

US Lawyers March to Protest Emergency Rule in Pakistan

By Meredith Buel
Washington
14 November 2007

[Buel report - Download \(mp3\) 747k](#)

[Listen to Buel report](#)

Hundreds of lawyers have marched past the United States Supreme Court in a show of solidarity with attorneys in Pakistan who have been arrested while protesting President Pervez Musharraf's decision to impose emergency rule and suspend the constitution. VOA correspondent Meredith Buel has details from Washington.

Dressed in dark suits like their counterparts in Pakistan, attorneys from the United States rallied in support of lawyers in Pakistan who have taken the lead in demonstrating against General Musharraf.

Jeff Golden, who chairs the international law section of the American Bar Association, traveled from London for the protest.

"The pictures that are coming out of Pakistan are not pretty," he said. "What we essentially see is, in effect, martial law, closure of courts, but probably most disturbing, we see hundreds of lawyers being thrashed in the streets. The message we would like to deliver is this is just not acceptable."



Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf wipes sweat from his neck as he addresses the international media in Islamabad, Pakistan Sunday, 11 Nov. 2007

A group of law students from Penn State University joined the protest, which took place next to the U.S. Capitol and a short distance from the White House. Eddie Richardson, 21, says he came to Washington to protest the Bush administration's support for General Musharraf.

"People in power in Washington, D.C. ought to understand that we do not support or like the idea of our country, or our politicians supporting people that do not stand for the rule of law," he said. "It is antithetical to what we are, who we are as Americans, for us to have an ally that does not comport with the rule of law and those types of democratic values."

Since declaring a national emergency, President Musharraf has detained members of the country's Supreme Court and arrested thousands of lawyers, human rights workers and members of opposition political parties.

William Neukom is President of the American Bar Association, which sponsored the rally in Washington.

"We the lawyers of America today in this country call upon General Musharraf to restore the constitution of Pakistan, to reinstate the Supreme Court of Pakistan and to release those lawyers and other leaders who have been wrongly jailed for their lawful protest of his lawless actions," he said.

Mohammad Akram Sheikh, the past president of the bar of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, joined the march and said it will boost the morale of attorneys in his home country.

He says it is time for General Musharraf to take off his uniform and allow free elections.

"I would request President Bush to kindly withdraw his recognition," he said. "President Musharraf is not part of any solution, he is part of the problem. Let those in civil society chose their own leader for regulating their own affairs."

Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte is expected to arrive in Pakistan later this week to urge General Musharraf to lift emergency rule and allow free elections.

So far Mr. Musharraf has resisted calls for him to reverse course, telling Britain's Sky News he will stay in power as long as Pakistan remains in turmoil.

"We have to see if there is a way that my going will insure balance and stability in Pakistan," said Mr. Musharraf. "That is the best time that I would like to quit. Ok? And I am seeing that. I am looking at that."

Meanwhile, lawyers in the United States say they will continue to stage protests in support of their colleagues in Pakistan.