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Pakistan: New president should reverse legacy of human rights abuses

As Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan's newly elected president, prepares to take his oath of office, Amnesty International called on him to take four steps to start reversing the country's human rights record.

The organization urged him and his party's government to:

- * reveal the fate of hundreds of victims of 'enforced disappearances'
- * reinstate all the judges illegally deposed by former president Pervez Musharraf in November 2007
- * commute the death sentences for more than 7,000 people currently on death row
- * protect civilians' lives in the tribal areas of Pakistan

It called on the government not to delay acting on its pledge to address the terrible situation for many families of the 'disappeared' by gathering and publicizing a list of all those in government detention.

The organization said that the human rights situation would remain bleak in Pakistan without an effective, independent judiciary.

Amnesty International also reminded the new president of the public commitment made by his party and the prime minister to commute the death sentences of all those who are on death row – what would be the largest mass commutation in modern times. This would be the first action towards a general moratorium on the death penalty, with the ultimate aim of abolishing it.

Finally, Amnesty International recognizes the legitimate security concerns of the Pakistan government in the tribal areas of Pakistan but urges the new President that security forces operations should aim at protection of civilian lives. The security forces operations and militants' activities have resulted in mass internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, in addition to the loss of many civilian lives.

Background

The Presidential election on 6 September marked the completion of an elected Parliament in Pakistan.

Pervez Musharraf resigned on 18 August as the new elected government in Pakistan threatened him with impeachment proceedings. Asif Ali Zardari was elected as the new president by the members of the national parliament and four provincial assemblies who form the electoral college for the election of the president. Mr Zardari is the widower of the former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated on 7 December 2007. He became head of the Pakistan People's Party after her death.

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