

The Bagram Prisoner Campaign

by Asim Rafiqui

Nearly 40 Pakistani citizens remain indefinitely imprisoned at the Bagram Prison in Afghanistan without charge or trial. Denied the right to a legal defense, these men have become victims of a cruel and unjust detention system with little or no hope for a fair trial or release. Some have been behind bars for over 11 years. Periodically allowed to speak to their immediate family members via Internet telephone calls, they are denied access to the outside world. They are isolated from the law, the media, and human rights organizations. Today these men are little more than specters on a computer screen. Successive Pakistani governments have failed to uphold the rights of its citizens held in Bagram or help alleviate the suffering of the their families in Pakistan.

The men being held in Bagram may have all but disappeared from the conscience and concern of society and the government. But their families continue to suffer the devastating consequences of their imprisonment, and continue the struggle for the release of their loved ones. This is a reality of indefinite detention largely lost in the debate about U.S. detention operations.

Photojournalist Asim Rafiqui, in collaboration with Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) - a non-profit law firm based in Lahore, is bringing to light the plight of the relatives of the current detainees. Through portraits, and first person testimony, Asim Rafiqui's images are part of a collaboration to help us all weigh the true cost of American policies of indefinite detention. His work highlights how many lives are being damaged, and how many futures are at stake, offering testimony of how the U.S. practices of indefinite detention without trial robs detainees and their families of justice and dignity. The images here, and the testimonies gathered, remind us that it is not just the 40 men who have been put behind bars, but entire families who have had their lives derailed and their futures placed on hold.