

Obama Administration Blocks Drone Victims' Lawyer from Testifying in Congress

By [Reprise](#)

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The US Government has, for a second time, failed to grant a visa to Pakistani lawyer [Shahzad Akbar](#), preventing him from speaking in congress on the CIA drone programme next week.

The hearing will be chaired by [Congressman Grayson of Florida](#) who has encouraged the US to immediately issue Mr Akbar with a visa. Scheduled for October 1st the hearing will feature testimony from [Rafiq ur Rehman](#), a primary school teacher whose 67 year old mother was killed in the same October 2012 drone attack that hospitalized his children Nabila and Zubair.

Before 2010 Mr Akbar travelled regularly to the US. It was not until 2011, when he began representing victims of CIA drone strikes, that Mr Akbar began having significant difficulty getting a US visa. This current instance is the second time that the US has failed to grant Mr Akbar a visa to speak at a U.S. event.

Mr Akbar, who founded the Islamabad-based human rights group the [Foundation for Fundamental Rights](#), and is a fellow of legal human rights charity [Reprise](#), filed the first ever case in Pakistan on behalf of civilian drones victims. Should Mr Akbar get a visa to accompany them, the October Congressional hearing will be the first time that drone victims have travelled to the US to speak with lawmakers.

[Congressman Grayson \(FL-09\)](#), said: "Congress would like to conduct an ad hoc hearing on drones, and it is very important for us to hear from victims of drone strikes. Rafiq ur Rehman, a school teacher in Pakistan, lost his 67-year old mother in a drone strike, and two of his children also suffered drone-strike-related injuries. The State Department has granted the visas of Rafiq and his children to allow them to travel to the U.S. and share their stories with Congress. However, it has not yet issued a visa for the family's lawyer and translator, Shahzad Akbar. Without Mr. Akbar, Rafiq and his children will not be able to travel to the U.S. I encourage the State Department to approve Mr. Akbar's visa immediately, so that Rafiq and his family can share their stories with Congress and the American public."

[Shahzad Akbar](#), Reprise fellow and director of the [Foundation for Fundamental Rights](#), said: "Once again I find myself being denied entry to the U.S. This time to stop me talking to American lawmakers who have invited me to speak about what I have witnessed. I hope to tell them about the impact of drone strikes on civilians in Pakistan, and to shed light on the fact that rather than keeping the US safe, counterterrorism policies like drone strikes are

instead a threat to America's national security.

"Failing to grant me a visa silences the 156 civilian drone strike victims and families that I represent. These families, who have lost children, parents, and siblings, are now trying through legal means to achieve justice. They have powerful stories to tell in their own voices, but will not travel without me, their legal representative."

[Robert Greenwald](#), director of the forthcoming documentary [Unmanned](#) which includes interviews with Mr. Akbar and Mr. Rehman, said:

"While filming Unmanned in Pakistan, I saw first-hand the critical role Mr. Akbar is playing in reaching, protecting, and encouraging those, like Rafiq and his family, affected by tragic drone attacks to use the legal system – not violence. This man should be welcomed and celebrated, not silenced.

"I also met and interviewed Rafiq and his family and know that if Mr. Akbar were allowed into America by the State Department, Congress and the American people would be as moved as I was about the plight of these survivors in a covert war."

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