

**Statement of Murad Saeed**

Arshad Sharif Shaheed and I were acquainted since my first tenure as a Member, National Assembly of Pakistan (2013-2018). In the later years the said acquaintanceship grew into a relationship of trust, friendship and brotherhood. Like many in his circle would admit to, Arshad Sharif Shaheed had a keen observation and a profound ability to analyze and assess, and stemming from his meticulous study of politics and history, predict the future developments on the national front well before time. Due to his family background (son of a Navy officer and brother of a (martyred) army officer), his association with the institution was very close. Arshad Sharif Shaheed was a true patriot, loyalist and nationalist; he was romantically involved with Armed Forces, his knowledge about defense of Pakistan was unmatchable. Therefore, due to nature of his work, his aptitude and his experience, he was always considered very close to the Armed Forces of Pakistan. He had on numerous occasions helped promote the Pakistan's side of the story and covered the military operations alongside Pakistan's Armed Forces. One recent example of such coverage is when Arshad Sharif Shaheed successfully busted the Indian propaganda by visiting the site of Balakot Attack in February, 2019 and exposed the Indian lies.

In December, 2021, Arshad Sharif Shaheed did an interview with Lt. General (Retd) Tariq Khan for his program "Power Play" on ARY News, a television network he was an employee of. That interview was not taken well by the military establishment of Pakistan, according to the information shared by Arshad Sharif Shaheed. That, however, in my understanding and to the best of my knowledge, was only the beginning of Arshad Sharif Shaheed's differences with the military establishment of Pakistan, or so I got the impression from our discussion. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbx9XFCLZzc>) (Annex- A)

The topics of Arshad Sharif Shaheed's programs on ARY and his social media tweets until March, 2022 revolved around accountability; mega corruption scandals, NROs for the political elites, international regime change operations; horse trading, meetings between lawmakers and American diplomats, clearly hinting towards what was transpiring in the actual power corridors. (Annex-B) Although Arshad Sharif Shaheed narrated that in a meeting, the then Chief of Army Staff, General (Retd.)

*(MS)*

Qamar Javed Bajwa, in reference to the topics of his programs had asked Arshad Sharif Shaheed to trust him that no “NRO” or a “Regime Change Operation” is underway. Later, Arshad Sharif Shaheed also narrated the story of a meeting with the then DG ISPR Lt. Gen Babar Iftikhar in March, 2022. Arshad stated Babar Iftikhar informed him that ‘I am coming from a meeting of the Core group and that it has been decided that Imran Khan’s Government is to be removed’ and that Babar Iftikhar requested/ demanded support in building a narrative in favor of the No-Confidence Motion. Well aware of the political realities of the country, and the credibility of the alternative political leadership, Arshad in clear and certain words refused any support to such an endeavor and adventure, as was evident from his shows, vlogs and tweets till his unfortunate assassination on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. (Annex-C)

On the evening of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Arshad Sharif Shaheed was among the journalists who were present in the Prime Minister House for a briefing on the infamous Cipher. Interestingly, all of those journalists were (and in one way or another are still) persecuted and/or harassed in the months following regime change. An officer of Inter-Services Intelligence Agency was also present in that room at the time (as many (present there) would be able to testify to the presence of officers dressed in suits in PM House that evening). The officer, later identified as Colonel Rizwan by Arshad Sharif, was also present in a meeting at the Kohsar Complex where Arshad Sharif was called by Sector Commander, Brigadier Faheem to express their displeasure and/or warn him about the topics of his TV programs, shortly after the success of No-Confidence Motion and removal of Imran Khan from premiership. (According to the account narrated to me by Arshad, Arshad’s presence at the PM House was also discussed in that meeting). However, it may be noted that Arshad Sharif Shaheed once again refused to comply to their demand of abandoning what to him was a cause he was pursuing for the sovereignty of Pakistan.

Soon after, Arshad Sharif Shaheed through his sources, learnt of a plan to arrest him through Federal Investigative Agency (FIA). (Arshad also filed a Harassment Petition in the Islamabad High court against the FIA, which falls under the authority of the Interior Ministry of the Federal Government) (Annex-D). That is when I was contacted, owing to the concerns regarding his security and the probability of an arrest, I managed to arrange for his stay at a safe location. Later in a conversation

*(m/sd)*

that evening Arshad discussed the public resistance to the regime change that the power quarters had not anticipated and their strategy to file false FIRs, persecute/arrest and humiliate all dissenting voices to create fear and curb resistance to the 'regime change'. While hearing his harassment petition, Justice Athar Minallah ordered the FIA to refrain from harassing Arshad Sharif.

