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Pakistan: Inclusion of Baloch activists on terrorist watchlist an affront to human rights

Responding to the arbitrary inclusion of 32 individuals, including Baloch activists, as “proscribed persons” under section 11-EE of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, which places severe limits and undue restrictions on their human rights, Babu Ram Pant, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for South Asia, said:

“The arbitrary manner in which these individuals, including peaceful Baloch activists, have been put on a terrorist watchlist without being given an opportunity to challenge the decision is an affront to due process and their rights to liberty, privacy and freedom of movement.

“Amnesty International has long raised concerns about the anti-terrorism law in Pakistan as it doesn’t comply with international human rights standards, grants broad powers to detain and proscribe individuals who are merely exercising their human rights, and fails to ensure fair trial guarantees. The law has systematically been weaponized and used to target dissent inside the country and crack down on critical voices.”

“This designation comes at a time when worrying reports of unlawful killings are emerging from parts of Balochistan province. Of particular concern is the strict lockdown in Zehri, Khuzdar district, where all movement in and out of the area has been barred since 25 September and an internet shutdown has been in place for the past few months in total disregard of the right to freedom of expression.

“We urge the government to remove all activists from both this list and other arbitrary designations such as the Exit Control List and Passport Control List, which also place undue restrictions on their freedoms. The authorities must follow due process and ensure they are able to challenge the designation before an independent and impartial court and take larger steps to bring anti-terror laws in line with international human rights law. Further, the Pakistani authorities must conduct an immediate, impartial and transparent investigation into the loss of life in Zehri during military operations, immediately lift the internet shutdown and all security forces abide by international law.”

Background

The Balochistan authorities, through notifications issued on 2 and 16 October, have designated 32 individuals from Khuzdar, Kech and Chagai districts in Balochistan province under the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act as “proscribed individuals”. These include women activists such as Dr. Sabiha Baloch, Sammi Deen Baloch, Naz Gul and Syed Babi Sharif and Shalee Assa.

The designation places the individuals under heavy surveillance and severely restricts their freedom of movement and ability to take part in public life. Proscribed individuals cannot travel outside designated areas without express permission from their local police station. It also grants powers to the authorities to investigate and freeze financial assets of the person or their immediate family members.

There have been reports of several deaths, including children, during military operations in Zehri, Khuzdar district in Balochistan.

