

Pakistan hotel union leaders jailed and face criminal charges after union wins recognition election!

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When the union at the upscale Pearl Continental Lahore hotel overcame management obstruction, threats and collusion with local authorities to win a recognition election in February this year, the hotel resorted to a tactic familiar from the 10-year struggle for union rights and recognition at the Pearl Continental Karachi. Management vandalized and set fire to a room in the hotel, and charged the union leaders with criminal action. One month later, more absurd charges were added: acts punishable under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act which carry sentences of 20 years!

The Lahore Pearl Continental is part of the Pearl Continental chain owned by businessman Sadruddin Hashwani, one of the wealthiest men in the country.

Act now: use the form below to send a message to the federal and state authorities demanding that these absurd charges be immediately and unconditionally dropped, the union leaders freed, and management compelled to recognize the union and enter in to good faith negotiations.

To sign:

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Letter

To Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, President
Mr. Yousuf Raza Gillan, Prime Minister
Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Federal Minister for Human Rights
Mr. Lateef Khosa, Governor of Punjab
Mr. Shahbaz Shareef, Chief Minister Punjab Province

Dear sirs

Grave violations of basic human rights have been committed in connection with efforts to thwart employees of the Pearl Continental Lahore hotel from being represented by the trade union they have democratically elected to represent them.

On February 13, 2012 despite many threats against workers and efforts to prevent them from casting their votes, including the illegal confiscation of the voting documents by Lahore Commissioner Jawwad Rafiq Malik, the Pearl Continental Hotel Employees Union Lahore won the election ordered by the Punjab High Court and was certified by the labour officer. Management was unwilling to accept this result. On March 12, top management and officers from the pro-

management union were seen vandalizing the human resources department and setting fires. The Employees Union officers were falsely accused of committing these acts of vandalism and management filed police complaints against all the union office bearers. The following day, March 13, the union chairman, senior vice president, vice president, publicity secretary and finance secretary were arrested at the hotel; the union officers were issued with show cause notices citing the absurd charges in the police complaints. Management also retaliated against union supporters by dismissing a number of contract workers at the hotel without warning and without providing grounds for dismissal.

On April 4 bail was approved and the union officers were released. The same Commissioner who illegally seized the election documents then used his influence to add new charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Bail was cancelled, and union President Muhammad Nasir was arrested and charged in the special Anti-Terrorism Courts. Similar tactics involving false criminal charges were used to dismiss, jail and vilify elected union leaders at the Pearl Continental Hotel in Karachi - charges which were eventually dismissed by the court after seven difficult years for the workers and the union. The use of the anti-Terrorism Act in these circumstances signals a dangerous escalation of these tactics.

I call on the government authorities to act to ensure that all the criminal charges against are Pearl Continental Hotel Employees Union Lahore officers Mian Amanat Ali, Nasir Aman Sindhu, Syed Sajjad Hyder, Rashid Anwar, Yaseen ul Hassan Shah, Lateef Mulli, Naeem Subhani, Karamat Meeran, Sabz Ali and unin member Shahzad Anwar are immediately and unconditionally dropped. The officers and all workers, including contract workers, dismissed from their jobs as a consequence of the union election and its aftermath must be reinstated at their jobs, and management must recognize the union and enter into good faith negotiations over the union's charter of demands.

The use of the criminal justice system to deny union recognition and keep union leaders and members behind bars is a blatant violation of basic human rights. The authorities must undertake an investigation into the use of the police and the justice system for these corrupt purposes. I look forward to swift action on your part.

Yours sincerely

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