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## **Pakistan: Disappearance of human rights defender Idris Khattak**

13 April 2020 marked five months since the disappearance of Idris Khattak. The human rights defender was on his way home from Islamabad when his rented car was intercepted near the Swabi Interchange of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Idris Khattak was accompanied by the driver of the car when the incident took place.

Idris Khattak is a human rights defender whose work includes documenting and advocating against a range of human rights violations in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan.

On 13 November 2019, a group of four plain-clothed men intercepted Idris Khattak's car near the Swabi Interchange of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The men put black sacks over the faces of the human rights defender and his driver and drove them to an undisclosed location. The defender's family became aware of his enforced disappearance only after the driver was released on the night of 15 November 2019. Since his disappearance, the family has not been contacted by any persons demanding a ransom, suggesting that the incident was not a kidnapping.

On 23 November 2019, Idris Khattak's brother filed a habeas corpus petition in the Peshawar High Court. However, it was not until 10 January 2020, that the court ordered the government to report on the defender's whereabouts. Even with the court's directive, there has been little progress in the case. To date, the family has no information regarding the whereabouts of Idris Khattak and his safety.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) [stated](#) that they have reason to believe that Idris Khattak is a victim of an enforced disappearance. The country has a long history of targeting human rights defenders with enforced disappearances, as a tool to quell their dissent and criticism of the administration and military policies. Many of the human rights defenders who have been arrested or subjected to enforced disappearance in Pakistan have been deprived of their basic right to medical assistance or contact with their families. Further to this, many are kept in degrading conditions, and are often subjected to abuse and torture. Those that are released are threatened into silence and face the risk of further violence against themselves and their families if they dare to speak out. The little information available on conditions during their ordeal is available only on condition of anonymity out of fear for their safety.

Successive governments have promised to criminalise enforced disappearances but it is yet to become law. Shireen Mazari, the minister for human rights, stated that the government intends to sign the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. However, no concrete steps have been taken so far, and the practice of enforced disappearance continues in the country with impunity.

At the time of writing, over five months following his enforced disappearance, the whereabouts of the human rights defender remain unknown. Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned about the safety of Idris Khattak and believes his disappearance is a reprisal for his peaceful human rights work, specifically his role in denouncing human rights violations in the region. Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Pakistan to carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the disappearance of Idris Khattak and determine his whereabouts. It calls on the authorities to guarantee his physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of his

family. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern over the lack of a safe and enabling environment in Pakistan for human rights defenders to carry out their valuable work.