

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	334
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 – Human Rights Priority Update report. January to June 2016 - Pakistan
Udgivet:	21. juli 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	31. oktober 2016

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: January to June 2016 - Pakistan
- **Publication date:**
21 July 2016
- **ecoi.net summary:** Half-year update on human rights situation (covering first half of 2016) [ID 329312]
- **Countries:**
Pakistan
- **Original link** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pakistan-human-rights-priority-country/human-rights-priority-country-update-report-january-to-june-2016>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: January to June 2016 - Pakistan, 21 July 2016 (available at ecoi.net) http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/329312/456795_en.html (accessed 22 September 2016)



Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: January to June 2016 - Pakistan

Updated 21 July 2016

There were serious and wide-ranging human rights concerns in Pakistan during the first six months of 2016. Overall, the security situation throughout the country improved, but terrorist attacks, including against minority communities, crimes against women, and the use of the death penalty continued throughout the period.

The year began with a terrorist attack on Bacha Khan University, Charsadda, when four gunmen opened fire killing 22 people and injuring over 20 others. An extremist group linked to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (Pakistan Taliban) claimed responsibility. In a major attack on Easter Sunday, a suicide bomber killed over 70 and injured more than 250 people at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore. The Jamaatul Ahrar group, affiliated to the Pakistan Taliban, claimed responsibility, linking the attack to Easter. The victims were both Muslims and Christians. The then Prime Minister and then [Foreign Secretary condemned the attack](#) and offered their condolences. Sectarian killings continued over the period. In Karachi alone, 3 Shia Muslims were killed in April, and prominent Shia human rights activist and journalist, Khurram Zaki, was murdered in May; 4 members of the Ahmadiyya community died in targeted shootings in May and June; and well-known Sufi singer, Amjad Sabri, was shot and killed in June.

Minority communities continued to suffer persecution in 2016. There were numerous reports of forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian women to Muslim men. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face restrictions on their ability to worship, vote, and obtain travel documents. Pakistan's blasphemy laws were misused against both Muslims and non-Muslims, although minority communities were disproportionately affected. In February, Mumtaz Qadri was executed for the 2011 murder of Governor Salman Taseer, a vocal critic of the blasphemy laws. There were large demonstrations in support of Qadri throughout the country.

Pakistan continued its use of the death penalty in 2016, albeit at a lesser rate than during the previous six months: over 70 persons were executed between January and June 2016, bringing the total number since the death penalty was re-instated in December 2014 to over 400. In May, Mohammad Sarfraz was executed despite concerns about the conduct of his trial and allegations that he was a juvenile at the time of the crime. Another prisoner facing the death penalty, Abdul Basit, who contracted tubercular meningitis while in custody

and is now permanently disabled, was issued a further stay of execution in January. The Pakistani authorities have yet to explain adequately how they intend to execute him in a humane manner, given his condition. Concerns remain over other death row prisoners with mental health issues, such as Khizar Hayat.

Detention without trial and the use of military courts to try civilians accused of terrorist offences continued into 2016. These courts lacked transparency and were not subject to independent scrutiny making it difficult to assess their compliance with international obligations. There were ongoing concerns about the number of internally displaced persons, and reports of extrajudicial killings by the security forces including as a result of the military operations in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas and elsewhere in the country.

We continued to be concerned about the denial of women's and LGB&T rights in the first half of 2016. There were frequent reports of so-called "honour killings" and violent acts against women, including several cases where the victim was burned to death by family members. Representation of women in the judiciary and government remained poor, as did women's literacy rate and opportunities for education. In June a transgender woman was killed in Mansehra, leading to street protests by the transgender community in several cities.

Over the period, Pakistan took some positive steps. In February, the Punjab Assembly passed the Protection of Women Against Violence Bill 2015 providing comprehensive protection to female victims of violence against a range of crimes. Also in February, the Sindh Assembly approved Pakistan's first Hindu Marriage Bill which, for the first time, recognises the validity of Hindu marriages. In the same month the Punjab Assembly passed a resolution in favour of Hindu Marriage Bill to be considered by the National Assembly. In late February, the government launched Pakistan's first Human Rights National Action Plan. Together with the re-establishment of the human rights ministry and launch of the Treaty Implementation Cell's human rights roadmap at the end of last year (see July–December 2015 update), these developments represent moves in the right direction. However, Pakistan's record of implementation of human rights legislation and the effectiveness of its state institutions to address human rights issues have been poor.

The UK continued to urge the government of Pakistan to improve the human rights situation for its citizens and comply in full with its international human rights obligations. At the highest levels, ministers and officials raised our human rights concerns, including minority and women's rights, and reiterated UK opposition to the death penalty, urging for the moratorium on its use to be re-instated. During his [visit in March](#), the then Foreign Secretary pressed Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all its citizens and uphold the rule of law. On International Women's Day on 8 March, he [met Pakistan's double-Oscar winning director](#), Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, to support her work to tackle so-called "honour-based" crime in Pakistan. In June, under the UK government's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, we launched projects to promote greater tolerance and religious freedom. Department for International Development ministers also raised human rights at the highest levels of the government of Pakistan. Pakistan remains a priority for UK development assistance with programmes designed to improve human rights.

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