

Public Statement

The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concerns about the murder of Rashid Rehman

Toronto — The Law Society of Upper Canada is gravely concerned about the murder of Rashid Rehman, a prominent Pakistani human rights lawyer and regional coordinator for the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in the Punjab province.

On May 7, 2014, Rashid Rehman, a 53-year-old lawyer, was killed by two unidentified gunman who walked into his office and shot him. He was shot five times. His colleague, Nadeem Parvaz and a client, Fazal Baloch, were also shot and injured.

The shooting follows a number of death threats directed at Rashid Rehman for representing a university lecturer and Fulbright scholar, Junaid Hafeez, who is charged with blasphemy. One of the death threats was made on April 9, 2012 in the Multan Central Prison courtroom. Rashid Rehman reported the death threats to the Punjab Chief Minister, the Inspector General of Punjab Police, the Multan City Police and the district Bar association. However, no action was taken to protect Rashid Rehman.

Rashid Rehman was the only lawyer Junaid Hafeez's father could find to defend his son. His son's first lawyer, who represented Junaid Hafeez during his bail hearing withdrew after being threatened by extremist religious groups. Charges against Junaid Hafeez stem from an allegation made in 2013 by a student associated with Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, a wing of the hard-line Jammaat-e-Islami party.

A student accused Junaid Hafeez, a poet and a popular lecturer in the English Department at Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, of insulting the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. No evidence supporting the student's claim was produced. The police registered the case as blasphemy. However, they did not request cybercrime specialists to investigate.

The Law Society is deeply concerned about situations where lawyers who work for the protection and respect of human rights are themselves targeted for exercising their freedoms and rights under international law. International human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* state that respect for human rights is essential to advancing the rule of law. Article 16 of the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* states "governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; are able

to travel and to consult with their clients freely; and shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics”. Article 18 states “lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes as a result of discharging their functions”.

The Law Society urges the government of Pakistan to:

- a. guarantee all the procedural rights that should be accorded to human rights lawyers in Pakistan;
- b. put an end to all acts of harassment against human rights lawyers in Pakistan;
- c. ensure that all lawyers in Pakistan can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of physical violence or other human rights violations; and,
- d. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.

The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for more than 46,000 lawyers and 6,300 paralegals in the Province of Ontario, Canada, and the Treasurer is the head of the Law Society. The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the legal community to intervene in support of members of the legal profession in Pakistan in their effort to advance the respect of human rights and to promote the rule of law.

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