

## **Statement regarding the escalation of arrests of journalists and human rights defenders in Kashmir**

We, South Asia scholars at the University of Warwick, are extremely concerned about the escalation of arrests, intimidation, and harassment of journalists and human rights defenders in Indian-administered Kashmir. The record of human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir as well as Pakistan-administered Kashmir has been outlined in the [United Nations 2018 report](#). The Indian state's targeting of journalists and human rights defenders has been particularly concerning since the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution (the removal of Kashmir's autonomous status) in 2019. Journalism has been reported as a [dangerous profession](#) in Kashmir. While journalists cover human rights violations, human rights defenders document these for the purpose of accountability and redressal.

We are especially concerned about the Indian state's use of colonial-era sedition laws as well as the provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) which enables the designation of individuals as terrorists without evidence. UN rights experts have [commented](#) that the UAPA has contributed to a “worrisome rise” in arrests in India, and especially in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.’ Since 2019, over [2,300 cases](#) have been registered under the UAPA in Jammu and Kashmir alone..

The most recent and shocking arrests are that of two prominent figures, Fahad Shah and Khurram Parvez. Shah is a well-known international journalist and editor of the independent news platform, [The Kashmir Walla](#). Shah, who holds an MA degree from SOAS at the University of London, has published widely on international platforms such as *TIME*, *The Guardian*, and *Christian Science Monitor*. They have been engaged in building platforms for dialogue in Kashmir. Shah was [arrested](#) on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 under the UAPA and a sedition law, for reporting that the family of a young man who was killed by state forces was not a militant. [Sajad Gul](#), a trainee reporter and a colleague of Shah’s, was also arrested for covering protests a few weeks earlier.

Khurram Parvez, well-known for producing rigorous and credible human rights reports as Programme Coordinator of the [Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society](#) (a leading human rights organisation in Kashmir) was arrested on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November under the UAPA. A global human rights leader, Parvez is Chairperson of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances and [Distinguished Scholar](#) at the Political Conflict, Gender and People's Rights Initiative (Center for Race and Gender at the University of California, Berkeley). Parvez was [arrested](#) on November 22, 2021, and has been arbitrarily detained since.

Both Shah and Parvez have been targeted for their fearless work in covering human rights violations in a context where the exceptional laws enable state impunity. The arrests appear to criminalise even posting or sharing any information contrary to the state narrative and position. This criminalisation of human rights work further demonstrates serious human rights violations by the Indian state, contravening press freedom and international law protections for human rights defenders.

We join global institutions concerned with press freedom and human rights such as the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), [Reporters without Borders](#), the [UN Human Rights Office](#), [Amnesty International](#), [The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#), [The Rafto Foundation](#), the [Asian Federation against Involuntary Disappearances](#), and the [Kashmir Scholars Consultative Action Network](#) in calling for the immediate release of Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul and Khurram Parvez. A petition is available to sign on [Change.org](#) for Fahad Shah. A petition to #FreeKhurramParvez is available at this [link](#).

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To learn more about the work of South Asia scholars at the University of Warwick please go to the Critical South Asia Group at Warwick webpage:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/wicid/researchandimpact/regionalareas/criticasouthasiagroup>