

Pakistan: Release Ali Wazeer, Mohsin Dawar and PTM activists - Their lives must not remain under threat

Friday 19 July 2019, by [TARIO Farooq](#) (Date first published: 19 July 2019).

On May 26, the army fired on a non-violent protest by the Pashtun Defence Movement (PTM) in Waziristan, killing at least 13 people and injuring dozens.



Ali Wazeer. Photo: Ali Wazeer/Twitter.

Two PTM members of the Pakistan National Assembly, Ali Wazeer and Mohsin Dawar, who led the protest, were arrested on trumped up terrorism charges and a curfew was imposed on the region.

The curfew created a humanitarian crisis, resulting in three deaths from starvation and lack of medicine. After huge protests across Waziristan and on social media, the 11-day curfew was lifted on June 17.

Today, Wazeer and Dawar still remain in detention, charged with terrorism offences. There are reports that Wazeer was physically tortured by the security forces. The MPs have not been allowed to attend the national assembly, including its recent budget session. The Pakistani state has arrested several other PTM activists and is repressing the civil rights movement.

An [International Solidarity Campaign](#) was launched in May demanding the release of Wazeer and Dawar, for the withdrawal of the case against them by police, for their protection from harm and for the lifting of the state of emergency in the region.

The people of Waziristan have been subject to the imposition of a colonial-era law, regulating public order. Under Section 144 of the Code of the Criminal Procedure, more than five people cannot gather at any public place. Consequently, protests, sit-ins and rallies are illegal.

Post-9/11, Waziristan was in the global headlines as a base camp for the Taliban and al-Qaida. However, last year the PTM emerged as a mass social movement and transformed the socio-political landscape of the region. The PTM is a non-violent movement that, on one hand, is anti-Taliban, and on the other, challenges the military establishment.

The PTM is also the target of violent attacks by Taliban operating throughout the region.

The PTM's main demands are for the right of return of Waziristan residents uprooted in the wake of anti-Taliban operations launched by the Pakistani state, and for an inquiry into extrajudicial killings. Overnight, the PTM became a platform for the people of Waziristan sandwiched between the Pakistani military and the Taliban.

Wazeer and Dawar were elected to the National Assembly in last year's general elections, due to the PTM's popularity.

According to procedure, when a member of the National Assembly is arrested, the speaker issues a production order so that the arrested member can attend the assembly session to explain their side of the story. However, in Wazeer and Dawar's case, despite a demand by opposition MPs, the speaker has refused to issue such an order.

Ahead of Ali Wazir's arrest, members of the military establishment publicly warned the PTM leadership of dire consequences. A high-level military spokesperson, while addressing a press conference, portrayed the PTM leadership as a fifth column and advised the media not to cover its views.

Such has been the level of media manipulation that the May 25 shootings were not reported as a case of the military firing on protestors. On the contrary, the mainstream media presented the incident as an act of self-defence by the military, following a violent attack on a military check-point.

Fortunately, several video clips have emerged since, which prove that Wazeer and his comrades were unarmed and non-violent. However, the mainstream media as well as social media, are engaged in a vilification campaign to malign the PTM leadership, particularly Wazeer and Dawar.

It is hard to say if Wazeer and Dawar will be out soon or not. Their popularity has sky-rocketed in Pashtun areas, however, their arrest under terrorism charges is indeed sinister.

Even if they are released in the near future under public pressure, their lives remain under threat. In future, there may be attempts to revoke their parliamentary mandate through dirty tricks. It is therefore urgent that the international solidarity campaign is built, not merely for their immediate release, but also for their security into the future.

Farooq Tariq

To sign the petition, go to ESSF (article 49080), [International Call – Pakistan: Release Ali Wazeer and Mohsin Dawar, withdraw false police cases:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article49080)
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article49080>

P.S.

- Green Left Weekly, July 19, 2019, Issue 1229:
<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/pakistan-release-ali-wazeer-mohsin-dawar-and-ptm-activists>