

# Ethics in Action

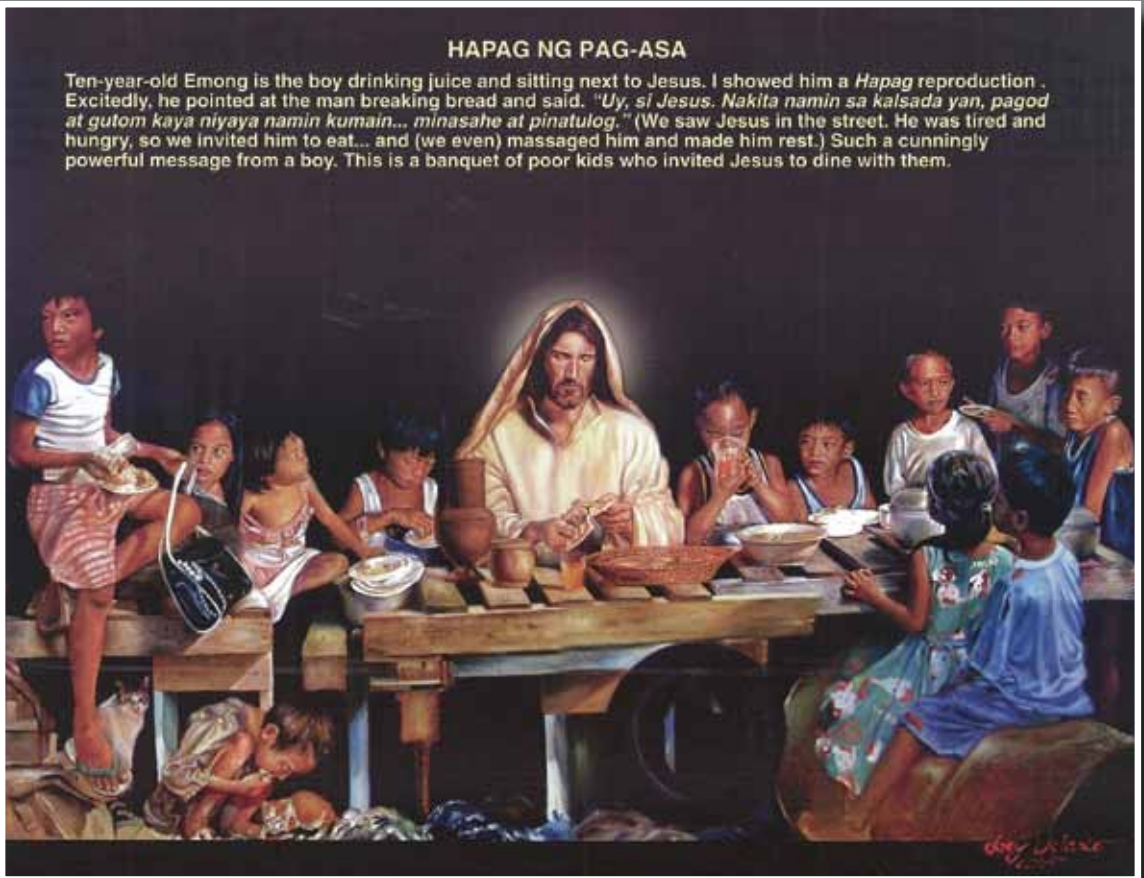
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## HAPAG NG PAG-ASA

Ten-year-old Emong is the boy drinking juice and sitting next to Jesus. I showed him a *Hapag* reproduction . Excitedly, he pointed at the man breaking bread and said. "*Uy, si Jesus. Nakita namin sa kalsada yan, pagod at gutom kaya niyaya namin kumain... minasahe at pinatulog.*" (We saw Jesus in the street. He was tired and hungry, so we invited him to eat... and (we even) massaged him and made him rest.) Such a cunningly powerful message from a boy. This is a banquet of poor kids who invited Jesus to dine with them.



Asian Human Rights Commission

**Cover image :**

‘Table of Hope’ painting by Filipino artist Joey Velasco.  
Courtesy Fr. Roberto Reyes

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# **Buddhist chiefs call Sri Lankan President to withdraw impeachment against Chief Justice**

*(A rare combined statement issued by the leaders (Mahanayaka theras) of Sri Lanka's four Buddhist chapters)*

28 November 2012

His Excellency the President  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
Temple Trees  
Colombo 3

Your Excellency,

## **Importance of avoiding apprehension in the minds of the people in dispensing law and justice in a Democratic Society**

Sri Lanka is an island which won the eulogy “Daham Divayina” from time immemorial and was praised here and abroad. But society at present is full of grave crimes such as murders, rape, robberies, arson, abductions, bribery, drug trafficking and child abuse; committed with craving and hatred. Almost every day these are reported in the media. These pernicious acts imply the lack of security and value of human life. There is more room for deterioration of human values, in the absence of equilibrium between materialistic, spiritual and ethical development and apprehension with regard to the equity in law. If there is a collapse in law and order it is rather difficult to rise up as a righteous nation. If we are to rekindle the fast vanishing human values in our country, we must make the man a humanist, who respects human values. Teaching of Lord Buddha elucidates that selfish craving, ignorance, hatred, lead to the destruction of human society. We can establish peace and happiness in our country by following Buddha's teaching and propagating and practicing patience and loving kindness. Many lessons can be learnt by the ruler and the subject if they follow the “Chakkavathi Sihanada” Sutra, the discourse by Lord Buddha, and take refuge in the teachings of Buddha. The time has come for all social institutions including the government to work together to bring this society out of this mire, taking into consideration the saying of Buddha, “To be born as a human is arduous and rare”.

The Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary can perform an immense service to maintain morals, law and peace in any civilized democratic society. It should be based on law, justice, patience and fairness. In order to achieve this end, it is not proper to resort to actions which will generate an apprehension with regard to the judiciary and the judges. It will be harmful rather than beneficial. It is certain to affect the honour and the trust that the judiciary of Sri Lanka had up to now in the world.

Majority of the people think that the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice will lead to a disenchantment about all branches of the judiciary. Therefore the government should think patiently about the ill effect of the prevailing attempt of the Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary to go above the other and take steps to safe guard the independence of the judiciary and solidify the feelings of justice in the minds of the people. By the display of just behaviour of the government it will definitely generate a feeling of satisfaction in the minds of the people.

It is possible to get humans to respect law and traditions by acting according to human ethics without scorn. Therefore to avoid the breakdown in law and deterioration of society as a result of the impeachment motion we kindly request that the impeachment motion be withdrawn, taking into consideration the recent recommendation of the Supreme Court. This will be beneficial to the country.

May you have the refuge of the Triple Gem!

1. Thibbotuwawe Sri Sumangalabhidana Maha Nayake Sthavira of Mahaviharawanshika Shyamopali Mahanikaya (Malawathu Chapter)
2. Udegama Sadharma Keerthi Sri Rathanapala Buddharakkhithabidana Maha Nayake Sthavira of Mahaviharawanshika Shyamopali Mahanikaya (Asgiri Chapter)
3. Napana Pemasiri of Sri Lanka Rammanya Mahanikaye Maha Nayaka Stavira
4. Davuldena Sri Gnanissarabhidhana Maha Nayake Sthavira of Amrapura Maha Nikhaya

# Drama achieves what sermons can't

Safeer Ullah Khan

*Manzoor Hussain, 33, had been smoking for over 15 years. He had a meagre income and his three children had dropped out of school because he would not pay their tuition fees on time. His wife was seriously upset with this state of affairs, but it was no use talking to Hussain. He would often ignore her and sometimes resort to violence. As his father and other elderly people in the community came to know about the situation, they too tried to talk sense to him, but to no avail.*

*However, the situation changed dramatically. One day, Hussain came home and called all his three children and wife. They were all afraid that something must have gone seriously wrong. They were holding their breath, anticipating abuse or even violence, as Hussain looked into each one's eyes very calmly and said, "I would not smoke from today, and all of you would go to school from next month." None of them could utter a single word, but kept looking at him in sheer disbelief. "How come," exclaimed his wife, after a long awkward pause.*

*To cut the story short, he had seen a performance by a street theatre group. The short play was on the issue of domestic violence and its impact on the family, especially children. Hussain was so thoroughly affected by the play that he roamed the streets thinking about his wife and children. Finally he took out the cigarette pack from his pocket and threw it into the nearby dustbin. He realized he was spending Rs 2000 (USD 20) on his cigarettes every month—an amount enough to pay for the education of his three children at the community school. Drama had achieved what all the sermons by elderly people in the community could not.*

Theatre has fascinated people around the world since time immemorial. On the one hand, the elite classes had their own theatre that told the stories of kings, queens, princes and princesses; on the other hand, there was a tradition of street theatre that focused on the common man's life and problems. The elite theatre made heavy use of costumes and

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Safeer Ullah Khan is a practitioner of street theatre working in Pakistan. Currently, he is working as Coordinator, Bedari Theatre Program and is a member of Theatre Wallay, a newly established group trying to revive theatre and cultural activities to de-radicalize Pakistan's youth.

other props, with usually a very large cast; street theatre meanwhile, was comparatively inexpensive entertainment.

The subcontinent of India and Pakistan has its own tradition of people's theatre known as Notanki, Natak, or Raahs. The most important aspect of this traditional theatre is its simplicity. Unlike theatre in the proscenium, street theatre entails minimum use of lights, cosmetics/makeup, costumes and other paraphernalia. A character is established with a small but significant prop, such as a stick to portray a policeman, a stool/chair to represent a king's throne and so forth. The actor achieves success with his acting skills: his voice control, body language and facial expressions.

This kind of theatre was quite popular among the masses, and people thronged to see such performances, which were held at melas or fairs regularly, in every nook and corner of the sub-continent. There were groups which would regularly perform various plays based on traditional stories and historic events. I do not know about India, but here in Pakistan, such groups have ceased to perform. I personally met quite a few people who used to perform for such groups, but have long changed their profession for various reasons.

Its strong appeal makes theatre one of the most cherished tools for development workers, especially those involved in advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. As the sub-continental version is more affordable and culturally acceptable, it becomes more important for awareness raising campaigns. There is no need to hire professional actors and actresses, as members of a community can themselves prepare short plays with minimum training.

Alex Mavrocordatos says, "The first step to development is a change of attitude, both individual and collective—and in that order—from declared helplessness to empowerment. This is culture in action, and theatre is a cultural tool."

Theatre is a cultural tool that helps change people's attitudes. When they prepare a play on a certain issue facing their community, they analyze its different aspects, search for its causes and learn about its possible consequences. These insights lead to a change in the attitude of the people who are directly involved in the production of the play.

As these activists become aware of the complications of the issue, they can become the best advocates on the issue for the rest of the community, and their play can be the best way to convince other members of the community to take the issue seriously.

Furthermore, these people have a continuous presence in the community as opposed to advocacy campaigners who visit a community for a short time, and cannot have long term interaction with the community.



Another special aspect of this kind of theatre is that the play is produced by the members of the community, so it portrays their problems in their own unique context, which makes it more relevant to the viewers. When directing a team of volunteers from Muzaffarabad (a district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in Pakistan) on the issues of personal hygiene and cleanliness, I came to know of the unhygienic practices indulged in by community members. I was told that while people did purchase soap, they would keep it under lock and key and take it out only for guests—something I would never have known if I was working with professional actors from Rawalpindi/Islamabad where I live. We developed scenes based on such ‘inside’ information, and the play became so powerful that after the first performance, around half a dozen kids ran to their homes, washed their hands and returned to the performance venue to show their washed hands to the theatre team.

What happens is that people start identifying themselves with the characters of the play, which makes them feel the agony, pain and suffering as well as joys of the characters. As a result, what the play’s characters learn is also learnt by the audience as well. It results in a change in the way the people perceive that particular issue, which leads towards a change in behavior afterwards. Drama achieves what endless sermons cannot. Theatre remains an under-utilized tool in the world. We need to make proper use of this powerful tool to bring about a positive change in our societies.

# **A Cambodia that tolerates dissent sends the right message to President Obama**

*The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)*

Phnom Penh, 15 November 2012 — The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) expresses its condemnation at the arrest today of eight community activists in Thmar Kaul Village, Po Sen Chey District, Phnom Penh. The community activists are guilty of nothing more than exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, and coming in the wake of intimidation and harassment of civil society groups attempting to organize and hold meetings ahead of the upcoming ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh, the arrests and detention of these community activists is yet another example of the Cambodian authorities' disregard for human rights. The Cambodian authorities have expressed a desire to show the "good" face of Cambodia to the world, however, their intolerance of dissent and willingness to use the police to stifle freedom of expression demonstrates little more than the shrinking democratic space in the country.

