

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Regarding:
Mr. Aitzaz Ahsan
Senior Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan
President Supreme Court Bar Association.

On the 9th of March, 2007 as I was detained in my house after refusing to succumb to the pressure of the military chief and his commanders to resign, I had one main point to ponder upon: who to retain as a lawyer in the proceedings that lay ahead? I did not have much difficulty in making the choice. Having been judge of the superior courts for several years and the Chief Justice of Pakistan for almost two, I had had the opportunity of making a judgment of the character and competence of all the lawyers of Pakistan. During those days of my first confinement, I came to the firm conclusion that I could safely place the prospects of my life, reputation and liberty in the hands of Mr. Aitzaz Ahsan.

I was amply vindicated in my choice of an attorney. Mr. Ahsan represented me first before the Supreme Judicial Council and then before the Supreme Court with such industry, dedication and competence that a 13-member bench of the Supreme Court (some of whom would have benefited from my ouster) unanimously ruled to reinstate me on July 20, 2007. I am quite clear in my mind that this might not have been possible without Ahsan's untiring preparation and advocacy.

Mr. Ahsan is a Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He has been a federal minister and an eminent parliamentarian. That he has been the defence counsel for the late Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, in the many cases brought against her, is not surprising. He has, for many years, been the most prominent attorney in her party, the Pakistan Peoples' Party. But what does establish the trust people can place in him is that he was also the choice of Mr. Nawaz Sharif, her rival. This is the more surprising because Mr. Ahsan was, himself, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate while Mr. Sharif was the Prime Minister. In that period Ahsan was famous for his abrasive, though dignified, criticism of Mr. Sharif. Yet when the latter was confined in a solitary cell in the Attock Fort prison, he chose to place his trust in Mr. Ahsan even though there were several prominent lawyers in his own Party.

Having defended accused before military courts convened in its forbidding confines, Ahsan was not new to the Attock Fort prison. He is, indeed, known for his commitments to human rights litigation pro bono. Victims naturally turn to him, as did the indigent gang-rape victim Ms. Mukhtaran Mai. Ahsan represents her in her appeal pending in the Supreme Court.


Ahsan has also made his mark as an author. It is rare for people so active in politics and public life in Pakistan as, I believe, in most of the developing world, to take to the pen. Ahsan has authored many articles on human rights and public issues. Above all, he is

author of two highly acclaimed books: "The Indus Saga" and "Divided by Democracy" (the latter volume having been co-authored with the renowned scholar Lord Meghnad Desai). Both books bring out Ahsan's long-standing vision of religious harmony and peaceful co-existence between all countries of South Asia. He spells his vision out in the vast historical panorama that is the back-drop of "The Indus Saga." But he carries this theme through his poetry as well. One of his most recent poems, written during several of months of detention since November last, has indeed become quite a household ditty. It too pleads for constitutionalism, social harmony and religious tolerance.

As a public figure, a Parliamentarian, a lawyer, an author and a poet Ahsan has championed the cause of human rights and always campaigned against human rights abuse. To do this anywhere is commendable. To do so under military regimes is courageous. And to do so consistently in and out of prison, without wavering, is outstanding.

Presently, Mr. Ahsan is the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and has been leading the world renowned Lawyers' Movement for the restoration of the judges prevented from functioning by an order of the Chief of Army Staff since November 03, 2007. Ahsan was himself arrested and detained on that day.

It gives me great pleasure to recommend Mr. Aitzaz Ahsan for the 2008 UN Human Rights' Award.


IFTIKHAR MOHAMMAD CHOUDHRY,
CHIEF JUSTICE OF PAKISTAN,*
ISLAMABAD.

* I have written this in the capacity of the Chief Justice of Pakistan because my purported 'removal' by an order of the Army Chief was illegal and unconstitutional. The only manner for the removal of a judge of a superior court is provided in Article 209 of the Constitution of Pakistan. That is by a process before the Supreme Judicial Council. No individual has, or can have, that authority.