OPEN LETTER

October 05, 2026

To:

H.E. Mr. Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro
President of the United Nations Human Rights Council

H.E. Mr. Tahir Hussain Andrabi
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Cc:

Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

Subject: Urgent Appeal Under Special Procedures for Clarification of the Fate and Whereabouts of Sayed Qasim Hashemi and Hamed Ehsas — Serious Concerns of Enforced Disappearance in Pakistan

Excellencies,

Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) submits this urgent appeal regarding the continued enforced disappearance of two Afghan journalists and filmmakers, Sayed Qasim Hashemi and Hamed Ehsas, missing in Islamabad, Pakistan, since 4 July 2026 — a period now exceeding eighty days without any credible official account of their fate.

I. Factual Background

Both men fled Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 and sought international protection in Pakistan on account of the risks arising from their work as journalists, photographers and filmmakers.

According to information provided by their families [and corroborated by: name specific source, e.g. media outlet or organization, with date], the two men disappeared in Islamabad on

4 July 2026. Their vehicle was subsequently located abandoned in the D-12 sector of Islamabad; neither man has been located since.

We request that the Government of Pakistan place on the public record the status and outcome of each of these proceedings.

II. Applicable Legal Framework

Pakistan is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it ratified in 2010. The prolonged, unacknowledged deprivation of liberty described above engages, at minimum:

- Article 6 (right to life), insofar as enforced disappearance places the disappeared person outside the protection of the law and at heightened risk to life;
- Article 7 (freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment), given the well-documented link between incommunicado detention and ill-treatment;
- Article 9 (right to liberty and security of person and freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention);
- Article 16 (right to recognition as a person before the law), which the Human Rights Committee has held is directly violated by enforced disappearance.

We further emphasize that Pakistan has clear responsibilities under international human rights law and the established legal framework on **enforced disappearance** to protect persons within its jurisdiction and to promptly, independently and effectively investigate allegations of enforced disappearance. Where state authorities, or persons acting with their authorization, support or acquiescence, may be involved, Pakistan must establish the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared, provide effective remedies to their families, and ensure accountability for those responsible.

In this case, Pakistan must urgently clarify the fate and whereabouts of Sayed Qasim Hashemi and Hamed Ehsas, who disappeared in Islamabad while seeking safety and protection in Pakistan.

Should the two men have been removed to Afghanistan, this would engage the customary international law principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the transfer of any person to a territory where they face a real risk of persecution, torture or other serious harm — a principal binding on Pakistan independent of its accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention, given the documented restrictions on journalists under Taliban rule.

III. The Central Question Requiring an Answer

Are Sayed Qasim Hashemi and Hamed Ehsas currently in the custody or under the effective control of any Pakistani authority — civilian, military, or intelligence — or were they transferred, deported, or otherwise handed over to the de facto Taliban authorities in Afghanistan? To date, no clear, verifiable public answer has been provided.

IV. This Case Is Not Isolated

This disappearance is not an isolated incident. Amnesty International issued Urgent Action UA 91/26 (Index: ASA 33/1439/2026) on 10 September 2026 concerning this exact case, confirming that Islamabad police have refused to register a complaint regarding the abduction of the two men. Separately, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), jointly with Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), formally called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to end what these organizations described as an intensifying pattern of harassment, arbitrary arrest, and deportation of Afghan journalists living in exile in Pakistan — individuals who had fled Taliban persecution only to face renewed threats in the country where they sought refuge. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has separately documented a broader pattern of enforced disappearances and press-freedom restrictions within Pakistan.

HRD+ submits that these converging, independently documented sources establish a credible pattern warranting the Council's sustained attention, not a case-by-case response.

V. HRD+ Calls on the Government of Pakistan to, within 30 days of this letter:

1. Publicly disclose the whereabouts and legal status of Sayed Qasim Hashemi and Hamed Ehsas, if held by any Pakistani authority.
2. Confirm or deny, in writing, whether either individual has been deported, transferred or handed over to Taliban authorities, and if so, disclose the date, legal basis, responsible authority, and circumstances.
3. Order an immediate, independent, impartial and effective investigation into the disappearance, consistent with Pakistan's obligations under Articles 6, 7 and 9 ICCPR, including the possibility of enforced disappearance or arbitrary detention by state agents.
4. Formally register and investigate the families' complaints listed in Section I, provide them with regular written updates, and guarantee their participation in the investigation.

5. Preserve all relevant evidence: CCTV footage from the D-12 area, telecommunications and geolocation data, vehicle and immigration records, and any detention or transfer records held by police, intelligence or immigration authorities.
6. Guarantee that, if alive and in custody, the two men are protected from torture and ill-treatment and granted immediate access to legal counsel, family contact, and judicial review of their detention.

VI. Appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Council and Special Procedures

HRD+ respectfully requests that:

- The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) transmit this case to the Government of Pakistan as a Joint Urgent Appeal, jointly with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, in accordance with the Special Procedures' standard communication practice;
- OHCHR request a substantive response from Pakistan within the standard 60-day reply period applicable to Special Procedures communications, and that any reply — or failure to reply — be reflected in the relevant public communications report to the Council;
- This case be considered in the context of Pakistan's forthcoming Universal Periodic Review, over which the Council presidency for 2026 presides, and raised by concerned States in that process;
- Concerned States and the European Union take note of this case in the context of human-rights-conditioned trade arrangements, including GSP+ monitoring, insofar as enforced disappearance and refoulement of journalists bear directly on the human rights conventions underlying such arrangements.

The prolonged absence of information cannot be treated as an ordinary missing-person matter where credible indications exist that state authorities may possess relevant information or have exercised control over the individuals' fate. The families have a fundamental, non-derogable right to know the truth about what happened to their relatives.

HRD+ remains ready to provide supporting documentation to the Working Group, OHCHR, and other competent bodies, and requests that this letter be treated as a formal submission for the purposes of Special Procedures communication.