



**02 August 2024**

## **India: End human rights defender and journalist Irfan Mehraj's 500-day imprisonment**

On 02 August 2024 journalist and human rights defender **Irfan Mehraj** completes 500 days in jail at the maximum-security Rohini prison in New Delhi, India. His jail term is a brutal retaliation against his human rights work and a mockery of justice. We, seven civil society organizations signing this statement, call for his immediate and unconditional release. We demand an end to the Indian government's endless repression targeting Kashmiri human rights defenders and journalists.

[Irfan Mehraj](#) is a respected journalist, researcher and human rights defender from Srinagar. He worked as a researcher at the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), a leading civil society organisation in Indian-administered Kashmir. He is the founding editor of Wande Magazine, a senior editor at TwoCircles.net and a frequent contributor to leading news publications in Kashmir, India and internationally.

On 20 March 2023, Irfan Mehraj was detained by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) under provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the draconian anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). According to a March 2023 NIA [press release](#), Irfan Mehraj was targeted for being 'a close associate of Khurram Parvez,' the coordinator for JKCCS, whose human rights work and support for victims of human rights violations in Kashmir has been equated by the NIA with funding terror. Human rights defender [Khurram Parvez](#) is imprisoned since November 2021 in a separate case under the UAPA.

There is widespread condemnation of the ongoing incarceration of Irfan Mehraj and Khurram Parvez, and the broader persecution of human rights defenders and journalists in Kashmir. The Indian government has failed to respond to the human rights violations and concerns in Kashmir raised by [United Nations experts](#) and international human rights organizations. Instead, the government continues to inflict brutal and unjust repression and retaliation to silence human rights work, labelling human rights defenders as terrorists and anti-national.

The continuing abuse of the UAPA and the repressive Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA), which permits preventive detention without charge, has deterred the work and safety of journalists and human rights defenders. The repression has worsened since the unilateral [abrogation](#) of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and the constitutional rights of the people of Kashmir in August 2019. Irfan Mehraj's continued incarceration on baseless charges, an obvious retaliation for his human rights work, speaks to the high risk borne by the region's activists. They live and work in one of the most densely militarized regions in the world.

We stand in solidarity with Irfan Mehraj and his family as his imprisonment reaches 500 days. We thank him for his vital contributions in defending the rights of people of his region. The signatories call for Irfan's immediate release and an end to the unjust and brutal suffering inflicted on him and his family. We urge Indian authorities to repeal regressive laws including the UAPA and the PSA and immediately end reprisals against human rights defenders, journalists and other critical voices. We also call upon Indian authorities to comply with their international human rights obligations by promoting human rights in Kashmir, allowing civil society and the media to freely operate in Kashmir

and granting international civil society, international media and the UN's human rights experts unfettered access to Kashmir and Kashmiri prisoners.

**Signed:**

- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Front Line Defenders
- Kashmir Law and Justice Project
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders