



## women's action forum خواتین محاذ عمل

### Remove curbs on Gulalai's freedom of movement

Lahore, 27 October 2018: The Court has granted bail to the Internationally recognized human rights activist, Gulalai Ismail, but Women Action Forum (WAF) expresses serious concern on the infringement of her freedom of movement as her passport has not been returned and her name remains on the Exit Control List (ECL).

On 12 October 2018, Gulalai was detained by airport officials in Islamabad following her return from London, United Kingdom. Gulalai was taken by Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in connection with an FIR filed against her and 19 other Pashtun Tahfuz Movement (PTM) leaders for their alleged involvement in a public gathering of PTM in Swabi in August 2018.

Gulalai is reported to have confirmed that she is neither a part of the core committee of the PTM nor holds any position of responsibility. However, as a human rights defender and a Pashtun, she has always continued to show solidarity towards PTM and completely endorses the constitutional and fundamental rights that they stand for. At the PTM jalsa in Swabi, Gulalai reportedly delivered a speech that was non-political, only acknowledged the local heroes and shed light on the political history of Swabi.

She added that she was arrested as state and non-state actors have launched an illegal crackdown on human rights defenders to silence their voices. "It is a striking example of how the space for civil society organisations and rights activists is shrinking. It is not an attack on me alone but a severe blow to our collective freedom of expression and liberty to speak out", Gulalai said.

In a statement issued on Saturday, WAF said: "Every year various human rights defenders are killed, attacked or subjected to other types of threats, intimidation and harassment. Women human rights defenders are faced with the same types of risks as any human rights defender but are also exposed to certain gender-specific threats and violence. As a country, we need to realise and recognise the role of women human rights defenders and protect them from discrimination, harassment and attacks.

Labeling human rights defenders as 'anti-state', 'anti-Islam', 'foreign agents', or 'proponents of Western agenda' does not only discredit the important work done by them but also constitutes as one of the major reasons for the continued cycle of violence against them. There is an urgent need to stop concocting frivolous and malafide FIRs against human rights defenders and immediately drop all charges against them for which there is no proof of allegation.

WAF calls upon the government to question those who create such propaganda against human rights defenders and build negative perceptions about them which puts their life at serious risk. We urge the authorities to remove all restrictions on her freedom of movement, which is an internationally accepted fundamental right. WAF also demands that the government must refrain from using the ECL for arbitrarily restricting freedom of movement and hampering the work of human rights defenders in Pakistan."