

Pakistan: In Punjab, repression of tenants at Okara Military Farms continue - In Gilgit Baltistan, Baba Jan final review petition to be heard on 25th September

Saturday 23 September 2017, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 23 September 2017).

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Okara Military Farms

The repression of tenants at Okara Military Farms continue for the last one and half years. On 21st September, Malik Salim Jakkar was arrested in Okara once again. He had spent most of the last two years (2015-2017) in jail and some two months back, he was released on bail.

Malik Salim Jakhar along his five friends came to see me a night before his arrest in Lahore, his first meeting after his release. However, he was arrested very next day. He has been facing 95 police cases, he was released only after he tendered an unconditional apology to the authorities. Despite that, he is arrested because many hundreds of peasants met him during his brief freedom.

The Anjman Mozareen Punjab (AMP), a component of Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee has been advocating land rights at Okara Military Farms apart from other public sector agriculture farms. The tenants has been working on these lands for over 100 years and successive civilian government had promised the land rights but could not do that under the pressure of the military.

The AMP was formed in 2000, when General Musharaf dictatorship tried to change the status of the tenants into lessee, a tactic to remove them from the land in longer terms. The tenants revolted and the state repression of the peasant movement started. There are 68,000 acres of land cultivated by tenants at Punjab public sector agriculture farms.

The tenants refused to pay the share of the crop which they were paying for over hundred year and told the authorities that "paid enough and no more".

11 tenants were killed in various incidents of firing and hundreds arrested under anti-terrorist laws during the last 17 years of the unprecedented peasant movement in Punjab. Women were in the fore front of the movement and were also subjected to arrests and physical beating by the police and rangers.

On 17th April 2016, the AMP had announced to observe the internal day of peasants at one of the villages in Okara on the call of La Via Campesina. They had been organizing the event since 2009. Police along military Tanks were brought in on 15/16 April to arrest Mehar Abdul Sattar, the general secretary of AMP. Against the arrest, thousands protested and more arrests were made mainly of women. Mehar Abdul Sattar is now facing 36 fabricated police charges including murder, attempt of murder, theft and so on. He has been subjected to some of the worst treatment of all the arrested leaders and activists of AMP.

He is now locked at the Pakistani “Guantánamo Bay detention center” the High Security Jail at Sahiwal, only under trail prisoner at the jail meant for convicted religious terrorists. He was in chain since March 2017 at the jail and it was removed only after Supreme Court order of removing the chains in September 2017. He lost almost half of his weight.



Asma Jehanghir addressing the meeting

Prominent human rights lawyer Asma Jehanghir argued successfully his case against violation of human rights at the Supreme Court. She along another prominent lawyer Abid Saqi visited Sattar in high security jail at Sahiwal on the orders of the Supreme Court last week where he told the visiting lawyers that only crime he has committed is to argue for the land rights at the public sector agriculture farms.

Along Mehar Abdul Sattar, other peasant leaders are also in jail since 2015 that include Nadeem Asharaf and Noor Nabi. Noor Nabi is an elected chairman of the local union council. As an advocate, he was perusing the cases at the courts. When in July this year, he went to attend a district council meeting, he was picked up by police and he is still in jail facing five different police cases. Noor Nabi is a former member of federal committee of Awami Workers Party and was also held the same position in the dysfunctional Labour Party Pakistan.



Farooq Tariq addressing the meeting

A local journalist Husnain Raza is also in jail since June 2016, his crime is to report the incidents of human rights violations at Okara Military Farms to his newspaper Nawai Waqat Group, the second largest media group in Pakistan. Unlike other journalists at Okara, he refused to send the dictated news by the local administration to his newspaper. He is also charged under anti-terrorist laws.

With the recent arrest of Malik Salim Jakhar, a new wave of arrests is expected. Although Pakistani courts have not sentenced any of the tenant arrested during the last two years and have accepted the bails in many cases but once your bail is accepted in all the cases, new cases are registered against you while you are still in jail.

While addressing a public meeting at Sahiwal on 20th September, Bilawal Bhutto, son of Benazhir Bhutto raised his voice against the arrest of tenants and vowed PPP support for the AMP land rights campaign.

The paradox is that PPP was in power from 2008 to 2013 and they did nothing to solve the ongoing conflict of tenants.

The National Commission for Human Rights, a constitutional body, issued an interim report after visiting Okara in 2016 and recommended to withdraw all the charges against the tenants registered under anti-terrorist laws. The NCHR also observed that the tenants are not anti-Pakistan or foreign agents as alleged by Okara administration but they are ordinary peasants demanding land rights.

We are helping the movement of peasants while most are terrified of the consequences of opposing the military dominated land dispute.



Visit at Sahiwal High Security jail and a public meeting

Today, 17 september 2017, hundreds of peasant women and men gathered at Okara Military Farms to protest against the continued imprisonment of their leader Mehar Abdul Sattar.



Mehar Abdul Sattar

On the occasion, Asma Jehnghir, former president Supreme Court Bar Association and Abid Saqi, former president of Lahore High Court Bar Association and myself spoke and assured the tenants of our continued support and solidarity.

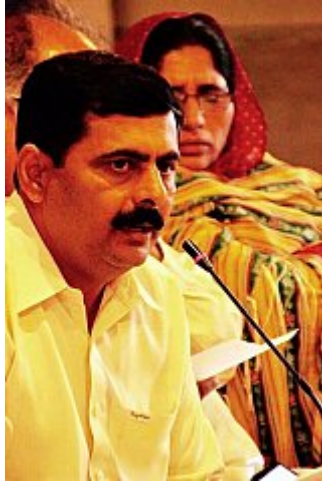


Asma Jehnghir

We demanded the release of all tenant leaders, ownership rights of the tenants and an end of victimisation of the peasants at Okara Military Farms.

Earlier we went to Sahiwal High Security Jail where mehar Abdul Sattar is imprisoned and the two

lawyers Asma & Saqi met him. He was in confident mood and told them that the struggle for ownership rights would continue.



Mehar Abdul Sattar, leader peasant movement at Okara Military Farms, a year before his arrest, speaking at a food sovereignty seminar.

Mehar Sattar chains were removed after six months on orders of Supreme court [1] and today visit was also ordered by the Supreme Court.

We addressed the journalists gathered outside the jail and spoke at a press conference at Sahiwal Press Club.

Gilgit Beltistan: Baba Jan

Baba Jan review petition is fixed for hearing on 25th September at the Supreme Court Gilgit Beltistan after it was adjourned earlier on 25th May and 16th August 2017. It seems that the court will decide the case on this day. We do not know what would happen. We are doing our best to provide the maximum legal support.



This time, Akhtar Hussain, the general secretary of AWP and an elected member Pakistan Bar Council is going to appear at the court in GB if he is allowed by the court to do so. Nisar Shah Advocate and two others are also travelling to Gilgit for Baba Jan. Pakistani lawyers are not allowed to argue in GB courts but our lawyers at GB told us that they would be able to get the permission of the court to do so.

This is his last chance to avoid a lifelong imprisonment that has been awarded by the same court earlier in 2015. The review petition was filed and our advocates were successful in convincing the court that they must hear the review petition.

Footnotes

[1] See ESSF (article 41840), [Pakistan: Supreme Court hears case of Mehar Abdul Sattar of Okara Military Farms](#).