

## My First AIJA Conference



The AIJA 2008 Paris Congress, with more than 600 participants from over 50 countries, was my first ever AIJA event and I feel much pleasure and privilege to be part of such an august Lawyers' Association. It is a really useful and informative platform for all the members and such a formidable forum to share experiences and knowledge on a global scale.

The legal community of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan are thankful to AIJA for their kind support at the time of crises in Pakistan. It has been and still is a difficult time for the Judiciary and lawyers in Pakistan to continue with their tasks under such enormous political pressure. During this time, AIJA's supporting letters were a moral boosting and gave Pakistani Lawyers a satisfaction to know that they are not alone in this global village.

For the Paris Congress, then AIJA President Mr. Pär Remnelid invited me to share my experience and impressions of the current situation in Pakistan with the Congress participants and members of AIJA during the General Assembly. I informed the participants what had happened to my colleagues and myself after the Proclamation of Emergency cum Martial Law in the country on 03-11-2007, when the Constitution of Pakistan was abrogated and some fundamental rights were suspended. The after-effects of this emergency can be witnessed from the lawyers' campaign to restore democracy, the independence of judiciary, the reinstatement of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, and upholding the Constitution of Pakistan.

The campaign for the cause was suppressed by the law enforcing agencies by making

an assault on lawyers community in Lahore High Court Premises where hundreds of lawyers were brutally tortured and arrested. It is also pertinent to mention here that police lodged so-called 'First Information Report', or FIRs, against these lawyers for unlawful assembly and flaming speeches against the military including other sections of anti terrorism acts.

The apprehensions of lawyers happened while simply walking on the street wearing court dress and even inside court premises. I would also like to add here at that time lawyers hesitate to go to their offices because there being many reported cases where lawyers were arrested from their offices without apparent reason. The legal community, political parties' leaders, activists and law clerks are under constant threat of being apprehended without bail or able warrants and without there being any warrants of arrest issued by a competent court authorities.

I have been apprehended along with my colleagues in the High Court premises during an open house session being addressed by the Lahore High Court Bar Association and other senior lawyers in Karachi Hall.

The Lawyers were all badly beaten with sticks and gunshafts.

Due to such violence many lawyers got seriously injured and were hospitalized however, most of them were transported to jails without being given any medical aid. I was actively involved during this campaign during which my coat was stained with the blood of colleagues to whom I had been providing first aid and accompanying them to High Court Dispensary. I had many opportunities

to escape from the place of occurrence but I was overwhelmed by the lawyers campaign spirit whose manifesto is to restore the rule of law, reinstatement of judges who refused to take oath under Provisional Constitution Order and independence of judiciary.

A bit to my background: I belong to a middle class family in Pakistan and am the sole bread winner for entire family. We have a combined family system living with my grandmother, parents, paternal aunt, wife, son and sister. They were very worried about me and it was difficult for them to trace me while I had been arrested. Only after a lot of struggle they came to know that I have been taken to Multan. (300 KM Away from my hometown)

After this report to the General Assembly of the AIJA Paris Congress, I was so pleased by the encouragement the participants showed to me and the support towards the Lawyers for Pakistan. This was one of the best moments of my life and I was deeply moved being able to speak in front of such an illustrious and caring audience.

We, the lawyers of Pakistan, are still striving to achieve our final goal: the independence of the judiciary and the restoration of Judges and we hope that together with AIJA we will be able to continue our task, to soon see a clear road ahead again.

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