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PAKISTAN

PAKISTANI ACTIVIST RETURNED AFTER DISAPPEARANCE

Seengar Noonari, Labour Secretary of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) and lifelong activist was returned to his family on 1 August 2021 after a five-week disappearance. He was released without charge, after he was abducted from his home in the middle of the night in front of his wife and children. Seengar had been organizing his community to campaign against allegedly illegal land grabs by a private property developer, which his supporters believe to be the reason for his disappearance.

No further action is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

Seengar Noonari is a grassroots activist who has been engaged in social work and uplifting his community and, at 3:00 am on the morning of 26 June 2021, he was abducted by about 15 armed men. Recounting the events, Fouzia, Seengar Noonari's wife, told Amnesty International that their children, aged between 15 months and 10 years, were with them as the men broke into their home and ransacked their belongings. They seized two mobile phones, an internet device, a USB and a few books before blindfolding Seengar and taking him away.

Fouzia submitted a petition to the Sindh High Court on 2 July, calling for Seengar to be produced in court. Notices were issued to the Sindh police, the chief of Rangers (a paramilitary force under the command of the Pakistan army) and the station house officer of Nasirabad Police Station, alongside the Deputy and Additional Attorney Generals, seeking their response by July 13. These were not adhered to.

In addition to Fouzia's efforts, the Awami Workers Party (AWP), a political organisation that Seengar has been a member of since 2009, organized daily protests calling for his return across the country, staging demonstrations, press conferences and online actions.

Seengar was released near Khairput district. No further details about his ordeal have been disclosed.

The AWP and Fouzia attribute Seengar's return to a combination of their advocacy and international scrutiny into the case. She said his return was like "Eid has arrived."

In Pakistan, enforced disappearance has been used as a tool to muzzle dissent. The individuals and groups targeted in enforced disappearances include Sindhis, Baloch, Pashtuns, the Shia

community, political activists, human rights defenders, members and supporters of religious and nationalist groups, suspected members of armed groups, and proscribed religious and political organizations in Pakistan.

The current government of Imran Khan promised to criminalize enforced disappearances through legislation. After families staged a sit-in in Feb 2021 for days, Imran Khan met with the families, pledging to bring an end to the practice. According to victim groups, there have been some returns in recent months. However, these seem to be ad hoc, and returnees are reluctant to share their experiences and never press charges. Dr Shireen Mazari, the Minister for Human Rights, introduced a bill in the National Assembly criminalizing enforced disappearance in June 2021, but the practice of enforced disappearance continues in the country with impunity.