



February 11, 1999

Mr. Pierre Sané, Secretary General  
Amnesty International  
1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 8DJ  
England



**Benazir Bhutto**  
**Leader of the Opposition**  
**Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

Dear Mr. Sané,

In an hour of deep distress for Pakistan, I am compelled to raise with you a series of authoritarian measures taken by the government of Nawaz Sharif that imperil Pakistan's free press, our civil justice system, and the rights of women in society.

Of most pressing concern have been deliberate actions taken by the Sharif government to directly undermine and silence any and all critical press in the country. Among other dire acts of intimidation, the government has raided the offices of our nation's largest newspaper (The Jang Group); withheld government advertising; frozen bank accounts without due cause; wire-tapped editors and journalists who wrote articles critical of the government's policies; intimidated contractors and vendors necessary for the publication of the newsprint; and repeatedly used false allegations of tax fraud as an excuse to throw the owners of the paper into court, despite a lack of evidence. Silencing an independent and critical press is often the goal of those in power whose actions and deeds cannot withstand the light of day.

The Sharif government is further undermining our civil judicial system by establishing military courts throughout the country, empowered to dispense summary executions. These courts have been declared unconstitutional in past Supreme Court verdicts, and their rulings suspended by our current Supreme Court. The right of every citizen to be tried in civil courts – beyond the influence of government pressure -- is vital to the continuance of an open and democratic society in Pakistan.

Lastly, the Nawaz regime has taken every opportunity to set back the advancement of women in our society. Among its many misogynistic policies has been the abolition of family courts and women-run police stations, established to promote the civic rights and equality of women in Pakistan. These actions trouble me deeply, and raise deep concerns about the further degradation of the rights of women and the welfare of other minorities in our diverse nation.

I appeal to you, as a promoter of the rule of law, human rights and a free and unfettered press, to condemn strongly and unequivocally the Nawaz regime's reign of terror against Pakistan's citizens and institutions of democracy. As the world's most recent nuclear power, it is even more important now that the international community not stand idly by as Prime Minister Sharif and his government try to return Pakistan to the dark days of dictatorship.

Sincerely,

Benazir Bhutto  
Leader of the Opposition