At 7:30am on 15 November 2012, eight community activists—Un Sokny; Kin Leang; Chray Nim; Khea Sary; Uch Srey; Mach; Sem Phal Sokunthy; Yun Sovanna; and Phung Sopheap—were arrested in Thmar Kaul Village, Po Sen Chey District, Phnom Penh, after writing the word "SOS", on the roof of their building. Their plea for help was written beside a picture of the President of the United States, Barack Obama. The eight are currently being detained at the Sangkat Kakab police station while the Prosecutor decides the charges to be brought against them. Residents in Po Sen Chey District are currently locked in a land dispute with authorities ahead of the ASEAN Summit. They have been told that they must vacate their properties and forfeit their land to make way for a security area around Phnom Penh International Airport, where foreign leaders are shortly due to arrive. ADHOC has repeatedly called for fair compensation for the residents. This compensation has not been forthcoming, and instead the security zone appears to be little more than another case of forced eviction in a country beset with forced evictions, land grabbing and ecologically and socially damaging Economic Land Concessions (ELCs), amidst a general disregard for the land rights of poor and marginalized Cambodians.

The eight community activists were exercising their right to freedom of expression in an attempt to bring their plight to the attention of foreign leaders. Freedom of expression is

a fundamental freedom and is intimately linked with the conditions of transparency and accountability that are necessary in a fully functioning democracy. Freedom of expression is guaranteed under article 41 of the Cambodian Constitution, in addition to article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). It is also incorporated into Cambodian law by Cambodia's ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992, which provides for freedom of expression under article 19: "this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice". Therefore, not only is the issue raised by the community activists an important one; they have every legal right to raise it.

There is no little irony that the community activists were arrested when sending a message to President Obama. Only last week President Obama was re-elected to office after a lively and long-fought presidential election in which freedom of expression was crucial to the democratic process. Moreover, freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution of the United States and therefore the exercise of this right would surely be welcomed by the delegation from the United States. Instead, in their heavy-handed suppression of this basic right and arbitrary arrest of the community activists the Phnom Penh authorities have shown how far a gulf there is between the human rights protections guaranteed under domestic and international law and the extent to which they are respected in practice.

The 2012 ASEAN Summit presents Cambodia with a unique opportunity to show its commitment to human rights. The arrest of the eight community activists gives the opposite message. If the Cambodian authorities truly wish to show the best of the country, then they must be willing to tolerate criticism and not attempt to stifle the democratic space in the country.

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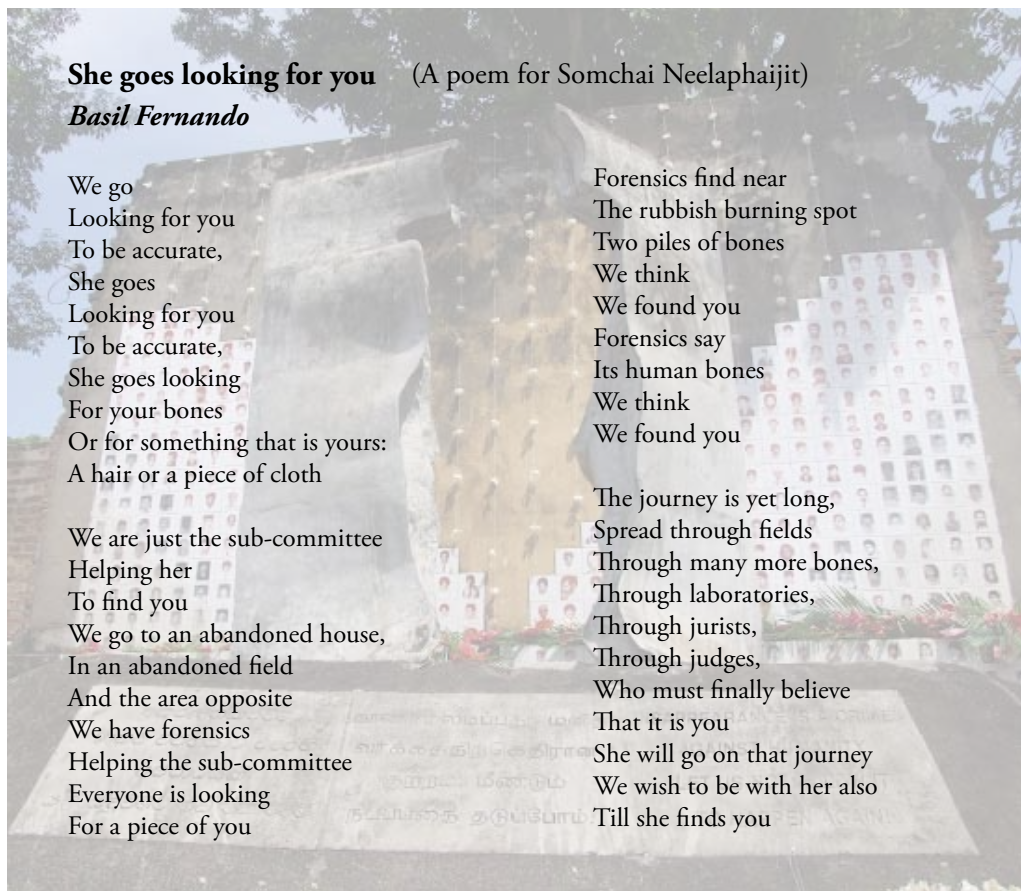
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# Commemorating Sri Lanka's disappeared

October 27 is Sri Lanka's national day for the commemoration of the disappeared, when persons gather at the Monument for the Disappeared at Raddoluwa Seeduwa. The monument was erected near Negombo in 2000 as a symbol of the disappearances which have plagued Sri Lanka since the 1970s.

This year, 2012, Tamils and Sinhalese commemorated the day together by paying respects to their loved ones who have been lost and discussing issues of accountability relating to these disappearances, as seen in the following photographs.





Plaques in all three languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English)



*“Government keeps on stamping people who work for democracy and rights,”*  
Chandraguptha Thenuwara, artist who made the Monument for the Disappeared.



Mother of two sons who have gone missing kisses and weeps at the Monument for the Disappeared.



“Who has abducted my two sons?”  
Paththirakaali Suyampunaadar (63) from  
Mannar, whose two sons were abducted in  
Mattakkuli in 2007.



“Tell me, what happened to my husband?”  
Sandya Eknaligoda, wife of missing cartoon-  
ist Prageeth Eknaligoda.



“Where is democracy in Sri Lanka?”  
Bandiweve Diyasena Thero.



Mothers and wives of the disappeared  
persons from the North and East of Sri Lanka  
participating at the commemoration event.



