

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 24, 2025

His Excellency Rizwan Saeed Sheikh
Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States
Embassy of Pakistan
3517 International Court, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador Sheikh:

We are writing to request the immediate release of Idris Khattak, a prominent Pakistani human rights advocate, who has been in government detention for nearly six years. Despite being a civilian, Khattak was subject to a “grossly unfair military trial” in 2021 which resulted in a 14-year prison sentence.¹ According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Khattak has had “extremely limited contact with the outside world” over the last six years.² We urge you to release Khattak from prison, and provide us with information regarding his ongoing detention.

Khattak is a well-known human rights activist who previously consulted with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. During his career advocating for the Pashtun people and speaking out against government repression, he documented human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas. For the last six years, he has been subjected to the very types of government abuse that he previously documented and highlighted for the world to see. His detention began on November 13, 2019, when he was stopped by plain-clothed security agents, abducted, and disappeared while traveling between Islamabad and Peshawar.³ For seven months Khattak’s whereabouts were a mystery – his family, friends, and colleagues did not know whether he was dead or alive.

¹ *UN experts condemn conviction of Pakistan human rights defender and minority activist Idris Khattak*, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (“Expert Condemnation”) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/12/un-experts-condemn-conviction-pakistan-human-rights-defender-and-minority>.

² *Id.*

³ *Pakistan: One year on from his disappearance authorities must reveal Idris Khattak’s whereabouts*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/pakistan-one-year-on-from-his-disappearance-authorities-must-reveal-idris-khattaks-whereabouts/>.

In June 2020, Pakistani officials finally confirmed that Khattak was in the custody of the military intelligence service. After approximately two years in pretrial detention, he was convicted of violating the Official Secrets Act, a British-era law, allegedly over information he shared with an Irish professor and human rights expert in 2009.⁴ Pakistani civil society and international bodies have roundly condemned Khattak's subsequent conviction in a secret military trial in December 2021, and the U.S. State Department highlighted Khattak's disappearance in its annual human rights report on Pakistan in 2020⁵, 2021⁶, and 2022.⁷ Amnesty International called his conviction "the culmination of a shameful two-year process that has been unjust from start to finish."⁸ The International Commission of Jurists described his conviction as "a gross miscarriage of justice."⁹ And the U.N. Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council said that his detention "is emblematic of how the military justice system is being instrumentalized to repress critical voices and rights activists"¹⁰ and that his "sentencing is an attack against the human rights community in Pakistan and sends a chilling message to civil society activists monitoring and reporting on alleged violations."¹¹

We respectfully request Khattak's release as well as the following information regarding Khattak's detention:

1. A petition¹² regarding Khattak's detention was recently filed on his behalf with the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Will the Government of Pakistan commit to releasing Mr. Khattak if the Working Group determines that his detention violates international law?

⁴ *Pakistan: Further information: Human rights defender denied civilian court trial: Idris Khattak*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/3660/2021/en/>.

⁵ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/>.

⁶ *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/>.

⁷ *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/>.

⁸ *Pakistan: Family of enforced disappearance victim Idris Khattak must be given clarity*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/pakistan-family-of-enforced-disappearance-victim-idris-khattak-must-be-given-clarity/>.

⁹ *Idrees Khattak's conviction by a military court is a gross miscarriage of justice*, INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS <https://www.icj.org/idrees-khattaks-conviction-by-a-military-court-is-a-gross-miscarriage-of-justice/>.

¹⁰ *Pakistan: Experts call for release of activist Idris Khattak after five years in detention*, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/pakistan-experts-call-release-activist-idris-khattak-after-five-years>.

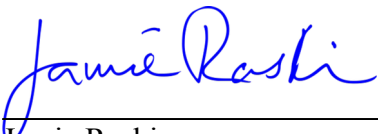
¹¹ *Expert Condemnation* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/12/un-experts-condemn-conviction-pakistan-human-rights-defender-and-minority>.

¹² *Petition to United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*, FREEDOM HOUSE <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Freedom%20House-Idris%20Khattak%20WGAD%20Petition-6.18.25.pdf>.

2. U.N. experts have called for Pakistani “authorities to conduct an independent and thorough investigation into the institutional and criminal responsibilities for Khattak’s disappearance” and to also uphold his “right to redress, rehabilitation and compensation” for the disappearance.¹³
 - a. Has the Government of Pakistan conducted an independent and thorough investigation into Khattak’s seven-month disappearance and identified the officials responsible? If so, what punishment was given to the officials responsible? If not, why not?
 - b. Since 2008, Pakistan has been a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and ratification of the Covenant was completed in 2010. Article 9 of the Covenant provides that “[a]nyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention shall have an enforceable right to compensation.”¹⁴ Khattak was unlawfully arrested and disappeared for seven months. Has the Government of Pakistan provided Khattak with compensation for his disappearance? If not, why not?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Marco Rubio, Secretary of State

¹³ *UN experts: Pakistan must end enforced disappearance of human rights defender*, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/09/un-experts-pakistan-must-end-enforced-disappearance-human-rights-defender>.

¹⁴ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.