In the following weeks, in an effort to persuade Arshad Sharif Shaheed to switch the line he was taking in his TV programs and on his social media against the 'regime change operation', he was visited by another officer at his residence in G-11, Islamabad. According to Arshad, the officer communicated that he is visiting on behalf and behest of the 'top leadership' and his response to the officer would be considered his response to the top leadership. Arshad Sharif Shaheed found the tone of the messenger rather threatening and refused to comply, standing by his principled stance. He told me that the issues have reached "a point of no return".

In the third week of May, 2022, Arshad Sharif Shaheed informed me that some FIRs have been filed against him and he will be arrested, in order to silence or intimidate him he would be tortured, abused and humiliated (Annex-E). Some of his sources even feared that he might be induced with some slow poison in custody. His sources had suggested that he seek refuge in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa for some time or better if he can leave the country, according to Arshad. We decided that I will accompany him to Peshawar the next afternoon. However, I received a call from him the next morning expressing the need for an urgent evacuation. At around noon, I picked up Arshad Sharif Shaheed from his residence in G-11 and so we went to Peshawar. I offered to arrange for his stay in Peshawar and to figure out a studio setup as well from where he can conduct his programs in safety. By next day he informed of receiving a UAE visa as well. His brave mother's message, however, encouraged him to stay and fight back the adversaries. He switched to a non-Pakistani cell number, changed his cell phone and blocked certain contact numbers. Meanwhile, Chief Justice Islamabad High Court, Justice Athar Minallah called Arshad Sharif Shaheed to appear in person for the hearing of the petition he had filed against the harassment by state institutions. Arshad in his TV show later that day also mentioned to have shown Justice Athar Minallah some proofs regarding the threats he was receiving. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE1K-Sz0ex8>)

*(M Sharif)*

It is pertinent to mention that when he changed his mind about temporarily relocating to UAE, I among his other friends suggested he at least apply and attain visas for different countries to keep his options open. Arshad though would sometimes laugh it off, at others assure us that he would but he was clear of one thing that it is his country and he would never leave it nor stop advocating what to him was the stance beneficial to his country. To him standing on the right side of history was more important than his life. The only reason that compelled him to leave eventually, was the fear of humiliation. Tolerating sexual abuse, being filmed naked was something everyone who know him, knew he would never be able to move on and recover from and most of all forgive.

Around this time Arshad Sharif Shaheed did his famous "Wo Kaun Tha" program, to which he was also communicated that "you have crossed the line", as per Arshad. Despite the protective bail by IHC, Arshad was continuously harassed and followed, as has been confirmed by his family too. He in conversations would often laugh about how there were multiple probable answers to the questions he raised during the program if only a guilty conscience would allow the perpetrators to think. (Annex- F)

Throughout the month of June and July Arshad Sharif Shaheed kept on changing his appearance, vehicles and hideouts. In this context, Arshad Sharif wrote a detailed Letter to the President of Pakistan and Chief Justice Supreme Court of Pakistan regarding the threats he was facing and the harassment by the state institutions. (Annex- G) The Letter was also copied to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, Chief of Army Staff, DG ISI, DG IB, among others. Ironically, after his cold-blooded murder the very people refused to acknowledge any threats to his life. (Annex- H)

Arshad had very credible sources inside the country's security agencies and he was on more than one occasion timely informed about the threats and plans to arrest. This enabled him to make timely escapes from many a situation created to intimidate him. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, Arshad Sharif Shaheed informed that 'friends' have paid head money for my execution'. Shocked to learn that, for the first time I asked him if he is sure about the credibility of the news and has cross checked it. He confirmed that it is a credible information. I asked him if he find it appropriate that

(M Syed)

we raise the issue, he said he is taking security measures and if the need arise, he 'like always' would let me know first. (Annex-I)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tlemr5n56Fs>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2sT3aPXWIQ>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjJ5ZtHVSWE>)

