



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Pakistan: Media Clampdown as Musharraf Bans Criticism**

**ARTICLE 19 is alarmed by the grave attacks on freedom of expression and human rights in Pakistan, including the arrest of hundreds of journalists, judges, lawyers and human rights activists, and the temporary closure of private broadcasters.**

*“Pakistan’s media has increasingly been shaping public opinion through critical reporting on key events such as the Red Mosque siege.”* said Dr Agnès Callamard, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19. *“It is therefore no surprise that Musharraf has taken these drastic actions to control the media in flagrant abuse of the right to freedom of expression and an illegitimate attempt to cling onto power.”*

On Saturday 3 November, President General Musharraf gave a televised address in which he declared a period of emergency rule and suspended elections scheduled for January 2008. Most private television news channels were taken off air and reports allege that as many as 1,500 media workers, lawyers and human rights activists have either been taken into detention or are being held under house arrest. A new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), adopted the same day, punishes, among other things, any criticism of the head of State, members of the armed services and any other senior member of government with a possible three-year jail term and 10 million Rp. (US\$167,000) fine.

A statement issued today by the Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz, reversed Musharraf’s election suspension, promising that elections will go ahead as scheduled. Attorney-General Malik Abdul Qayyum further clarified: “[T]here will be no delay in the election and by 15 November these assemblies will be dissolved and the election will be held within the next 60 days”. This backtracking can be largely attributed to those within the country, especially the legal profession, who have strongly protested Musharraf’s actions. Key Western allies including the United States and members of the European Union have also exerted pressure on Musharraf by strongly urging the holding of democratic elections as scheduled and the restoration of civilian rule.

ARTICLE 19 calls on all the Pakistani authorities, and Musharraf in particular, to release of all those held in detention or under house arrest for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and to oppose the government, to repeal the 3 November Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) immediately and to respect the right of the media to inform the public on matters of interest, including through criticism of any authorities. We also call on Western governments to use their influence to bring about these results and to press for a return to civilian rule through democratic elections.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

- For more information, please contact Catrina Pickering, Programme Officer, [catrina@article19.org](mailto:catrina@article19.org), +44 20 7278 9292.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.