*“People in North and East are prevented from mourning for their loved ones killed in war. People in North and East should be allowed to mourn for their loved ones who were killed in war. People in other parts of the country think that the war is over and Tamils in North and East are living happily and peacefully. But it is incorrect! There is a silent war going on in North and East of Sri Lanka. Government rapidly closed down the Menik Farm before the upcoming UPR (Universal Periodic Review)! Media needs to highlight the ‘hidden issues’ in the North and East,”* Reverend Fr Jeyabalan Cross.



Tamil fathers whose sons have been disappeared over the past few years.



*“In North and South our children go missing”* Banner in Sinhala and Tamil.



Families and friends of the disappeared picketing after paying floral tribute.



Families and friends of the disappeared picketing after paying floral tribute.

*Photographs and captions courtesy of Dushiyanthini Kanagasabapathipillai.*



# **The human rights folk school approach: An example from Indonesia**

*AHRC staff*

Human rights training or education is often understood as a one-way interaction activity where experts come for teaching and participants for learning. It is normally conducted so as to introduce various international human rights instruments. Those attending such meetings clearly know however, that these teachings will remain as teachings. They can hardly be made use of in practice by the participants in their locality. This failure stems from the idea that participants should learn first without taking their local wisdom into consideration. Indeed, this way of delivering so called 'knowledge' does not work in most countries of Asia, since the problems causing human rights violations are not addressed or discussed. Apart from that, the approach of delivering knowledge to local activists will give the impression that changes can take place only when there is a party from outside interfering—which is often the case. In fact, no lasting change can be made from outside or from the top; it has to come from within the community itself, by firstly discussing the problems amongst themselves.

Keeping in mind the limitations and ineffectiveness of such a 'knowledge delivery' approach, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has been implementing the 'folk school' methodology in its human rights training programmes for the past many years. This methodology generally consists of three important stages: the identification of human rights problems, discussion amongst those who have similar problems, and sharing knowledge and ideas amongst each other in order to find a solution.

## **Identify the problems in your area**

The first stage in the folk school approach requires participants to identify the human rights problems they have in their area. Whereas it is essential for the organisers of the training to get an overview on the state of human rights in a particular area, there should not be any strict assumption on the type of human rights problems that the participants perceive to be the most important. Giving the participants the opportunity to identify the problems not only develops their understanding and critical thinking regarding ongoing situations, but will also lead the discussion to be more solution oriented. In particular, the end solution will be more relevant to their own context. The main role of the organizers

at this stage is simply to facilitate the discussion and to encourage participants to analyze the cause of problems taking place. It is not necessary to provide academic analysis or research on the problems; rather, through this process, the participants are encouraged to conduct their own analysis.

The AHRC recently conducted a human rights meeting in Padang, West Sumatra in cooperation with Padang Legal Aid Institute (LBH Padang). From the beginning it was understood that the meeting would focus on the issue of torture. Why and how torture is such an issue in West Sumatra, however, was something that was left for the participants to discuss. Through this discussion, we were able to identify some of the causes. Some were quite general and can be found in other countries, such as the low rate of torture complaints due to the fear of further reprisal, the absence of any law criminalizing torture, and corruption within the police and judiciary. Some other factors, however, were relatively unique due to the strong influence of culture, tradition and religious belief in the area. A participant from Aceh, for instance, highlighted that torture cases in which the victim had died are unlikely to be brought to the court as most Muslims in Aceh believe that there should not be any fuss made over dead people, as otherwise they will not rest in peace.

By focusing on one case of human rights violation, participants can approach or understand the case from various perspectives: legally, practically or socially. The main problems that the participants identified during the meeting, leading to torture, in the context of Indonesia and particularly West Sumatra are as follows:

- Difficult access to facilities where liberty is deprived at;
- Ineffective witness protection mechanism;
- Schedule of court hearings not informed to defence lawyer;
- Police offer money to settle torture cases;
- Lengthy criminal procedure results in the dropping of torture complaints;
- Misapplication of law against perpetrators;
- The role of the police to enforce torture victims to sign a peace settlement;
- Lenient punishment is meted to the police compared to the gravity of the crime committed;
- Issues on torture and human rights abuses are hardly taken up or discussed by the media or public;
- Torture victims usually come from a poor socio-economic status;
- Police torture doesn't always leave any marks;
- Torture victims are intimidated and threatened, as well as portrayed in a negative manner;
- Quota/case target phenomenon by the police;
- Fabrication of cases;

- Poor police recruitment system and lack of proper training, not only on human rights but also on interrogation and investigation methods;
- Rampant corruption by the police;
- Deliberate disregard of autopsy report on torture victims;
- Lack of forensic scientists.

The findings above are only the gist presented by participants when they identified the problems or obstacles they face while dealing with cases of human rights violations in their area. Our role as facilitator was simply to listen carefully and ask for clarification when required.

### **Discuss with others who have similar problems**

Once one participant started identifying a problem, other participants began sharing their own problems. While the human rights violations they deal with may differ, they have common understandings and problems in their area. Participants actively asked each other questions, and once a common area was identified, the discussion was in fact led by the participants themselves. Again, the role of facilitator was only required for clarification of the discussion or in a situation where too many participants wanted to discuss at the same time. This approach allowed the participants, who all have varied and different experiences, to learn from each other.

Not only did this meeting provide a platform for local activists to share their perspectives and difficulties, but it also provides the possibility of building new networks.

### **Find ways to solve them**

An important message delivered to the participants was that nobody will know about the human rights problems they face if they do not voice them to the public. There is no shortcut to solve such problems unless a strong request is made by the people. For such a request to be made, it is first necessary to create and influence public opinion, which can be done only if people know about the problems.

During the meeting, the AHRC introduced its urgent appeals programme to the participants. A brief explanation on the human rights mechanisms within the UN was also given, with heavy emphasis on how civil society can make the most use of them. Two important things needed to be highlighted to the participants at this stage: first, that international human rights mechanisms have limitations, and are in no way a substitute to domestic or local advocacy. Secondly, given the lack of mechanisms to enforce international law, the best result that can be expected from international human rights mechanisms is the creation of public opinion.

Good documentation plays an important role in creating public opinion. For this reason, after identifying and discussing the problems they face, the participants were divided into groups to discuss and prepare documentation on a specific human rights case. The documentation was later presented by a representative of each group. To ensure the documentation is clear and carries adequate information, participants from other groups were given the opportunity to ask questions and give suggestions to the presenting group.

One particular obstacle in creating public discourse on human rights issues is their invisibility in mainstream media. Even in instances where a human rights issue is reported by the mainstream media, support from the general public usually lasts only for a short period of time. Their interest quickly shifts elsewhere. Furthermore, realizing this trend, government officials and the police often deliberately distract the public with other news. Maintaining public interest and discussion was one of the difficulties identified by participants.

#### **Challenges in advocating and litigating torture cases as identified by participants:**

- ◆ Absence of torture preventive mechanism;
- ◆ Absence of law criminalizing torture;
- ◆ Unwillingness of torture victims to submit complaints;
- ◆ Police lack of understanding on human rights and proper investigation techniques. This problem is partly caused by the poor recruitment system of the police;
- ◆ High cost of being police officers (as one has to bribe, etc.) encourages them to extort money from people and take financial advantages from cases they are dealing with;
- ◆ Prevalence of 'quota/cases target phenomenon' leads to the fabrication of charges and framing by the police;
- ◆ Non transparent proceeding under Propam, the police's internal disciplinary mechanism;
- ◆ State commissions such as the Witnesses and Victims Protection Agency (LPSK) and National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) still do not work optimally;
- ◆ Law enforcement officials are not independent: (1) cooperation on bad practices, e.g. corruption, amongst them; (2) torture committed by military officers are tried by Military Tribunal;
- ◆ Charges imposed by law enforcement officials on perpetrators of torture are too light;

- ◆ The difficulty to prove torture allegations before the court: (1) the difficulty to find witnesses willing to testify; (2) scientific proofs such as medical/autopsy report is disregarded by law enforcement officials; (3) difficulty to obtain expert testimonies, especially on forensic matters;
- ◆ Punishment handed down to the perpetrators of torture is too light;
- ◆ Police and the media often work together in creating bad image of torture victims, i.e. they are criminals;
- ◆ Lack of law enforcement officials' understanding on restitution mechanism established by law.

## **Closing remarks**

An important principle underlying the folk school approach implemented by the AHRC is that local organizations and activists are in a better position to judge the situation and problems in their area. Therefore, it is not the approach of the AHRC to come to the community and lecture them. The relationship between the AHRC and the organizations or individuals it meets is not a subordinate one; rather, we meet with them to learn and understand the challenges they face in advocating human rights cases and to provide assistance upon their request and need, in ways we are capable of.

Having meetings and discussions on human rights issues, and brainstorming solutions are alone insufficient to end all the problems a community is experiencing. The next challenge will be how local organizations, using the findings above, raise the matters both to local and international communities. The aim of this meeting was merely to open the gate of possibility in accessing those communities.

# Sufi poetry

*Bulleh Shah*

What is largely known about Bulleh Shah comes through legends, and is subjective, to the point that historians cannot even agree on the precise date and place of his birth. Some “facts” about his life have been pieced together from his own writings, while others have been passed down through oral traditions.

Bulleh Shah’s real name was Syed Aliraza Shah Rizvi, he was a Punjabi Muslim Sufi poet, a humanist and philosopher from 1680-1757. He is believed to have been born in 1680, in the small village of Uch, Bahawalpur, Punjab, now in Pakistan, where his ancestors had migrated to from Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan.

When he was six months old, his parents relocated to Malakwal, where his father, Shah Muhammad Darwaish, was a preacher in the village mosque and a teacher. His father later got a job in Pandoke, about 50 miles southeast of Kasur. Bulleh Shah received his early schooling in Pandoke, and moved to Kasur for higher education. He also received education from Maulana Mohiyuddin. His spiritual teacher was the eminent Sufi saint, Shah Inayat Qadiri.

Bulleh Shah practiced the Sufi tradition of Punjabi poetry established by poets like Shah Hussain (1538–1599), Sultan Bahu (1629–1691), and Shah Sharaf (1640–1724). Bulleh Shah lived in the same period as the famous Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai (1689–1752). His lifespan also overlapped with the legendary Punjabi poet Waris Shah (1722–1798) of Heer Ranjha fame, and the famous Sindhi Sufi poet Abdul Wahad (1739 – 1829), better known by his pen-name, Sachal Sarmast (“truth seeking leader of the intoxicated ones”).

## *Stay silent to survive*

People cannot stand to hear the truth.  
They are at your throat if you speak it.  
They keep away from those who speak it.  
But truth is sweet to its lovers!

Truth destroys shara [shariah: religion].  
Brings rapture to its lovers,  
And unexpected riches,

Which shara obscures.  
Stay silent to survive.

Those lovers cannot remain silent  
Who have inhaled the fragrance of truth.  
Those who have plaited love into their lives,  
Leave this world of falsehood.  
Stay silent to survive.

Bulleh Shah speaks the truth.  
He uncovers the truth of shara [shariah].  
He opens the path to the fourth level,  
Which shara [shariah] obscures.  
Stay silent to survive.

### ***Nor Hindu nor Muslim***

Neither Hindu nor Muslim,  
Sacrificing pride, let us sit together.  
Neither Sunni nor Shia,  
Let us walk the road of peace.  
We are neither hungry nor replete,  
Neither naked nor covered up.  
Neither weeping nor laughing,  
Neither ruined nor settled,  
We are not sinners or pure and virtuous,  
What is sin and what is virtue, this I do not know.  
Says Bulheh Shah, one who attaches his self with the lord,  
Gives up both Hindu and Muslim.

Bulleh is neither Rafzi nor Sunni, nor learned  
nor an intellectual nor a Jaini.  
I have learnt the lesson of love of God alone.  
People say: Bulleh is an Infidel (Kafir)  
and an idol-worshipper.  
But in the Lord's court, both the Momin [believer] and Kafir  
are treated alike.

# Velasco's film a true social canvas

Meryam Dabhoiwala

Review of Joey Velasco's short film, 'Canvas of Society':

Part 1- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD7acjjWRG4>

Part 2- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN2gKZV-YUs&feature=relmfu>

The 'Canvas of Society' is a short film made by late Filipino businessman turned artist, Joey Velasco, on the 12 street children he painted in 2005. He met these children in Manila and used them as models for his 'Last Supper with Street Children' painting, titled 'Table of Hope'. This painting of Jesus breaking bread with homeless and malnourished children was Velasco's first and most notable work. Velasco started painting to battle depression from a life threatening kidney ailment. His work depicted Jesus in ordinary Filipino life, giving him the label of 'heartist'. Velasco died on 23 July 2010 of kidney failure.

The 'Table of Hope' is a wonderful twist to the original 'Last Supper' painting. Not only does it portray the reality of malnutrition and child labour in the Philippines, it also questions the country's values and ethics. In a country where 90 percent of the population is Christian (largely Roman Catholic), the film underlines that Christ's principles of loving your neighbour, of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick have not prevented over three million child laborers and malnourished children. Why are there no government programmes adequately addressing these issues? Why is society keeping its silence? At the end of the film, Velasco explains Jesus' bowed head as being tired, dismayed: "It's your turn this time. I'm always the one giving my share. Do you expect a 'miracle' again?" Velasco notes that whereas he initially thought that these children must be used to their poverty, in fact, 'It is not that they are used to their poverty, but that we are used to it'.

Velasco's narration is as humble as his work, and the short film is without any sensationalism or drama that is sometimes found in documentaries of such a nature. Velasco honestly questions his life and values, his living, and that of his society. His genuine interest in the children and





his perception of their goodness and innocence is touching. "She is more generous, more life-giving than me," he says of Nene. Of the dead in the cemetery where she works: "At least they give her life; how about me, do I give life to others?" In an interview, Velasco noted that he learnt many things from these children, things that he "never learned in school, like the nobility of character, courage and faith in the face of unspeakable poverty".

The inspiration for 'Table of Hope' came from Velasco's four children, who were being picky about their food; "So, I thought of providing them with a visual reminder, strong and challenging, of their blessings of life and to appreciate what was on the table." Velasco went to different squatter areas of Manila to seek his models, where he fed the children noodles and juice, and took their photos unnoticed. When his painting was complete, he hung it on his dining room wall.

Initially, Velasco did not know the stories of his models. When he and his painting gained fame however, Velasco started feeling uncomfortable. "The subjects of my painting were observing me. I could no longer escape them. They became missionaries to me, and took me on a spiritual journey."

Velasco retraced his steps using his photos. "I searched for each one of them, and it was only then, when I knew who they were, was I able to find myself and my God. I thought they were the ones who were lost, only to find out I was the one actually lost." At the end of the film, Velasco reveals that he saw himself reflected on the canvas of society through these children.

Each child is introduced in the film from their portrait at the Table of Hope, which is a nice technique, switching between a painted image and video footage. Each child is shown in their natural environment and with their natural behaviour, and this is used to question Velasco's own life and actions, as well as serving as an indictment of his society:

While my children swim in a private resort, Michael swims in a mountain of muck of rotten garbage. I am included in the filth of garbage, I am one of the ingredients of this rotten society. Have I done anything to make my society smell good? Or am I just good at complaining?

'Canvas of Society' differs from other films not only due to Velasco's first person narrative style, but also in the heartfelt questions he asks of himself. Listening to Velasco ask such questions inevitably leads viewers to ask them of themselves as well. And the answers will leave most of us uncomfortable and ashamed. "My tummy may be filled with so much food, but is my inner life full also? Is my soul malnourished?"

Apart from the children seated at the table, Velasco's painting also includes one child scavenging under the table, the inspiration for whom is an award winning photograph by Kevin Carter, of a child from Sudan. The end of the film shows this child, as well as other images depicting Africa's terrible famines and its toll on both children and adults. In depression, Carter committed suicide after three months of taking the photograph, and Velasco hopes that a similar fate does not await him.

Children are said to be the future. Emong's comment on seeing Velasco's painting, "We invited Jesus to eat," speaks to a wonderful innocence and generosity. If this could indeed become society's future, the world would be a much better place, and perhaps ills such as child labour and malnutrition would not exist. Unfortunately, these children will most certainly lose their innocence before long, particularly if they remain in their present conditions, amidst drugs, violence and poverty. As Velasco asks of little Itok, "is he the one who will stab a dagger [in] my chest in the future"?

If art is a mirror of reality, an attempt to provoke and inspire change, then Joey Velasco was a true artist. He was surely a true Christian as well. Taking his cue from Jesus, Velasco did his part to paint a better society. Now, it is our turn.

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# Canadian prime minister nominates Malala for Nobel Prize

*Change.org*

*(Press release issued by Change.org)*

**TORONTO, ON** -- On Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Harper and his wife Laureen declared support for a petition calling on the Nobel Foundation to award 15 year old Malala Yousafzai the Nobel Peace Prize for her courageous work promoting access to education for girls in the Swat valley in Pakistan, an area once controlled by the Taliban.

After tweeting his support for the petition the Prime Minister said, “Laureen and I are pleased to support Malala Yousafzai, a determined young woman who has done so much to promote education and women’s rights in her native Pakistan. All Canadians salute her courage and tenacity and wish her well in her recovery.”

The petition was launched on Change.org by Tarek Fatah, a well-known Muslim Canadian commentator who had been inspired by Malala’s work and was outraged after the youth was shot by a Taliban gunman in October.

Tarek’s petition made clear that the first step was to ensure that Malala would be nominated and called on Canada’s federal leaders to make a major statement by unanimously nominating her for the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. The petition has achieved this goal with all party leaders coming out in support. Four nomination letters have been sent to the Nobel Foundation and one party is currently completing their letter.

“I am absolutely delighted the Prime Minister has nominated Malala for the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize,” said Fatah. “The fact that all of Canada’s political party leaders could join together to lend their name to this noble cause is not just a validation of Malala’s enormous courage, but also the greatness of Canada where good people of all political stripes came together to support a child halfway across the world.”

Also on Wednesday, Canadian Senator Salma Atallahjan visited with Malala and her family in a UK hospital and had the opportunity to tell them about the ‘Nobel For Malala’ petition. The Senator was happy to report “Malala is doing very, very well and the doctors are really pleased with her progress.”

While Fatah's 'Nobel For Malala' petition was the first, it has now sparked a global phenomenon. People around the world are setting up this same petition in their own country asking for their political leaders to come together to nominate Malala for the Nobel Prize. Pages have been started in eight countries including the UK, France and Pakistan and the counter on the petition reflects the cumulative efforts of all these petitions from around the world.

Fatah is asking all Canadians and people around the world to continue signing the petition to encourage other world leaders to come out in support of Malala, and ultimately, to push the Nobel Foundation to award Malala the Nobel Peace Prize.

"This major petition victory comes just as we reached one million Canadian users," said Jordy Gold, Campaigns Director for Change.org in Canada. "It is incredible to see how people are using the site to bring together not only our federal party leaders, but also people who care about the same issues from all around the world."

**Live signature totals from Tarek Fatah's 'Nobel For Malala' campaign:**

<http://www.change.org/Malala>

**For more information on Change.org, please visit:**

<http://www.change.org/about>

Change.org is the world's largest petition platform, empowering people everywhere to create the change they want to see. There are more than 20 million users in 196 countries who use our tools to transform their communities – locally, nationally and globally.

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# **Pakistan's religious minorities suffer abuse and harassment**

*Baseer Naveed & Stewart Sloan*

Pakistan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in November 2012 with a thumping majority vote. It was one of the highest votes received by any country, despite having a human rights record that shows little compliance with the pledges it made in 2008.

The ongoing excuse for Pakistan's continuation of human rights abuses and non-compliance with international obligations is the fight against terrorism and defence of sovereignty and national interests. However, there seems to be little progress in the fight against terrorism, as can be witnessed by the almost daily attacks by religious extremists and Taliban elements from inside and outside the country's borders.

In international fora, Pakistan's leaders continue to spout their commitment to ensuring freedom of religion and equality for all. Their actions behind closed doors are somewhat different however, and it is not possible that the voting countries are unaware of this; this casts doubt on the sincerity of the countries that voted for Pakistan's election. Perhaps they are happier with the devil they know, afraid of what might happen if they have no control whatsoever over that devil's actions.

Pakistan will undoubtedly be proud of the number of votes it received, but this may lead to the false idea that the country must be doing something right, and therefore may continue to ignore its international obligations. Perhaps now is the time for the country to prove that it is worthy of this reward by complying with its obligations. Now is the time for the international community to ask definitively when Pakistan is going to abolish its blasphemy laws, introduce legislation to make torture a crime, and ensure that the military is placed firmly under the Constitution in order to stop enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

It was just a few short weeks ago when Hina Rabbani Khar, Foreign Minister and head of the Pakistan delegation stood before the UN at the Universal Periodic Review and assured her audience that freedom of belief and religion was practiced in Pakistan. She obviously

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does not read the newspapers. Perhaps such a thing is below her and she waits for one of her aides to inform her of what is going on in the real world. Perhaps her aides do not consider the harassment and physical attacks on members of the Hindu minority to be a matter worthy of attention. Whatever the case, harassment and attacks on the Hindu minority are a very real occurrence and one that the government of Pakistan is turning a blind eye to in its ongoing policy of appeasement towards the religious extremists.

In one of the most recent incidents on November 8, a group of Islamic extremists arrived at a Hindu temple on the outskirts of Karachi shouting, "Kill the Hindus, kill the children of the Hindus!" Armed with pistols, the group destroyed the temple fittings and ripped off the golden bangles worn by the women. Men and women were beaten indiscriminately and the attackers were so sure of their impunity from any government action they did not even bother to conceal their identities or cover their faces.

This was not an isolated case; indeed, it was the second time this particular temple has been attacked, and there have been many such incidents reported. Even Muslims who speak out in public in defence and support of Hindus leave themselves open to attack.

Marvi Sirmed is an outspoken defender of democracy and human rights. She has particularly spoken out on the rights of minorities such as the Hindus, Christians and Shias. More recently, Marvi was instrumental in the campaign to free Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl who was wrongly accused of blasphemy after a Muslim cleric planted evidence against her. Marvi has been receiving threats from rightwing and extremist groups for several months now, and for her own security has had to change her place of residence.

On November 3, unidentified gunmen opened fire on the car in which Marvi was traveling, but fortunately she and her driver escaped unharmed. The attack took place in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. While the police announced that they have started an investigation into the attack, no results have been forthcoming.

Another area of concern involving the Hindu and Christian minorities is that of forced marriage and conversion. Typically, a Hindu girl goes missing and when she next contacts her family they find that she is married to a Muslim boy. There have been numerous court hearings in several cases to determine whether the conversion was voluntary, and in each case students from nearby madrassas attend court chanting demands that the conversion be confirmed and intimidating the judges. An NGO worker said that in the 100 cases that he had personally worked on, only one girl had been safely returned to her family.

There is now a mass exodus of Hindus from Pakistan, which is noted but ignored by the government. The impetus for this exodus is generally believed to be the forced conversion

and marriage of a Hindu girl, Rinkle Kumari. Even a *Suo Motu* action by the Supreme Court of Pakistan yielded no favourable results, and the girl herself, perhaps realizing the helplessness of her situation, opted to remain with her Muslim 'husband'. Rinkle's relatives allege that she was forced to decide in favor of her husband and her uncle said that the Hindu community had submitted to the kidnapping for ransom practices against them; however, kidnappings of girls followed by forced conversions so alarmed the community that their fear increases with every passing day.

At the time of Pakistan's creation, the Hindu community had the choice of remaining in Pakistani territory or immigrating to India. They chose to remain loyal to a country whose government is now turning a blind eye to the harassment and abuse perpetrated against them by religious extremists.

The glowing image that Hina Rabbani painted of Pakistan blatantly ignored the harassment and abuse of Hindus, Christians, Shias and the Ahmadiya community. She ignored the several attacks on members of the Shia community in which buses were stopped by people in military uniform, Shias identified, lined up on the side of the road and shot, execution style.

It is ironic that on the very day the Foreign Minister was giving her speech to the UN, the Ahmadiya community in Pakistan was forbidden to hold their Eid celebrations and prayer meetings like other Muslims. One can only laugh at the Foreign Minister when she claims that religious minorities enjoy complete freedom. What freedom forbids the Ahmadiya community from voting in the general elections so they can have a voice in parliament or from praying as they wish?

Moreover, members of the Ahmadiya community are persecuted, harassed and killed, with no action taken by government bodies. On August 20 in Ghatialian, the police registered a case against four Ahmadis, Mr Naeem Ahmad, Mr Gulfam Naeem, Mr Ahsan Ramzan and Mr Shahid Abdullah, after receiving the complaint of a mulla, Qari Afzal. The reason for the complaint was that the four men had hurt his feelings and intimidated him. Interestingly, three of the accused were not even present at the time of the alleged incident, which indicates a fabricated charge. Although they obtained temporary bail at the initial hearing, on October 15 the Additional Session Judge of Pasroor changed the applied penal code in the case with PPC 298-C, an anti-Ahmadiyya clause, and rejected bail. The police arrested all the accused and sent them to jail until a new bail application was moved in the Magistrate's Court, which was granted on October 23. The accused still face trial.

Anti-Ahmadiyya activities are nothing new, but incidents have risen steeply in Hafizabad, with the desecration of an Ahmadiyya graveyard by the police on the instructions of

a group of mullas. The police officials urged the Ahmadis to commit the desecration themselves, and when they refused a group of men went to the cemetery and erased Islamic inscriptions from the gravestones.

