

TIME RECEIVED	REMOTE CSID	DURATION	PAGES	STATUS
October 5, 2018 10:33:09 AM GMT+02:00	0041 22 7335823	132	3	Received
05/10 2018 10:30 FAX 0041 22 7335823	PAKISTAN MISSION GE			0001/0003



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No. Pol/SP-Proc/2018

03 October 2018

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan accredited to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Special Procedure Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and with reference to its letter's No. AL PAK 4/2018 dated 16 July 2018 has the honour to enclose the response of the Government of Pakistan regarding the case of Ms. Gul Bukhari.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Special Procedure Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) the assurances of its highest consideration.



Special Procedure Branch
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Geneva

Response to the Queries raised by United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID); Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders regarding situation of human rights defenders /journalists/media outlets-Case of Ms. Gul Bukhari

i. Any additional information and/or any comment(s) on the referred cases.

The allegations conveyed in the communication are being investigated by the relevant authorities following due process.

ii. Status of investigation into the abduction of Ms. Bukhari, including information on whether anyone has been arrested or prosecuted and the status of any on-going trial. In case no such investigation has taken place, the reason of that.

The police had registered a First Information Report (F.I.R) in Police station, Sarwar Road, Lahore against abduction of Ms. Gul Bukhari as per due process. A joint Investigation team has been constituted which has recorded the statement of Ms. Gul Bukhari and necessary investigation is being carried out.

iii. Please provide information about why Ms. Bukhari and her family have not been provided with protection measures.

Law enforcement authorities are mindful of the need to ensure safety of Ms. Gul Bukhari and have taken all necessary steps to ensure her safety. She has all the constitutional and legal guarantees as that of any other citizen of Pakistan. No information of intimidation or harassment has come to the notice of the Government from her side.

iv. Please provide information about measures taken to ensure that media can operate in a manner free from political and other forms of interference.

The Government of Pakistan remains strongly committed to the respect, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its citizens in accordance with its international obligations and domestic laws. Being parliamentary democracy, Pakistan has independent judiciary, active media and vibrant civil society thus creating an enabling and safe environment for all.

Human rights defenders, civil society and bloggers are free to function in an enabling and independent media environment of Pakistan. In a thriving democracy like Pakistan, free and independent media is considered as an important pillar of the State. The robust role of media can be gauged from the fact that over 100 media channels frequently highlight political, social and human rights issues and lead the national debate on issues of public importance. The Constitution of Pakistan protects all the fundamental rights

of its citizens. Articles 9, 10, 14 and 19 deal with protection of life and liberty of persons, protection against arbitrary arrest and detention, inviolability of person and freedom of speech respectively. These constitutional provisions are available to all without discrimination. Moreover, the fundamental rights are justiciable and if any citizen fears that his/her constitutional rights are being violated can seek redressal at appropriate forums. We would like to underscore that given the unprecedented level of freedom of media, all cases of intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders get immediate media attention and are addressed by the Government, the Parliament and the Judiciary. Where required, high-powered commissions were set up to investigate into allegations of intimidation and harassment.

Pakistan strongly believes in the freedom of press, expression and opinion and has been making appreciable efforts both internationally and domestically. We believe that journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders play an important role in ensuring freedom of press, fostering culture of accountability, protecting rights of citizens and providing access to prompt and timely information to the public on all issues. The Government has taken several measures to safeguard journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and lawyers for them to function without fear. The Government considers them partners in promotion and protection of a human rights culture in Pakistan. A few measures taken in this regard by the Government are as following:

- a) notified a Ministerial Media Security Committee with the mandate to suggest welfare measures to ensure safety of Journalists and Media Persons;
- b) initiated a new scheme (Life Insurance Policy for Media Persons) for the welfare of the journalists;
- c) a Hot Line Number (111-925-225) has been installed in Press Information Department so that journalists can inform the Government about any potential threat to them or security related issues;
- d) Establishment of Endowment Fund to provide relief to the wounded and crippled journalists who have fallen victims of terrorism in the line of duty.

The Government's draft Journalist Welfare and Protection bill, 2017 is under consideration. It was circulated amongst All Pakistan Newspaper Society, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors and Pakistan Broadcasters Association for inputs. Meanwhile, Ministry of Information has constituted a media security committee to provide protection and safety to the media persons nationwide. Provincial Governments have been taken on board to strengthen this arrangement.

The Government of Pakistan would like to reiterate that all possible facilitation are being extended to the media to carry out its professional duties.