminals and we can fear that the goal of this transfer was to have them murdered by other prisoners (in a fight among prisoners...) so that the authorities would not be held directly responsible.

The five prisoners concerned are members of the Labour Party Pakistan, (LPP) and of the Progressive Youth Front (PYF). The best-known among them, Baba Jan, has just been re-elected to the federal committee of the LPP during its recent congress in March.

The prisoners have been kept in secret since the 28<sup>th</sup> of April attacks (even their lawyers have not been able to see them); it has therefore been difficult to gather information. The latest news is that Baba Jan, Iftikhar Hussain and Amir Ali have been severely injured. Baba Jan has apparently two broken fingers (possible a broken hand?), wounds to his face and his head shaved in order to humiliate him. Two others, Ameer Khan and Rashid Minhas, are less severely injured.

They have been transferred to the high level prison of Zulfiqarabad, in the city of Gilgit.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) published a communiqué on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in which it considers “exceedingly worrying” the information received (according to which at least five activists have been tortured)

3. We are also writing you to ask for your urgent intervention with the government of Pakistan to secure the release of all nine labor prisoners of Faisalabad. Six of them are Akbar Ali Kamboh, Babar Shafiq Randhawa, Fazal Elahi, Rana Riaz, Ahmed Muhammad, Aslam Malik and Asghar Ali Ansari. Four of them were arrested in July 2010 while the other two were arrested in July 2011 on the same charges.

In July 2010 a power looms works organization called, Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM) began negotiating with employers to implement a 17% wage increase adopted by Government. Following 3 weeks of negotiations employers refused to pass on the pay increase. Subsequently 100,000 workers in Faisalabad and surrounding areas came out on strike to protest. It was during this strike that LQM trade union leaders were labelled as terrorists by the employers and they were arrested at a local police station. In early November 2011 the Anti-Terrorism Court of Pakistan sentenced 6 union leaders to 490 years in jail for terrorism offences, despite the lack of any legitimate evidence to justify their arrest and sentencing. It is clear that the employers and judiciary aligned to silence the fundamental right of the workers to organise and bargain collectively as prescribed in ILO conventions 87 and 98.

All of the prisoners are the leaders of LQM in Faisalabad, the third largest city of Pakistan. LQM is a community based labour organization fighting for the rights of the textile workers since 2004. An anti-terrorist court judge on November 1, 2011, sentenced six leaders under terrorism charges in Faisalabad. As is frequently observed that Terrorists are set free by these courts and workers leaders are charged under terrorist laws in Pakistan.

They were accused of burning down a factory during the strike. This is a fabricated charge. The facts

are that on the day of strike, July 20, 2010, gangsters in the pay of the factory owner started shooting at the workers who were leaving the factory to demand better wages. Some workers dared to go inside the factory and forced the gangsters to stop firing. Some of them were beaten up by the angry workers. During the trial, the workers' advocate asked if the factory had been burned down then how was it able to be operating again three days later.

The long term jail sentences of these workers leaders has been a devastating blow to the workers movement in Faisalabad, and indeed across the country. That the court could hand out such a draconian anti-labor judgment was beyond anyone's expectations, especially since this judiciary itself had been restored through the support of a powerful people's movement. Yet, the anti-terrorist court chose to give a verdict with the sole aim of damaging the power loom workers movement which was slowly becoming a symbol of working class militancy all over the country.

4. We are informed that just several days ago, another incident took place (not far from Lahore, the capital of Punjab province): a landlord whose land was bought by the government in the 1970s land reforms and re-distributed among the villagers of Dehra Sehgal, has been attempting to snatch the land back for the last few years. In the most recent incident, he partnered with a local gangster who paid the police to attack the village, severely beating up many villagers, including 16 women. Outraged, the next day, the villagers blocked the main highway, which is nearby. This time, the police attacked with batons and tear gas. A passer-by was mistaken for one of the protestors by the police and first beaten up and then shot. The police is pressurizing the murdered man's family to declare that he was shot by one of the protestors, but they, despite being terrified, are refusing to do so. Local leaders of the Workers Party Pakistan, with whom the peasants association of the village is associated, had joined the protestors by this time. Some of them as well as some of the prominent village organisers have been charged with terrorism (under the Anti-Terrorism Act, Clause 7) as well as with robbery.

It seems to us, in Pakistan, the authorities seem to have hit upon a "formula" to crush rights-based movements: create a disturbance, provoke the people, and hope some incident of violence occurs (failing which, have the police do it), and then charge the movement organisers with terrorism.

5. We are aware that these events in Gilgit-Baltistan and also Faisalabad 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.

6. We, Joint Labor Secretariat of Greater Jakarta Indonesia, have joined the international campaign to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Baba Jan and the other prisoners. We fully support the people's movement in Gilgit-Baltistan in their struggle.

7. 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.

8. We ask you to insist to your government that the false charges against the demonstrators be dropped; that full compensation be paid to all the people affected by the landslide of July 4, 2010 and the families of the prisoners; and to repeal the "terrorist" charge to all prisoners.

Jakarta, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012

For democracy and welfare of all people in the world, for socialism in 21<sup>st</sup> century!

Yours sincerely,

## **Joint Secretariat of Labor - Greater Jakarta, Indonesia**

### *Sekber Buruh Jabodetabek:*

Indonesian Trade Union Congress Alliance (KASBI), Indonesian Transportation Trade Union of Struggle (SBTPI), Greater Jakarta Workers Federation of Struggle (FPBJ), Indonesian Trade Union Jakarta (SBIJ), United Indonesian Labour Movement (PPBI), Indonesian Automotive Trade Union Federation (FSPOI), Buana Group Textile Trade Union (SPTBG), Indonesian Trade Union Movement (Gesburi), PT Toppan Communication and Information Forum (FKI PT Topan), Suzuki Indonesian Metal Trade Workers Federation (FSPMI Suzuki), Indonesian Independent Trade Union (SBMI), Jakarta Front (Front Jak), Confederation of Prosperity Labor Unions Jakarta (KSBSI Jakarta), Confederation of Prosperity Labor Unions Tangerang (KSBSI Tangerang), Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Greater Jakarta Railway Workers Trade Union (SPKAJ), Jakarta International Container Terminal Head Truck Operator Workers Forum (FP OHT JICT), Gasbindo Independent Trade Union (SBM Gasbindo), Jakarta International Container Terminal Trade Union (SP JICT), Indonesian Market Traders Association (IKAPPI), Indonesian Independent Union (SMI), Student Struggle Center for National Liberation (PEMBEBASAN), Indonesian Association of Catholic Students (PMKRI), Urban Students Network (JMK), Indonesian Student League for Democracy (LMND), Jakarta Student Consortium (KMJ), Youth Organisations Union of Struggle (KPOP), Indonesian Cultural Society Union (SEBUMI), Indonesian Youth Front for Struggle (FPPI), People in Movement (Rakber), Movement Indonesia (PI), Free Women National Committee (KNPM), Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA), Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation (LBH Jakarta), United Indonesian Struggle (PPI), People's Liberation Party (PPR), Working People's Association-Organisational Saviours Committee (KPO-PRP).

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