

Amnesty International UK

MEDIA BRIEFING

COMMONWEALTH GAMES GLASGOW 2014

PAKISTAN: HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS BEYOND JUSTICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY 24 JULY

“There has been progress on human rights in Pakistan in recent years, but the country’s almost complete failure to protect journalists, arbitrary and secret detention of citizens, as well as blasphemy laws which lead to violence and persecution, means it is a country where human rights are continually oppressed.

“The right to life, access to justice, and freedom of expression are under sustained threat. We urge Pakistan’s authorities to ensure those responsible for human rights abuses – including its own military and intelligence agencies – are brought to justice in fair trials.

“The authorities must ensure that those found guilty in trials are not automatically given the death penalty. There must also be an end to the spate of abuses justified under religious reasons due to the country’s archaic blasphemy laws – reforming these is more urgent than ever.”

Siobhan Reardon – Programme Director, Amnesty International Scotland

Amnesty spokesperson available throughout the Games
Daily media briefings available throughout the Games

Pakistan

Population: 179,160,111

President: Mamnoon Hussain

Games debut: Vancouver, 1954

National sport: Field hockey, cricket, football

Delhi 2010 medal tally: 5 medals, 2 gold

Human rights concerns

There have been a number of improvements in enshrining human rights in law over the last five years, including the enactment of laws that seek to ensure fundamental rights, the rights of women, and ratification of some key international human rights treaties.

However, human rights abuses by state and non-state actors have continued and, in some respects, become far worse over the same period. The state continues to have a poor record in bringing perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty. A recent development of particular concern is the Protection of Pakistan Act, that provides sweeping powers and immunities to security forces, enabling arbitrary arrests, incommunicado and indefinite detention, expands the scope for the use of lethal forces, and seeks to establish secret courts where accused individuals do not have access to the case

against them, lawyers or relatives (see further below).

Death Penalty

We have called on the government not to resume executions following the 30 June 2013 expiration of a presidential order imposing a moratorium on the death penalty.

Pakistan has more than 8000 prisoners on death row – most of them have exhausted the appeals process and could now be facing execution. Although a five-year moratorium was interrupted in 2012 with the execution of a soldier by the military, and Pakistan did not use the death penalty in 2013, it did sentence 226 people to death last year.

Human Rights Protections in North-West Pakistan

Millions experience perpetual lawlessness in Pakistan's north-western tribal areas, where human rights abuses are committed by the armed forces and by armed groups including the Taliban who are beyond the reach of justice.

Armed forces in the north-west are using broad new security laws and the harsh colonial-era penal system to commit these violations with impunity. These laws have in effect established a framework that gives the armed forces free rein to carry out human rights violations.

LGBTI

Pakistan is one of 42 countries within the Commonwealth that criminalises homosexuality. Stemming from colonial laws, homosexuality is a crime under Section 377 of Pakistan's Penal Code and carries a sentence anywhere between 2-10 years and a fine; and life imprisonment.

Arbitrary and Secret Detention and Enforced Disappearances

Arbitrary detention without charge or trial, secret or unacknowledged detentions, and enforced disappearances continue across Pakistan despite promises by the executive, parliament and courts over the last five years to end these practices.

There has also been little progress in determining the fate of thousands of people who have disappeared.

Blasphemy Laws

Human rights activists, lawyers, judges and political leaders who have spoken out against the blasphemy laws or defended religious minorities have been subjected to harassment, intimidation, threats, physical attack and in some cases killed.

Non-Muslim religious minorities are particularly vulnerable to accusations of blasphemy.

Violence Against Women and Girls

We welcome the passage of four landmark bills by Pakistan's parliament aimed at protecting women's rights. However, violence against women and girls remains prevalent across Pakistan and the criminal justice system continues to fail to investigate and punish abuses against women. Government-run women's shelters require a major overhaul.

Freedom of Expression

Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists because of the extent and severity of attacks on the press. Our research has identified 34 media workers who have been killed as a likely consequence of their work since democratic rule was restored in 2008. In only one case have the perpetrators been brought to justice.

In April 2014, Amnesty International launched a major new report on attacks on journalists in Pakistan. The report details how Pakistan's embattled media community faces threats, harassment, abductions, torture, and killings from a range of sources including intelligence services, political parties and armed groups like the Taliban.

Full report: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/005/2014/en>

PEOPLE AT RISK – CASE STUDIES

Zahid Baloch – Abducted political activist at risk of death

Zahid Baloch, Chairman of the Baloch Student Organisation-Azad (BSOA) was abducted in Quetta, Balochistan, on 18 March this year. His family do not know where he is or what has happened to him. He is at grave risk of ill-treatment, torture, or even death. Hundreds of other activists have suffered similar fates in the province over recent years.

Witnesses claim Zahid Baloch was taken at gunpoint in the Satellite Town area in Quetta, Balochistan on 18 March by personnel of the Frontier Corps, a federal paramilitary force. The authorities have not provided any information concerning his abduction and have failed to investigate it adequately. Zahid Baloch is the Chairman of BSOA, a student organization advocating the separation of Balochistan province from the state of Pakistan. It was banned by the Pakistan government in March 2013 because they claimed it was “involved in terrorism.”

Rashid Rehman – Human rights lawyer shot dead in his office

Prominent human rights defender and lawyer Rashid Rehman was shot dead in Multan, Pakistan on 7 May this year. The killing is likely linked to his legal representation of university teacher Junaid Hafeez who has been charged with blasphemy. The Pakistani authorities must bring the perpetrators to justice and drop all charges against Junaid Hafeez. Well-known lawyer and a human rights defender Rashid Rehman was shot dead in front of colleagues in his office in the city of Multan, Punjab province, on 7 May. One of his associate advocates, and a client were also shot and seriously injured. A witness said two unknown young men entered Rashid Rehman's office, which is inside the building of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) on the busy Kutcheri Road, and fired several shots. Rashid was hit by five bullets and died of his injuries in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

ENDS

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