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Pakistan: Free Baba Jan - The longest serving political prisoner in Gilgit Baltistan

Sign this urgent appeal!

Friday 8 February 2019, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [Petition / Sign-on Letter](#) (Date first published: 8 February 2019).

Baba Jan is the longest serving political prisoner in Gilgit Baltistan. For seven years Baba Jan has been unfairly kept in jail on trumped up charges. Currently, he has heart issues and is being denied medical treatment. We demand that he be shifted to Islamabad so he can avail medical facilities and also be released.

On 25th of September 2014 Baba Jan and 11 other activists (these include, Iftikhar Hussain, Irfan Ali, Aleemullah Khan, Sher Khan, Rashid Minhas Anees, Sher Khan, and Salman Ali) of Gilgit Baltistan were sentenced to life imprisonment by an Anti-Terrorism Court in Gilgit city. Baba Jan and the others sentenced, however, are not terrorists. He is a respected political activist of Gilgit-Baltistan. He has been sentenced because of his continued activism in support of the oppressed of the region.

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 the people of Gilgit-Baltistan was ignored. Baba Jan, 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 offset the protests of the displaced, the government promised monetary compensation to the affected people and support in their resettlement.

However, for many, 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 until recently.

On 11th August around 200 people protested for the rights of those families who had not received compensation as the then 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 and other government buildings were burnt down by the protesters.

Baba Jan arrived 6 hours later. He organised the protesters in a peaceful manner 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 was kept in jail for two years before being granted bail, while another activists, Iftikhar Hussain, has been denied bail and has

now been in jail for over seven years. Twice, Baba Jan and Iftikhar Hussain were picked up by government paramilitary forces 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, 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, shaved his head. He sustained fractured fingers but was denied medical treatment.

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.

Baba Jan is a community activist and it is for organising the community and demanding their voice be part of the political process that he is being punished. In 2013, Baba Jan, was granted bail and resumed his activism in support of the people. He successfully campaigned for the 'wheat subsidy' for the region to be restored in 2014. For his efforts his bail was withdrawal and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Undeterred, in summer 2015 he stood from jail to be a representative in the Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly from Hunza constituency. Without funds and hindered by jail, he nonetheless, managed to come second in the elections. The seat again become vacant in 2015. Baba Jan was set to ran but was not allowed to. His strong showing had scared the Government of Pakistan and the election delayed multiple times on various pretexts until as a convict Baba Jan was ineligible to run.

We call on the Government of Pakistan to publish the findings of the judicial inquiry into the killing of Afzal Baig and Sher Ullah Baig and to bring to justice those who are responsible for the police violence. We call on activists locally and internationally to protest the decision of the court, which is punishing innocent citizens and letting the police go free . Baba Jan and the other activists are being made an example of to stop the people of Gilgit-Baltistan from protesting for their political and human rights. We demand, above all, that the sentence be abrogated. It is contrary to all concepts of justice that murderers be promoted into higher stations within the police force, that judicial reports not be furnished to families of the victims and that community leaders be imprisoned for life. We stand in solidarity with the political prisoners of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor (emeritus), MIT; Laureate Professor, U. of Arizona

Eshan Ali, Awami Action Tehreek Gilgit-Baltistan

Mir Mohammad Ali Talpur, Writer

Sadia Abbas, Professor, Rutgers University, Newark

Tariq Ali, Writer

Muhammad Hanif, Journalist/writer

Aziz Ali Daad, Writer

Farooq Tariq, Awami Workers Party

David Graeber, London School of Economics and Political Science

Pervaiz Vandal, Architect

UPDATE

Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan): Some latest news concerning Baba Jan situation

In spite of the urgent call from his family, friends and a broad international support, Baba Jan has not been transferred to an Islamabad well-equipped hospital for a thorough examination of his health situation, while he was feeling strong chest pain.

He is presently at Gahcooch Jail (Gilgit-Baltistan territory), where he has been serving his life sentence earlier. The facilities here are better than in the town of Gilgit.

Baba Jan still feels pain, but is better after taking regularly medicine. He has not fully recovered, but is not in the same very bad shape that he was earlier.

On the issue of the review petition of his case.

Baba Jan has been unfairly sentenced to the equivalent of two life imprisonment by an Anti-Terrorism Court, and kept in jail on trumped up charges.

He presented a legal review petition, which cannot be heard until three judges are appointed to the Supreme Court of Gilgit-Baltistan. At present, only one judge is there, the other two are now retired and there is no replacement yet.

Baba Jan thanks again all those who campaign for his release and for his right to proper medical treatment.

The international solidarity campaign continues.

15 March 2019

Pierre Rousset

View online : [To sign](#)

P.S.

- <https://www.change.org/p/government-of-pakistan-free-baba-jan-the-longest-serving-political-prisoner-in-gilgit-baltistan?signed=true>

- Haider Ali a lancé cette pétition adressée à Government of Pakistan et à 4 autres.