In August, Arshad Sharif Shaheed was at ARY News studio for his program (a footage of that day was also shown by Kashif Abbassi in his program 'Off the Record' on October, 27<sup>th</sup> and a testification of Maria Memon regarding the happenings of that evening is also on record in her program 'Aitraz Hai' of October 29<sup>th</sup>, both telecasted on ARY News, Arshad Sharif Shaheed had to leave the studio without recording his program because of the movement around ARY News studio.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, while I was in Banigala I found multiple missed calls from Arshad on my phone, which was unlike Arshad. I learnt that there is an immediate threat to his life and an evacuation is required. Since, I was made aware of the intensity of the threat to his life I arranged for a bullet proof car for his transportation and from there Arshad Sharif took to Peshawar. The next morning Arshad Sharif left for Dubai from Peshawar Airport. Shortly after his photograph from the FIA's immigration counter was released to a certain 'whatsapp group' media and an organized campaign started against Arshad Sharif. (Annex-J) ARY News Director News, Ammad Yousaf was picked up by law enforcement agencies the same evening, tortured, stripped naked and harassed. ARY News transmission was suspended all across the country. Arshad's fears were only validated by the incidents that followed his departure. (Annex-K)

For the next few days, Arshad Sharif Shaheed sounded content and satisfied. Soon after, in a conversation he mentioned that the former CoAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa is in Dubai and we will see what transpires now. (Annex- L) It didn't take long for his qualms to be renewed. The next day I received a call from Arshad Sharif Shaheed, he informed that the hotel management has informed of some visitors from the Dubai authorities, he asked whether I can look for any options that he can relocate to, I asked him to let me check. But before I could figure anything out Arshad called back and asked me to stay on call while he sees them in the hotel lobby. There was not much that I could make out of the conversation due to the

*(Signature)*

distortion but from whatever little I could hear and what Arshad Sharif Shaheed told me afterwards they asked him to leave Dubai on a 48 hours' notice. They mentioned pressure on them from Pakistani authorities to detain him, which they said they would not want neither would recommend him to go back to Pakistan stating threats to his life, and that they would want him to move elsewhere. They also suggested he travel to a country that does not enjoy good relations with Pakistan and to avoid relocating to a gulf country. (Annex-M)

I immediately started contacting some of my friends in Dubai whom I thought could identify some potential options for him or facilitate him in attaining any other visas at the earliest. As much as I remember, it was Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> August, a weekend in Dubai and start of one in the rest of the world which further complicated the situation and reduced Arshad's already limited options. (With Gulf countries off the chart, Kenya was among the very few countries Arshad could seek refuge in on such short notice alongside countries like Maldives, Albania, Uganda, Rwanda, Seychelles, Mauritania etc.) On my next call shortly after, I was informed that the authorities have returned and taken back the 48 hours option and asked him to leave immediately. That in this entire saga was the only time I sensed distress in Arshad's tone, he kept repeating if his love for his country is a crime so big that they are shrinking the earth for him. He told me he is leaving and will contact me upon reaching his destination. I asked him about his destination to which he said he is going somewhere they'd not anticipate. Later, I learnt he was in Kenya.

We had multiple voice and video calls during his stay there, he kept updating about his activities which mainly involved reading and occasional shooting practices, he would share videos too which because of the number of FIRs that were filed against me, the probabilities of arrest and the security threats we both were facing I'd delete immediately, as per Arshad Sharif Shaheed's instructions. Because of security threats I am facing myself I changed multiple phones in this duration too. In this duration, on August 31<sup>st</sup> his employer ARY Network was forced to fire him and make a public announcement in this regard. (Annex-N) (Arshad in his vlogs has mentioned that DG ISPR was the person forcing ARY News to fire and disassociate with him. Earlier similar claims were made about ARY News' Bureau Chief Sabir Shakir as well who is also in self-exile due to threats to his life and well-being in Pakistan). In the first week of September, he started vlogging on his YouTube

*(Signature)*

channel and that is when I warned him about his background revealing his location (as the impression he was giving publicly on his social media, at the time was that he is in UK). (Annex-O)

For most of his stay in Kenya he would sound satisfied with his living arrangement, however, what to me felt like frustration from being stuck in one place, away from his family and the country he loved so much and the constant rejection of visas (he applied for multiple visas, including United Kingdom and even eventually reapplying a Dubai visa as a last resort but all his visas were rejected stating different reasons) (Annex-P). He did sound depressed or may be worried in the last few weeks of his life and realizing that I also advised him to move elsewhere, he I believe was waiting for a suitable time to make the move, however we both were aware of how his options were reduced to none and the only suitable option seemed to wait until November end, i.e., a change of command in the military, and to return to Pakistan hoping things would improve with that.

