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MEDIA ADVISORY

FOSA Demands the Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan

The military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, has imposed a state of emergency in Pakistan, aborting the long-awaited return to democracy. With the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), Mr. Musharraf has authorized himself to rule by decree, suspended fundamental rights in Pakistan, and granted himself unlimited powers. The PCO also prohibits the Supreme Court of Pakistan from passing a judgment against Mr. Musharraf. When the Supreme Court refused to ratify Mr. Musharraf's declaration of the state of emergency, eight SC judges, including Iftikhar Muhammad Choudhary, the Chief Justice, were taken into custody and Mr. Musharraf appointed a new Chief Justice. Other judges from lower courts and many lawyers, including Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, have been detained. Regular news broadcasts have been suspended, independent TV news channels forced off the air and curbs imposed on the media.

Friends of South Asia (www.friendsofsouthasia.org), a San Francisco bay area based organization, strongly condemns the declaration of emergency rule in Pakistan. It is an illegal and unconstitutional decision and an attempt by a military dictator to continue his illegal and unconstitutional rule. This declaration of a state of emergency must be universally condemned and the generals in Pakistan must end their stranglehold on the country.

FOSA expresses its solidarity with the people of Pakistan in their demand for an end to dictatorship and for free fair and elections. We are heartened by the courage shown by the Justices of the Supreme Court who have declared the PCO and the imposition of the state of emergency illegal and unconstitutional. The Court has declared that no judge of the Supreme Court or any of the high courts including the chief justices would take oath under new PCO. We also commend civil society organizations such as various human rights groups, lawyers groups, independent news and blogger sites in Pakistan who continue to organize and inform the public in defiance of the government orders.

FOSA rejects President Musharraf's defence of emergency rule as a necessary step to combat extremism and terrorism. We disagree that suspending the rights and liberties of its own citizens would in any way help Pakistan fight extremists and terrorists. This is a transparent ploy by Mr. Musharraf and his military junta to crush the nascent movement towards democracy.

FOSA joins with all citizens of Pakistan in demanding an immediate end to the emergency rule and a speedy restoration of the constitution and the rule of law. To ensure working of an independent judiciary, all Supreme Court judges deposed on November 3 by Mr. Musharraf should be restored to their positions. FOSA demands that all political workers and members of the legal fraternity arrested in the wake of declaration of emergency rule be immediately released.

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