



## International Labor Rights Forum

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## International Labor Rights Forum Statement on Pakistan's Declaration of a State of Emergency

November 8, 2007

The International Labor Rights Forum condemns General Pervez Musharraf's declaration of a state of emergency in Pakistan. In recent days, Pakistan's government has detained, beaten and tear-gassed opposition party leaders, lawyers and human rights advocates and has clamped down on the media. Of particular concern to ILRF are Musharraf's assaults on labor organizations and workers' rights.

Leading labor activists have been harassed. Nisar Shah, Chairperson of the Labour Party and a prominent advocate, was just arrested and party worker Shakeel Malik was beaten, while Tarooq Fariq, General Secretary of the same party, has had to go underground. Khalid Mahmood, head of the Labour Education Foundation, and Mohammad Ashiq Bhutta, Information Secretary of the National Federation of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Workers, were both arrested and later released. Police arrested the convener of the Pearl Continental Hotel Workers Solidarity Committee, Liaqat Ali Sahi, and two members of the Solidarity Committee, G. Fareed Awan, Assistant General Secretary of the All-Pakistan Trade Unions Federation (APTUF) and Ayub Qureshi, Information Secretary of the Pakistan Trade Union Federation (PTUF). Activists belonging to Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum narrowly escaped arrest in Karachi. Countless others are suffering similar infringements of their liberties and only ILRF's ignorance prevents us from highlighting their stories, as well.

Under the terms of the state of emergency, freedom of association and of assembly have been suspended. These are basic workers' rights that have already been severely battered by years of military rule and privatization. In fact, one of the rulings by Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry that first drew General Musharraf's ire was his blocking of privatization plans for a steel mill.

ILRF therefore joins the Pakistan Workers Federation and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in calling for "the immediate restoration of the rule of law, the country's Constitution and the fundamental democratic rights of its people." International organizations must be allowed access to prisoners and, more importantly, all prisoners arrested as a consequence of the emergency declaration *have to be released*.

It must be acknowledged, too, that events in Pakistan are in part the result of a long history of United States support for the country's military. ILRF therefore calls on the U.S. government to no longer uncritically support General Musharraf and to stand clearly on the side of Pakistan's people. Real security—for Pakistan and for the United States—will not come with clamp-downs on the very organizations and individuals who hold the key to a stable, open society.