

Child Victims of CIA Drone Strike in Pakistan Give Evidence to US Congress - Lawyer Denied US Visa

By [Reprieve](#)

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Two children who were injured in a CIA drone strike in Pakistan which killed their grandmother are today visiting the US Congress, along with their school-teacher father, to give evidence on their ordeal.

Rafiq ur Rehman – a primary (elementary) teacher in North Waziristan – and his children Zubair (13) and Nabila (9) are the first victims of the covert drone programme to give evidence in person to members of Congress. The children's grandmother – Mr Rehman's mother – Mammana Bibi (67) was killed in a CIA strike in October 2012.

They are clients of human rights charity Reprieve, and will be joined by their legal representative Jennifer Gibson. Their Islamabad-based lawyer, Shahzad Akbar, a Fellow of Reprieve, had intended to join them, but was denied a visa by the US authorities – a recurring problem since he began representing civilian victims of drone strikes in 2011.

In testimony to be delivered to members of Congress today, Zubair will say: “My grandmother was nobody's enemy. She was kind and caring. She used to help the mothers in my village deliver their babies. In the evening, she would tell all of the children to gather around and she would tell us stories. Stories of her life, of our family, of our community. She had so many stories that I can't pick a favourite. I miss all of them.” His testimony will also describe the strike which killed his grandmother, and how he was nearby when it happened, and injured in the leg by shrapnel.

Mr Rehman will tell Congress: “In urdu we have a saying: aik lari main pro kay rakhna. Literally translated, it means the string that holds the pearls together. That is what my mother was. She was the string that held our family together. Since her death, the string has been broken and life has not been the same. We feel alone and we feel lost. We also feel scared. My family no longer gathers together like it did when my mother was alive. I hardly see my brothers and sisters and my children rarely see their cousins. Their cousins tell them that they are afraid to visit because the drone might then kill them, too.”

Reprieve Staff Attorney Jennifer Gibson will say: “The onus is now on President Obama and his Administration to bring this war out of the shadows and to give answers. That is how a democracy works. Democracies demand transparency. They cannot operate in shadows. Until we do that, every child who loses life or limb persuades dozens more in tribal Pakistan that the United States does not distinguish friend from foe. Children who are not hit themselves, like Nabila and Zubair, continue to live in terror that the hovering drone may attack them next. Silence in the face of this only fuels resentment – not just against the United States, but against the government of Pakistan for its complicity in these killings. Too

often this debate has been a quibble about statistics and not about the human cost – and political consequence – of the drone wars. I hope today's testimony offers a much-needed antidote to this."

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