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November 7, 2007

Ambassador Anne W. Patterson  
American Embassy  
Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5  
Islamabad, Pakistan

Dear Madame Ambassador,

I write to you with gratitude for the work you are doing to promote democracy and to protect the vulnerable in Pakistan. While I know that such diplomatic efforts are difficult given the current situation in Pakistan, I wish to encourage you to continue to work for the protection of the fundamental freedoms that the citizens of the United States hold so dear.

In the past four days, General Pervez Musharraf has declared a State of Emergency in an order bearing his signature as head of the armed forces instead of as President, shut down independent television stations, and sacked the judiciary for challenging the constitutionality of his Presidency.

In Pakistan, freedom of religion has been precarious, especially for religious minorities, for a long time now. Blasphemy laws – the most severe in the world – are used to silence religious dissidents and political opposition. The overwhelming culture of suppression of dissent has extended to claim victims expressing any political opposition. The most recent mass arbitrary detentions of scores of lawyers and civil society activists have brought into relief what religious freedom watchers have long known – the government's commitment to the mechanisms supporting rule of law is weak indeed.

President Bush declared it is the United States's "desire to see a return to democracy in the shortest time possible." Secretary Rice has stated General Musharraf's latest actions are "extraconstitutional," called into question the U.S.'s defense aid to Pakistan, and focused on pressuring General Musharraf to hold elections. But democracy requires more than elections; it is meaningful only with active protection for dissenters in a robust civil society, and with an independent judiciary.

We thus ask that the United States focus its diplomatic strengths in Pakistan not only on the form of democracy in elections, but also the reinstatement of an independent judiciary that can uphold the constitution and a free press to speak out on behalf of dissenters.

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Ambassador Anne W. Patterson

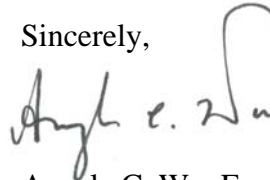
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We would also like to bring to your attention the arrest of one particular activist, Ms. Asma Jahangir, Chair of the Human Rights Commission in Lahore, and U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Ms. Jahangir has been detained for unidentified activities allegedly "prejudicial to public safety and maintenance of public order." Ms. Jahangir is one of the strongest and most consistent voices for religious liberty and human rights in Pakistan. She is one of those whose support and work General Musharraf needs in order to combat the militants he cites as the reason for a state of emergency. I have been in touch with Ms. Jahangir since her house arrest. She is safe, but anxious for the plight of her fellow activists, many of whom have been beaten and dragged to jails.

We call on you forcefully to press for the immediate and unconditional release of Ms. Jahangir and other activists being detained under the current emergency provisions, so that they might return to their job of protecting those who cannot protect themselves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angela C. Wu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'A'.

Angela C. Wu, Esq.  
International Director  
The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty