

URGENT ACTION

PRIME MINISTER ROLLS OUT PLAN TO TACKLE SMOG CRISIS

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan held a press conference on 30 November solely to address the smog crisis that gripped Punjab during 2019. Accepting that smog was a “silent killer”, he rolled out a plan in line with expert recommendations to tackle the toxic air pollution. We welcome the responsiveness of the Government of Pakistan, and their willingness to address the crisis. We will be monitoring the situation closely to see them follow through on their commitment to clear the air.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

In November and December 2019, the air in Punjab, Pakistan’s most populous province, was so toxic that people’s health and lives were in grave danger. Schools were forced to shut down, recorded respiratory illnesses were on the rise, and it became painful to even breathe. On 21 November, the Air Quality Index in Lahore, the capital of Punjab, reached 598 at 1pm – far exceeding the threshold for ‘hazardous’ levels, which begin at 300. On that day, and others, Lahore recorded the worst air pollution in the world.

In response to the crisis, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action for the people of Lahore in a bid to mobilise its supporters around the world to campaign on behalf of the entire population, due to the hazardous smog engulfing Pakistan’s second largest city. The campaign received global coverage, making headlines in The New York Times, Time, BBC, Newsweek, The Washington Post, and breaking news bulletins on Pakistani news channels; with the media calling out the Government of Pakistan for failing to prioritise the public health crisis that the smog presented.

On 30 November, nine days after the action was initiated, Prime Minister Imran Khan held a press conference outlining a plan to tackle the smog and emphasising the deadly consequences of letting the crisis unravel. This is the first time a prime minister has held a press conference solely to discuss air pollution – showing that the campaign elevated the issue to the very highest levels in the government.

Further to the response by the Government of Pakistan, the Federal Minister for Climate Change, Malik Amin Aslam, wrote to Amnesty International saying, “I want to assure you that our Ministry is committed to play its role for shifting the landscape in Pakistan towards a cleaner, greener and sustainable future and particularly targeting the growing challenge of air pollution and climate change”.

While the commitments made by the authorities to address the smog crisis have been welcomed, the air in Punjab remains at levels regarded as unhealthy to very unhealthy. We will be monitoring the situation closely to ensure that the Government of Pakistan follows through on their commitment to clear the air.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: The people of Lahore – They/Them

THIS IS THE SECOND AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 153/19

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/1370/2019/en/>

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