Arshad, on multiple occasions mentioned that "The king (Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa) has gone insane and is after my life". He was also warned through a message with regards to the topics of his vlogs in his last days that he has crossed the red line, Arshad informed. While he discussed the records of Toshakhana gifts received by military heads and different government officials. He was also collecting information about 'Umar Farooq Zahoor' the Dubai based businessman, he also tweeted about on the day of his murder. (Annex-Q)

This to the best of my knowledge and memory is the account of the ordeal that Arshad Sharif Shaheed went through in the last few months of his life, most of it is Arshad's account that he recounted to me initially during our meetings and later on through phone calls. The developments post Arshad Sharif's cold-blooded murder are no less eerie. On the night of Arshad Sharif's murder, while I and his friends were preparing ourselves to inform Arshad's family of the unfortunate incident, calls were made from officers of ISPR to his former employer (ARY News) and probably other news channels as well to announce his death as a car accident. The very next day different bogus statements started coming from Kenya too, statements that even Kenyan media was not willing to buy but the Pakistani government functionaries were insistent that the nation shall believe.

(Rifay)

Some additional observations and facts that I consider are important to be brought into your notice, on record and to explain are;

The threats that many claim today were non-existent have been communicated by him to the higher authorities in his letters. Yet right after his death senior government officials kept claiming that there was no threat to his life. Rana Sanaullah, the Federal Minister for Interior, post Arshad Sharif Shaheed's assassination, in a TV interview with Nadeem Malik on Samaa TV, confesses to a telephonic conversation that took place between him and Shaheed Arshad Sharif. To a question by the anchor 'did he mention about the threats to his life'. Rana Sanaullah responds (in his words)

بان اس نے مجھے کہا کہ میرے خلاف جو بے جھوٹے مقدمات درج کیے جا رہے ہیں، تو یہ ہے اس طرح سے ہے، اس طرح سے ہے تو میں نے اسے مذاق میں کہا، میں نے کہا کہ ارشد شریف صاحب یہ آپ مجھ سے پوچھ رہے ہیں آپ کو نہیں پتہ تو یہ مقدمات تو پھر درج ہوتے ہی ہیں۔ وہ اگئے سے بنتے رہے.....

While Arshad had clearly written about the threats to his life in his letter to the President of Pakistan, and Chief Justice of Pakistan, which as stated was also copied to the Minister of Interior among others. And that he had presented evidence of threats to Chief Justice Islamabad High Court. The denial of the government and its functionaries to the existence of any threat to his life in Pakistan is beyond me. The admission of Rana Sana that 'مقدمات تو پھر ہوتے ہیں' is rather criminal and needs at the least an explanation.

Arshad, despite a valid visa, was forced to leave Dubai and so has been proved by the government formed FFT's report as well. Yet both DG ISPR and Minister for Interior specifically on multiple occasions claimed his visa had expired and hence he had to leave Dubai. That is, at the least, a deliberate effort to misdirect the public.

Rana Sanaullah is also on record to have said that the fact-finding committee constituted by the Government of Pakistan in relation to the murder of Shaheed Arshad Sharif will probe charges of gold smuggling. Later on, days before the fact-finding committee's report was submitted to the SC, the interior Minister made another statement that Arshad's was probably murdered because of a personal feud that he had with his hosts in Kenya. Considering the importance of the office he is holding I am compelled to believe that these are deliberate and well thought attempts at creating ambiguity on the matter. *(MSJ)*

A Press Conference was held on the night when his body arrived in Pakistan where certain details about Arshad Sharif Shaheed's murder that were not a public knowledge at the time were shared. The intention behind that press conference and the source that provided those details to a rather irrelevant person in this scenario (or was there a relevance of that person?) is something that requires to be probed as well.

In the recent days a responsible government functionary in a meeting with a family member of Arshad Sharif raised questions on the mental health of Arshad Sharif referring to the quotes of the Hollywood movie 'Joker' in his office. To my knowledge, the said officer also informally warned Arshad's friends that the family's demand for a sou moto by the SC might be met but they shall be aware of the 'personal connotation' behind his murder. Something that Rana Sana had also hinted towards in a couple of TV programs and a probable attempt at Arshad's character assassination. The above indicates that even after his death the government and its functionaries are trying to malign Arshad Sharif's name and obstruct the justice he was demanding from the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of Pakistan.

I hope the above can help the JIT in reaching the people who unlawfully persecuted Arshad for the only crime of staying true to his profession; journalism. And standing by what according to his knowledge, information and understanding was a stance beneficial to the country he had remained sincere to in life and in death.

  
Murad Saeed

Additional Document:

Annex- R Arshad Sharif's petition before the Honorable Islamabad High Court

Annex- S Copy of FIRs