

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Rights activists highlight shrinking civic spaces in Pakistan, ask collective movement**

KARACHI, Dec. 23: Human rights, labour rights, freedom rights and women rights activists on Monday underlined the need to have a collaborative struggle to win the fundamental freedoms for the citizens of Pakistan as currently many rights are compromised.

Leading human rights defenders and civil society activists were speaking at a webinar "Where do we go from here? A year of the restricted state of civic freedoms in Pakistan" organized by The Knowledge Forum to discuss the state of civic spaces and fundamental rights in Pakistan, highlighting concerning trends in media freedom, labour rights, and civil liberties despite the transition to civilian rule.

The webinar, part of The Knowledge Forum's ongoing efforts to promote informed discourse on Pakistan's pressing issues, brought together prominent voices including human rights activist Uzma Noorani, senior journalist Iqbal Khattak of Freedom Network, trade unions leader Mirza Maqsood who is also currently working with PILER, and Ali Palh of Sindh Human Rights Defenders Network, who shared insights on the challenges facing civil society and rights activists in the country.

Human rights activist Uzma Noorani, who has also worked as lead in Women's Action Forum for women's human rights, emphasized that the current political setup has failed to improve civic freedoms, pointing to the recent treatment of Baloch protesters and continuing restrictions on freedom of assembly.

"The repression continues under civilian rule, similar to what we experienced under military regimes," noted Noorani. She particularly highlighted the challenges faced by youth activists, Baloch Yakjehti Committee, and organizers of marches for women's human rights, including the Aurat March, who face resistance from both state and non-state actors.

Veteran journalist Iqbal Khattak presented alarming statistics on media freedom, revealing that 151 journalists were killed between 2000-2025, averaging one death per month. "The media landscape has become increasingly dangerous for professional journalists seeking to maintain independence," said Khattak. While acknowledging recent legislative progress in journalist protection at federal and provincial levels, he emphasized that implementation remains weaker, particularly in Sindh, which has become the most dangerous region for journalists.

Senior trade unionist and labour rights expert Mirza Maqsood outlined how trade unions have been systematically weakened through privatization and legal amendments, particularly in the banking sector. He stressed the need for stronger worker unity and called for trade unions to align with broader political and social movements to achieve meaningful change. "Labour rights have been pushed off the priority agenda of the state and the society. Even political parties have distanced themselves from worker struggles," Masood observed.

Human rights lawyer Ali Palh addressed the critical issue of enforced disappearances, describing them as a tool for permanent silencing of dissent. He highlighted new trends where human rights defenders face repeated short-term disappearances as an intimidation tactic. Palh emphasized the need for police reforms and Pakistan's signing of international conventions, particularly the Rome Statute, to address these violations effectively.

The speakers collectively emphasized the need for greater solidarity among different sectors of civil society, labour movements, students association and other human rights defenders for effective implementation of existing protection laws. They underlined the need for strengthening of independent human rights institutions and a lasting

In her welcome remarks, Ms. Zeenia Shaukat, Director of The Knowledge Forum said the forum has been actively engaged in knowledge production focusing on the community agenda. As a part of this effort, this year, a [monthly bulletin](#), titled the Pakistan Bulletin, and a series of [webinars](#) spotlighting key issues of Pakistan has been produced with the aim to promote an informed understanding of the issues of Pakistan. The Bulletin covered human rights, economics, politics, and climate change. This webinar is part of their broader initiative to influence discourse and decision-making on critical issues facing Pakistan.