

Hina Jilani

Advocate

Supreme Court of Pakistan

AGHS Law Associates

131-E/1, Gulberg-III, Lahore- Pakistan.

Phone: (042) 5763234 - 5763235 - 5710709

Fax: (042) 5763236 - 5710235 - 5883582

Email: hina@brain.net.pk, aghs@brain.net.pk

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Nomination of Barrister Aitezaz Ahsan for the award of the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights.

I have known Barrister Aitezaz Ahsan for the past thirty years as a friend, inspiring lawyer, politician and a fellow human rights activist. In his professional capacity and as a politician he has consistently worked for the survival of democracy, promotion of human rights and respect for the rule of law in Pakistan. His principled stands to safeguard democracy resulted in several periods of imprisonment under different military and civilian dictatorships. He has always been the first port of call for human rights defenders who have needed legal assistance or political support against the repressive measures adopted by State authorities.

His commitment for human rights and democratic values did not wane even during the periods that he served in the cabinet under elected governments. Human rights advocates, in particular, found him to be a staunch ally in promoting human rights policies and initiatives.

His efforts in the more recent months for upholding the principle of judicial independence have been acknowledged nationally and internationally. His leadership of the lawyers' movement has inspired the legal community with the confidence to sustain their struggle. He continues to lead this peaceful movement with integrity and wisdom, notwithstanding the immense risk to his personal security.

The civil society in Pakistan considers Aitezaz Ahsan to be a valuable asset for the promotion and protection of human rights and attainment of democracy. His courageous and principled struggle deserves to be recognized and celebrated. I, therefore, fully support and endorse the nomination of Aitezaz Ahsan made by the Asian Human Rights Commission and the Asian Legal Resource Center for the award of the United Nations Prize in the field of human rights for 2008.

Hina Jilani

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Former Special Representative of the
United Nations Secretary General
On Human Rights Defenders.