

## U.S. and Pakistan: Free Aafia!

By Sara Flounders

In support of efforts to pressure the U.S. government to repatriate Dr. Aafia Siddiqui to Pakistan, former U.S. Congressperson Cynthia McKinney and International Action Center Co-Director Sara Flounders traveled to Pakistan last December. Cynthia McKinney has been a courageous and outspoken opponent of U.S. wars at every step. The IAC has a 20-year history of organizing opposition to U.S. wars, racism and repression.

When Cynthia McKinney and I landed at the airport in Karachi at 4:00 a.m., hundreds of people greeted us with showers of rose petals. Later that same day there was a huge motorcade and we spoke at a mass rally of many, many thousands of people calling for the U.S. to return Aafia Siddiqui to her native country. What overwhelmed us on the first day was repeated in city after city, and in small towns—for eight days.



Sara Flounders, Fowzia Siddiqui, Cynthia McKinney flash the peace sign in Karachi. They were showered with rose petals on their arrival. Aafia Siddiqui supporters turned out in hundreds and thousands wherever they went throughout Pakistan. Photo: Altaf Shakoor

Our trip focused on solidarity with the people in demanding the repatriation of Aafia Siddiqui to Pakistan. Her case exposes the U.S. government's violations of due

process and justice and also its practices of secret renditions, illegal confinement, and torture.

The millions of Pakistanis who support Aafia Siddiqui want to bring pressure upon the Pakistani government as well, so that it, too, demands that the U.S. return her to Pakistan. There is deep anger at the Pakistani military, which has collaborated and profited off decades of U.S. war in Afghanistan.

All political currents—and there are hundreds of parties—say they support her return. This includes even those who worked with the U.S., in addition to those opposed to U.S. imperialism. It includes labor, religious forces, and the masses in the street, which are for her release in a powerful way. When we were on the road, young people came out in thousands. Our car was surrounded by youths on motorcycles carrying flags with Aafia's picture on them. We saw signs on the walls all over, "Free Aafia," "Free sister Aafia," and the reference to her sentencing, "86 years, b—s—."

Pakistanis can't believe what happened to this American-educated Pakistani woman. Every time we met them they asked: How could she and her very young children be kidnapped and the U.S. government or some secret agency, hold her and the children in prison for years, all of them separated from one another? Why was a Pakistani citizen held in Afghanistan and then brought to the U.S. for a "show trial"? How it was possible that someone who injured no one could be sentenced to 86 years in the U.S.? The average Pakistani is outraged.

The average American should be, too. The case of Aafia Siddiqui has exposed crimes committed in their name.

### Solidarity of Women Resonates

We were extremely impressed by the role of women in the movement to free Aafia Siddiqui. You could really feel their rage at Siddiqui's humiliation by the U.S. government.

The years of imprisonment, of solitary confinement and isolation, the horrendous prison conditions for Aafia today, the daily, abusive, invasive strip search for her trial in New York City—this abuse must become a deeply felt issue for the women's movement in the U.S. Aafia's name should be raised across the country on International Women's Day and every day. Here is a real women's issue, as opposed to the propagandists' use of women's issues in the service of empire providing a rationale for invading other countries to protect and liberate their women.

Far from protecting and liberating Aafia, the U.S. abducted and imprisoned her.

People in Pakistan consider the extrajudicial killings with the drones to be an extension of the U.S. policy of secret renditions, and the kidnapping and imprisonment of Siddiqui.

There is also boiling opposition across the whole political spectrum in Pakistan to the daily U.S. use of drones to carry out what the U.S. military calls “targeted assassinations.” These Hellfire missiles have killed thousands of civilians and are an affront to the sovereignty of Pakistan.

Throughout the country, far from being the quiet and submissive Muslim women stereotyped in U.S. media and entertainment, we found women to be passionately involved in these issues.

I want to give just one example of how our actions can create solidarity with them and resonate to counter the horrific impressions that they have of the U.S. I had attended Dr. Aafia Siddiqui’s trial in New York City, where she was charged with grabbing a gun and attacking U.S. soldiers while in U.S. custody at an Afghanistan police station. At her trial, I saw the prosecution’s inability to present any evidence of her guilt—no forensic evidence—not a fingerprint, shell casing, or injury to any of the soldiers or FBI agents she was accused of trying to murder, though she, herself, had been shot.

I had written articles and drafted petitions about this outrageous case. But what made the biggest impact in Pakistan was a small act of solidarity during the New York trial that was totally unnoticed in the U.S., though it became top of the news in Pakistan. During Aafia Siddiqui’s sentencing to 86 years in prison for attempted murder, I stood up in federal court and shouted out: “Shame, shame on this court!” Everyone in Pakistan seemed to know about this. It means so much for Pakistanis to know that there are women in the U.S. who oppose the humiliation of this Pakistani woman.

Yes! The U.S. War Machine is Vulnerable

In Karachi we visited Aafia Siddiqui's home and met with her sister, Dr. Fowzia Siddiqui, her mother, who is ill, and two of Aafia's children, who have been returned to the extended family after years of captivity. One child, an infant son at the time Aafia was kidnapped, is still missing.

Dr Fowzia Siddiqui, Aafia's sister, traveled with us the whole eight days and is now the main coordinator of the Free Aafia movement, along with maintaining a medical practice and caring for her mother, her own two children, and Aafia's two returned children. Dr. Fowzia Siddiqui was also U.S.-educated and coordinated the epilepsy program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD., before returning to Pakistan.

Aafia's home city, Karachi, is the center of support for her. Her name seemed to be on every wall and every overpass.

People in Pakistan continually say that Karachi, the major port city and a city twice the size of New York City, is key to the war in Afghanistan. This is a city that is crucial for an orderly U.S./NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

People often made the point that Pakistan taught the U.S. a lesson when just months ago the people and the government shut all passes and roads into Afghanistan to trucks carrying NATO supplies. They kept them closed for seven months, until the U.S. government formally apologized for a missile strike on Pakistani soldiers. Today there are lines of trucks going along the roads, south to Karachi, bringing U.S. equipment back from 12 years of war in Afghanistan.

Nothing shows more clearly the utter failure of U.S. drones than seeing how these totally criminal, extrajudicial tactics have turned a whole population so decisively against Washington. Ninety-five percent of Pakistan's population hates U.S. policies. But ordinary people can do something to demonstrate to Pakistanis that we don't support the harm being done to them.

Take Action!

One act that everyone can take that will resonate here in the U.S. and in Pakistan is to sign the petition for the repatriation of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui to Pakistan. This e-mail petition goes to the White House, members of Congress, top Pakistani officials and, most important, to members of the media in the U.S. and Pakistan.

See: [IACenter.org/SiddiquiPetition](http://IACenter.org/SiddiquiPetition)

Sara Flounders is the co-director of the International Action Center (IAC), founded by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark. IAC coordinates activism and information opposing domestic and international injustice.