

Pakistan: End Impunity and Bring Perpetrators of Sabeen to Justice**For Immediate Release**

(Islamabad/Bangkok, 27 April 2015) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), together with its Pakistani member Bytes for All, strongly condemns the killing of Sabeen Mahmud. The groups also call on the government of Pakistan to ensure the protection of human rights defenders and bring perpetrators of the brutal murder of Sabeen Mahmud to justice.

On 24 April 2015 Sabeen Mahmud, social activist, founder and director of The Second Floor (T2F) was gunned down while returning from a panel discussion titled "Unsilencing Balochistan Take 2". T2F, a café and arts space frequented by many activists, had been providing the space to discuss and debate issues in Pakistan. The panel discussion on the human rights violations in Balochistan was supposed to take place at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) however, it was cancelled at the last minute "on orders from the government", according to a statement issued by LUMS.

"We are shocked and deeply disturbed by the targeted killing of Sabeen. She was a vocal activist who defended rational thinking and worked towards providing a safe space for free expression," says Shahzad Ahmad, Country Director, Bytes for All,. *"What happened to Sabeen is an indication of growing intolerance and shrinking spaces for civil rights movements. The State needs to take proactive and effective measures to ensure that free speech is protected and human rights violations in Balochistan are not brushed under the carpet. Sabeen's brutal murder has created a sense of extreme insecurity and vulnerability among human rights defender,"* warns Ahmad.

Sabeen's murder is only the latest in a series of attacks on human rights defenders and journalists in Pakistan. In 2014, another prominent human rights defender, Rashid Rehman, was also murdered in his office in Multan. Rehman had been receiving death threats for his work in defending civil rights. Almost a year after the killing, there is no sign of progress in the investigation, nor have any of the perpetrators been brought to justice.

"The right to freedom of expression in Pakistan has steadily deteriorated over the years. On the one hand we have seen an increase in legislation prescribing greater restrictions on expression while on the other, persons including human rights defenders and journalists, are subjected to harassment and violence." explains Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. *"We call on the government to immediately address the situation by bringing perpetrators of Sabeen's murder to justice and by ensuring that the right to freedom of expression of all, including human rights defenders, journalists and academic institutions, is safeguarded"* urges Balais-Serrano.

FORUM-ASIA further points out that the rule of law in Pakistan has for long been a subject of worry for the international community and that the recent spate of killings of human rights defenders and journalists goes to validate these concerns. The organisation expresses that their greatest fear is that Sabeen was not the last to fall and that her murder is an indication of harsher times to come. FORUM-ASIA hopes that the government of Pakistan takes sincere steps towards ensuring that this is the last of such unfortunate incidents.

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About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organisations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedom of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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