The problems for the Ahmadis started with the amendment to the Constitution in 1973 during the reign of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which declared them as 'non-Muslim'. However, it was during the regime of General Zia Ul Haq that they were truly disenfranchised. Ahmadis were denied the right to declare themselves as Muslim. They were not allowed to build mosques similar to those of the Muslims. They could not write or inscribe Quranic verses on the walls of their mosques. And as described above, even inscribing Quranic verses on their gravestones left them open to attack by religious zealots.

Sadly the sectarian prejudice against Ahmadis even extends to their right to education; another area in which the government has failed miserably to live up to its responsibilities. Ms Afshan Malik was a student in the Government Degree College for Women, Gulshane Ravi, Lahore. While participating at the Natiya (poems in the honour of the Holy Prophet PBUH) competition in the Punjab Youth Festival, her recital was so well-liked that the Chief Minister of Punjab asked her to recite another Naat while the results were being compiled. She did so and was loudly applauded by the audience. She was awarded the first prize and a trophy.

After a few days, her rivals came to know that the two Naats she recited were written by Ahmadi elders, and started to harass her in college. They even tried to get a police case registered against her. When the situation became serious, Afshan had to discontinue her studies, and her family later moved residence for their safety.

Even Pakistan's only Nobel Laureate was not spared from anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment. An Ahmadi, Dr Abdus Salam won the Nobel prize in 1979 for his work in theoretical physics and for his discovery of the 'God' particle. Dr Salam was the first Pakistani and the first and only Muslim to receive a Nobel Prize in Physics. He contributed heavily to the rise of Pakistan within the international physics community. In a career spanning 45 years, he worked tirelessly to promote training and research into physics. He worked as one of the science advisors to the government from 1960 to 1974 and played a major role in Pakistan's science infrastructure. After the parliament passed a bill declaring the Ahmadiyya sect as non-Islamic however, Dr Salam left Pakistan dejected.

Dr Salam passed away on November 21, 1996 in England at the age of 70. In the town of Alloway, Scotland, the cottage where the famed poet, Robbie Burns lived has been preserved for future generations. It is now a museum honouring the life and times of the 'Bard'. Sadly no such honour has been paid to the house where Dr Salam resided. Instead of being preserved as a mark of honour, it has been allowed to fall into disrepair



and the local residents hang their washing from its crumbling walls; a deliberate snub to show that Ahmadis, scientists and Nobel Laureates have no place in Pakistan's history and culture.

Likewise, his headstone originally read, "The first Muslim Nobel Laureate Dr Abdus Salam." After the vandals were finished it, it now reads only, "Dr Abdus Salam". The government remains apathetic to the extremists' actions to belittle his work. There has been no investigation into the vandalism and to be honest, none is expected. This also speaks to the apathy of civil society and the institutes of higher learning. It is shameful that they are unable to respect the scientific achievements of one of its own citizens. Indeed, Dr. Salam's community has contributed more to the creation of Pakistan than any other religious sect or group. Unfortunately, in a time where the only heroes of the country are the soldiers supposedly guardians of its sovereignty, the Jihadists that operate with the full knowledge of the government to protect the 'purity' of Islam, there is no place for scientists and academics who work to enlighten society and advocate scientific knowledge. The government of Pakistan has turned its back on a man that dedicated his life to the betterment of his country; a country that disowned him because of his faith.

Though Dr Salam has been treated as 'persona non grata', one might have thought there would be hope for Pakistan's civil society in the person of Malala Yousufzai, the young girl of only 15 who stood up to the religious extremists and fought for her right, and the rights of other Pakistani girls to an education. She is the example that Pakistan's civil society should be following. Unfortunately, Malala too has now joined Dr Salam in the group of persons that are 'persona non grata'. She is said to be pro-American and even some state organizations have joined the chorus of hatred towards her. A Muslim group in the United Kingdom, where Malala is undergoing treatment for the gunshot injuries she sustained during the attempt on her life, also declared her eligible for assassination. The group has been angered by her public comments in support of the occupying US forces in the region and her mocking of the hijab and jihad. The group plans to announce a fatwa against her on November 30 at a mosque which was previously raided by British forces due to its religious extremism.

It is yet to be seen if the UK government will take further action towards this mosque and the group based in its territory.

It is high time for the Pakistan government to cease its policy of appeasement towards the religious extremists and armed forces. The country's true heroes are not Jihadists and hate mongers; the true heroes are the individuals who work for the betterment of the people and humanity in general.

# **A policeman's love letter to his girlfriend**

*Baseer Naveed*

My Love,

You are as precious to me as the Police Rules of 1861. The thrill I get from knowing that you are in my life is like that of arresting a top notorious gang leader. Whenever I see you I want to grab you as if you were a hardened criminal with a huge reward on your head and put you in chains. You look very beautiful when you talk slowly, innocently with fear on your face as if you are giving a confessional statement with the sensational revelation of an amateur accused person. The other day you were mistaken and thought I was teasing you, but actually I was doing a body search because of the ongoing law and order situation.

When you did not contact me for many days I started rusting like the ammunition lying in the police stocks. The other day I saw you with a suspect person and that was the reason which compelled me to take action under the criminal acts. I am a follower of law but when your replies stopped then I had to send a police summons to you. Your indifferent attitude to my feelings is nothing less than interfering in the affairs of official work.

My love, when I look at you I think you are so beautiful and your big blue eyes remind me of the headlights of a police armoured car.

When next I encounter you it won't be with an AK-47.

Your frustrated paramour,

PC 197856

# Practicing Ethics in Action

*Ethics in Action* begins with the realization that both law and morality have failed the people of many countries, who are today facing incredible forms of cruelty that they have little power to eradicate. Despite all the rhetoric of empowerment, the reality witnessed in most Asian countries is desperation and powerlessness. The two ingredients necessary for any real empowerment of ordinary people are law and morality. If living conditions are to improve, defective legal systems and the failures of upholding ethics and morality cannot be ignored. *article 2*, a publication of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, sister organization of the Asian Human Rights Commission, is devoted to discussing matters relating to defective legal systems obstructing the implementation of human rights. *Ethics in Action* will be devoted to discussing how movements and leaderships claiming to uphold ethics and morality have failed to promote and protect human rights.

The AHRC invites submissions to *Ethics in Action* by individuals and organizations interested in issues of human rights, ethics and morality in Asia. Submissions can include articles, poetry, fiction and artwork. For more information, please write to [eia@ahrc.asia](mailto:eia@ahrc.asia).

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