AFAD remembers Jaswant Singh Khalra on his 25th anniversary of his disappearance and stands in solidarity with the disappeared in Punjab, India.

6th September 2020

Manila: The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) remembers human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra on the day of his abduction and disappearance and stands in solidarity with the victims of enforced disappearance and extrajudicial executions in the state of Punjab in north India.

Jaswant Singh Khalra was a human rights activist who was abducted by the Punjab Police outside his home in Amritsar on 6th September, 1995. He was tortured in police custody and killed over the next few days and his body was never returned to his family. Khalra lived a life dedicated to the pursuit of truth and justice, whose work has brought to life the horror and impunity of state sanctioned violence in the 1980s and ’90s Punjab.

Between 1 and 8 June 1984, then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered a military action on the Golden Temple in Punjab — one the most important religious places for Sikhs. The attack led to the killings of thousands: more civilians than combatants. On October 31, 1984, Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards, leading to anti-Sikh pogroms across India. These events led to the movement for greater autonomy and socio-economic rights spiral into heightened insurgency against the Indian State. The response of the Indian State was brutal leading to human rights violations and crimes against humanity. Khalra was involved in human rights activism when two his colleagues were disappeared in the early 1990s. The search for these disappeared colleagues led him to cremation grounds in Amritsar, Punjab unearthing the issue of mass illegal cremations, enforced disappearances and extra-judicial executions.

Many human rights organizations have documented at least 8,500 cases of enforced disappearances in Punjab. The Khalra Mission claims that there are an estimated 25,000 Sikhs who were killed in Police “encounters” and clandestinely cremated in cremation grounds across Punjab without knowledge of their families.

Over these decades, the victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Punjab and their families are yet to receive justice. The perpetrators have not been held accountable for their crimes. The Indian State has not even acknowledged the crimes committed in Punjab. AFAD strongly urges India to disclose the truth, bring the perpetrators to justice, ensure reparation for the families, and guarantee non-repetition.

Signed by:

Khurram Parvez
Chairperson

Nilda L. Sevilla
Secretary General

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) is a regional federation of human rights organizations working toward a world without desaparecidos. AFAD members are based in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kashmir, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. It advocates truth, justice, redress, reparation, and empowerment for the victims and the reconstruction of the historical memory of the disappeared towards the eradication of enforced disappearances.