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Pakistan

Stop the abuse of anti-terror laws against political activists - release jailed workers

- News from around the world -

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The Awami Workers Party (AWP) called for the immediate release of its jailed leadership, including Baba Jan and Ghulam Dastageer and demanded that state authorities stop the abuse of anti-terrorist laws to repress peaceful political protest in the country on November 20. AWP members and supporters gathered at Aabpara chowk on Thursday as part of a countrywide Call to action by the party, which included demonstrations in Karachi, Lahore, Hyderabad, Multan, Faisalabad, and Moro among others.

The gathering at Aabpara was addressed by several central leaders of the AWP, including Central Information Secretary Nisar Shah and Punjab President Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, and included representatives from various progressive and nationalist organizations from Gilgit-Baltistan AJK and Punjab, including the National Students Federation (NSF), the United Kashmir Peoples National Party (UKPNP) and NSF-Gilgit Baltistan.

Speaking on the occasion, AWP Information Secretary Nisar Shah said that the government and security agencies were openly using the pretext of anti-terrorism to suppress peaceful protest across the country. He said that leaders like AWP Vice-President Baba Jan from Gilgit-Baltistan had been sentenced to life imprisonment just for raising their voice for the rights of working people and disaster affectees from the region. Similarly, AWP Federal Committee member Ghulam Dastgeer had been indefinitely imprisoned for the crime of helping tenants resist illegal forced eviction by large landlords in Derah Saigol. He said that, in both these cases, peaceful working class activists were targeted by the state for organizing marginalized groups to struggle for their rights.

Addressing the rally, AWP Punjab President Aasim Sajjad Akhtar said that repression of progressive politics under the guise of anti-terrorism in Pakistan was part of the larger global political discourse of anti-terrorism in the 21st century under which imperative of national security were used to further the interests of capitalism and imperialism. He said that state authorities in Pakistan had successfully instrumentalized the threat of terrorism in the country to protect their interests while doing nothing to improve the security of the people overall. While progressives were being openly targeted under anti-terror laws, violent right-wing and sectarian militants useful to the state still had a free reign to continue their genocidal activities unabated, he said.

Speaking on the occasion, UKPNP Vice-President Naila Khaneen said that progressive and nationalist activists across the country had been bearing the brunt of state repression for decades. She said that the state was unwilling to tolerate any dissenting opinion in the country which reflected its fundamentally undemocratic character. She further called upon progressive and nationalists across the country to unite in peaceful resistance aimed to force state elites to recognize peoples' democratic rights and aspirations across the country.

In her address to the rally, NSF General Secretary Alia Amir Ali, said that the ongoing repression of peaceful activists was part of the decades-long process of criminalizing politics in Pakistan. She said that state and military elites in Pakistan continued to regard politics as a threat to their interests, and national security legislation was merely a new tool in their hands aimed at protecting those interests. She said that a fundamental shift in the character of the Pakistani state was required in which the people's right to express dissent was recognized, for which progressive forces across the country would have to wage a long and concerted battle.