

US REFUSING TO LET TRUTH-TELLERS VISIT COUNTRY AGAIN

The lawyer representing the innocent victims of drone strikes in Pakistan just got denied a visa to speak at Columbia Law. (h/t curiouser_georg)

I am a Pakistani lawyer who is suing the CIA for killing innocent civilians through drone strikes in my home country. This month, the US state department prevented me from travelling to the United States to participate in a conference hosted by the human rights programme at Columbia University law school in New York City.

I have been granted US visas before and no reason was given by the state department for refusal on this occasion: despite repeated enquiries, we were merely told there was a “problem” with my application. If seeking justice through the law – instead of violence – is the reason for banning my travel, then mine is another story of how government measures in the name of “national security” have gone too far.

Although I have previously held consultancies with USAID, and helped the FBI investigate a terrorism case involving a Pakistani diplomat, my relationship with the US government changed dramatically in 2010, when I decided to take on the case of Karim Khan. Karim Khan was away from home on New Year’s Eve 2009 when two missiles fired from what we believe was a CIA-operated drone struck his family home in North Waziristan and killed his son, aged 18, and his brother, aged 35. Informed over the phone of their deaths, he rushed back to find his home

destroyed and his brother's family – now a widow and two-year-old son – devastated.

[snip]

To avenge their deaths, Khan could have joined the Taliban insurgency against the United States. Instead, he put his trust in the legal system. In November 2010, we initiated legal notices against the CIA and the US secretary of defence for their wrongful deaths. Since then, more than 35 families from Pakistan have come forward and joined us in our legal proceedings.

So, why would the US government want to prevent me from discussing these cases at Columbia law school?

They've done this before—for example, with anti-renditions activist Edward Horgan.

Still, I wish the folks in charge of rule of law programs at DOJ would get in touch with those at DHS to remind them that rank hypocrisy is not a good way to win hearts and minds.