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PAKISTAN MUST PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RISING ATROCITIES IN BALOCHISTAN

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The Pakistan government must immediately provide accountability for the alarming number of killings and abductions in Balochistan attributed to government forces in recent months, Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International also called on Baloch armed groups to avoid attacks that target or endanger civilians, in the face of escalating attacks on government workers and non-Baloch residents of the province.

In the last four months, at least 90 Baloch activists, teachers, journalists and lawyers have disappeared or been murdered, many in "kill and dump" operations, according to information compiled by Amnesty International. Their bullet-ridden bodies, most bearing torture marks, have been recovered across Balochistan.

"Since October, every month has seen an increase in the cases of alleged disappearances and unlawful killings," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director. "These atrocities are carried out with flagrant impunity. Credible investigations into these incidents – resulting in prosecutions – are absolutely necessary to establish some trust between the Baloch people and the Pakistan government."

The victims' relatives and Baloch groups blame the "kill and dump" incidents on Pakistani security forces, particularly the Frontier Corps and intelligence agencies. Many of the victims were abducted by uniformed Frontier Corps soldiers, often accompanying men in plain clothes, in front of multiple witnesses.

Security forces deny the charges, claiming that the deaths were a result of rivalry between Baloch militant groups.

"The human rights crisis in Balochistan has largely been ignored, even inside Pakistan, but thousands of people are not only suffering from extreme deprivation but discrimination, insecurity and human rights abuses on a massive scale," said Sam Zarifi.

"Human rights abuses attributed to the security agencies have created a climate of fear for the families of the disappeared. They are terrified to speak out in fear that security agents will kill their loved ones or abduct other family members in reprisal."

Armed Baloch groups have also been implicated in a surge in targeted killings of non-Baloch civilians and government employees, including teachers at government education institutions. Hundreds of teachers have fled the province as a result of these killings, bringing the education system to breaking point.

Baloch armed groups have claimed responsibility for a series of bombings on gas infrastructure causing a desperate shortage of fuel for cooking and heating throughout the province during the coldest period of the year. Sectarian targeted killings have also increased, and Balochistan's Hazara Shi'a community claims that Taleban and Sunni extremists have murdered hundreds of their members since 2004.

"Baloch armed groups must also avoid endangering civilians," said Sam Zarifi. "The apparent targeting of civilians, teachers and government officials by Baloch groups, has forced many of them to flee the province, which only worsens conditions for the already poorly-served Baloch people."

In November 2009, the Pakistan Government attempted to address long-running Baloch grievances about economic and political disenfranchisement and human rights abuses with a package of laws called the Aghaz Huqooq-i-Balochistan ("the Beginning of Rights of Balochistan"). However, according to a recent report in the *Dawn* newspaper, only a quarter of the proposed measures have been implemented thus far.

Amnesty International calls on the Pakistan government to:

- Investigate all alleged human rights abuses, including all "disappearances" recorded by the judicial Commission of Inquiry for Missing Persons;
- Bring all perpetrators of abuses to justice, whether they belong to security forces or non-state armed groups; and
- Ensure that all individuals brought to justice receive a fair trial and are not subjected to torture or other abuse in detention.

"Pakistan's foreign allies should ensure military assistance is not linked to human rights abuses in Balochistan," said Sam Zarifi.

"As Pakistan's most significant international allies, Amnesty International calls on the United States and China to ensure their support for security forces in Balochistan does not assist human rights abusers."

Balochistan has a long history of civil and armed unrest since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, with ethnic Baloch groups advocating greater autonomy within the state or complete separation.

Balochistan holds the largest single source of domestic energy reserves in Pakistan, but Baloch groups argue these resources disproportionately benefit other provinces and ethnic communities.

The Baloch people remain one of the poorest communities within Pakistan with some of the lowest literacy and employment rates and life expectancies.