

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Amnesty International urges Pakistan resolve hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Pakistan

Few punishments are as cruel and deliberate as enforced disappearances. People are wrenched away from their loved ones by state officials or others acting on their behalf. They deny the person is in their custody or refuse to say where they are. Families are plunged into a state of anguish, trying to keep the flame of hope alive while fearing the worst. They may be in this limbo for years.

The disappeared are at risk of torture and even death. If they are released, the physical and psychological scars endure. If they are killed, the family never recovers from their loss. Disappearances are a tool of terror that strikes not just individuals or families, but entire societies. This is why they are a crime under international law, and if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack, they constitute a crime against humanity.

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has more than 700 pending cases from Pakistan, and Pakistan's State Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has received reports of hundreds more, from across the country. Victims include bloggers, journalists, students, peace activists and other human rights defenders whose work promotes the same values as this Council and is crucial to a free and just society.

No one has ever been held accountable for an enforced disappearance in Pakistan.

These crimes take place against the backdrop of a broader assault on civil society. Freedom of expression is criminalized online. Human rights defenders are smeared and threatened and journalists are attacked. Civil society organizations are subject to greater restrictions, and international NGOs have been expelled.

Amnesty International welcomes Pakistan's acceptance of recommendations to make enforced disappearance a criminal offence,¹ but is disappointed by Pakistan's failure to accept several recommendations – including from states with their own traumatic history of disappearances – to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Amnesty International is pleased to note that Pakistan has accepted recommendations to protect journalists and freedom of expression,² however, is concerned that the government did not accept recommendations to bring the perpetrators of such threats, attacks and abductions to justice.³

As an elected member of this Council, Pakistan must uphold the highest human rights standards – to not just acknowledge violations, but take concrete steps to end impunity for them.

Background

¹ A/HRC/37/13, recommendation 152.131 (Switzerland).

² A/HRC/37/13, recommendations 152.170 (Cyprus), 152.173-176 (Sweden, Czechia, Norway, Greece).

³ A/HRC/37/13, recommendations 152.177-178 (Canada, Austria).

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan on 19 March 2018 during its 37th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered this oral statement. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on country:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/6513/2017/en/>

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