

Pakistan - Student march: AWP calls for dropping sedition cases against political, student activists

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The Awami Workers party (AWP) condemns in the strongest words the registration of sedition case against student leaders, academics and others for participating in a peaceful march for their genuine demands.

The move is provocative, ludicrous and violation of the fundamental right to freedom of expression and procession guaranteed by the constitution.

AWP President Yousuf Mustikhan, General Secretary Akhtar Hussain and Deputy Secretary Ismat Shahjehan have condemned the crackdown on student and political activists as well as academics by authorities in Punjab, Sindh, and KP.

The AWP leaders also expressed concern at the abduction of Alamgir Khan Wazir, a former chairperson of Pakhtun Council of the Punjab University chapter from the campus for ostensibly making a speech at the student march.

Cases have been registered at the Civil Lines Police Station, Lahore nominating Dr Ammar Jan, Farooq Tariq, Muhammad Shabbir, Kamil Khan and Iqbal Lala, father of Mashal Khan, the slain student of Mardan University, who has become a symbol of resistance against extremism and state repression. Iqbal Lala was given a hero's welcome as he arrived to express solidarity with students in Lahore.

They have been nominated under the charges of nuisance, sedition and the Punjab Sound Systems Regulation Act.

The AWP leaders said that the students exercised their fundamental right to peaceful protest for their rights and which was acknowledged by the Prime Minister Imran Khan and Punjab Governor.

The Punjab and Sindh police have started crackdown and intimidation of leaders and activists of Progressive Students Federation, WDF and AWP for participating and organizing the march.

The AWP leaders said that the student marchers wanted restoration of union, better education facilities, an end to harassment on campuses and other education-related rights and a violence-free democratic society where everyone can live with dignity.

Alongside the continuing state repression in Balochistan and Sindh against youth and political activists, the current wave of intimidation and harassment will serve only to further alienate state from society it is supposed to be defending, the AWP leaders noted.

On the one hand, PM Imran has acknowledged the students' grievances and promised to restore student unions and resolve their problems, on the other the filing of FIR against peaceful students

and other citizens is a vicious attack on academic freedom, freedom of dissent, the AWP leaders said.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has directed the federal government and the provinces to form a comprehensive strategy for the protection of students' rights and for the speedy resolution to their problems.

They demanded immediate withdrawal of the FIR, recovery of Wazir and an end to intimidation of political workers and repression in Balochistan, Sindh, KP, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan.

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<https://awamiworkersparty.org/student-march-awp-calls-for-dropping-sedition-cases-against-political-student-activists/>

AWP announces support for student solidarity march, restoration of student unions

Party leaders call for action on student demands, including full right of association & structural reform of education

Awami Workers Party (AWP) expresses its full support for the Student Solidarity March being organized by progressive student groups (including PrSF, PSC, RSF, SAC and others) in cities across Pakistan on November 29 and asks party workers to join the student marches.

AWP calls for the immediate restoration of student unions and the protection of students' right to association as well as their representation in university-related decision making.

In a joint statement, AWP President Yousuf Mustikhan and Deputy Secretary-General Ismat Shahjehan said that the current rotten education system is stifling critical thinking and creativity and propagates narrow rightwing statist ideology. It also represses all students and teachers who dare to resist this decrepit system and the corruption within it.

AWP has long held that the Pakistani state has criminally neglected public education and increasingly relegated the critical task of providing education to the private sector which has made education unaffordable for the majority.

"The 35-year-old ban on student unions has allowed universities and authorities to abuse students with impunity and exacerbated the deterioration of the education system. AWP believes the ban on student politics has also been irreparably harmful for the country's social and political fabric and has led to the monopolization of politics by a small class of feudal, capitalist and military elites, while inhibiting the political participation of the youth and middle and working classes," they said.

They also denounced the securitization of campuses across the country, especially in universities in

Sindh and Balochistan, where military and paramilitary troops have been stationed to control student bodies.

They cited the recent incidents of sexual harassment and blackmailing in University of Balochistan and other varsities, which shows that the unaccountable university administrations and security forces have been abusing their position of surveillance and policing powers to commit heinous crimes against students, particularly female students.

AWP leaders called for immediate executive or legislative action to lift the ban on the student unions and reiterated the party's resolve to pursue all available means to support students in achieving this end.

They also supported the students' demands for an overhaul of the education system and curricula to remove hate material that promotes discrimination against different ethnicities, genders, faith groups and classes from them and develop a curriculum on scientific foundations that foster creativity and the elimination.

They also called for allocation of 10% of GDP for education, prioritising regions and provinces that have been historically neglected by the state, including former tribal districts, and rural Balochistan, Sindh, KP and Gilgit-Baltistan to achieve universal mass education while making the whole system accountable to the citizens and students.

AWP's Ammar Rashid, one of the organizers of the March in Islamabad, called for the formation of empowered campus committees to curb sexual and other harassment with students and women representation to eliminate the scourge of harassment and violence assault on campuses.

He also called for the de-securitization of campuses and an end to deployment of security and paramilitary personnel in universities, and the full recognition of students' right to expression and right to political association.

AWP leaders also demanded release of all those students who have been arrested or abducted for organizing protests (most of them in Balochistan and Sindh) and withdrawal of charges including the recent sedition charges against Jamshoro University for demanding clean water.

Nov 20, 2019

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