

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	352
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: July to December 2016 – Pakistan
Udgivet:	8. februar 2017
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	3. maj 2017

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- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: July to December 2016 - Pakistan
- **Publication date:**
08 February 2017
- **ecoi.net summary:** Half-year update on human rights situation (covering second half of 2016) [ID 337432]
- **Countries:**
Pakistan
- **Original link** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pakistan-human-rights-priority-country/human-rights-priority-country-update-report-july-to-december-2016>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: July to December 2016 - Pakistan, 08 February 2017 (available at [ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net)) http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/337432/467236_en.html (accessed 30 April 2017)



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Wide-ranging and serious human rights concerns continued in the second half of 2016. While the security situation continued steadily to improve, terrorist attacks, the use of the death penalty and violence against minority communities and women remained common features of the July to December period.

In a series of large-scale terrorist attacks, Pakistan's citizens minorities were targeted by extremist groups. In August, a suicide bomber attacked the Civil Hospital in Quetta, Baluchistan, killing over 70 and injuring more than 120 persons. The majority of those killed were lawyers congregating at the hospital entrance following the earlier shooting of a prominent barrister. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), an extremist group linked to the Pakistan Taliban, claimed responsibility. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Alok Sharma, condemned the attack and offered his condolences. In a further JuA claimed suicide bombing in September, 28 persons were killed at a mosque in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In October, three terrorists attacked a police training centre in Quetta killing over 60 cadets and injuring over 160 others. Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, condemned this attack and offered condolences. A splinter group of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) claimed responsibility. In November, a suicide bomber killed over 50 and injured more than 100 pilgrims at the Shah Noorani Sufi Shrine in Baluchistan. The Foreign Secretary condemned the attack.

Violent attacks and persecution against minority communities continued throughout the period. 6 members of the Hazara community in Quetta were killed in shootings in August and October. In Karachi, 5 persons died when LeJ militants opened fire outside a Shia religious gathering in October, and the following month a police officer from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was murdered. There were frequent reports of forced conversion and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian women to Muslim men. Ahmadiyya continued to face restrictions on their ability to worship, vote and obtain travel documents. In November, a large crowd attacked and damaged an Ahmadiyya mosque in Punjab. Four Ahmadiyyas were arrested afterwards. FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, met a representative of the Ahmadiyya community in January 2017 to discuss the mosque attack and other concerns. Pakistan's blasphemy laws were misused against Muslims and non-Muslims although minority communities were disproportionately affected. In October, the Supreme Court appeal hearing for Asia Bibi, a Christian women convicted and sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2009, was postponed. No new date was set.

Pakistan maintained its policy of sentencing to death those convicted of a wide range of criminal offences. While fewer prisoners were executed in the latter half of 2016 than in previous periods – Human Rights Commission of Pakistan figures indicate 10 executions took place between July and December 2016 compared to over 70 in the preceding 6 months and 160 in the 6 months before that, serious concerns over Pakistan's use of the death penalty remain. In particular, serious concerns remain in relation to prisoners with mental and physical illness such as Imdad Ali, Khizar Hayat and Abdul Basit. In October, it was reported that the Supreme Court had acquitted 2 brothers previously hanged for murder. The authorities are investigating this apparent miscarriage of justice. During a visit to Pakistan in January 2017, Mr Sharma lobbied for the abolition of the death penalty and later wrote to Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights reiterating our concerns about prisoners suffering mental illness facing the death penalty.

The use of military courts to try civilians accused of certain terrorist offences continued during the period. These lacked transparency and were not subject to independent scrutiny making it difficult to assess their compliance with international standards. Reports of extra judicial killings by security forces continued.

Pakistan's women's rights position showed little sign of improvement in the final 6 months of 2016. There were numerous reports of so-called "honour killing" and violent acts against women, often perpetrated by family members of the victim. In July, Qandeel Baloch, a high profile Pakistani social media personality and women's rights advocate was killed. Her brother reportedly confessed to murdering her for "dishonouring the Baloch name". At Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons on 20 July, Theresa May reaffirmed the government's view of honour crime stating "... there is absolutely no honour in so-called honour-based violence. It is violence and a criminal act, pure and simple". Women continue to be poorly represented in the judiciary and the government, and literacy rates remain low. Pakistan's children continued to face abuse and hardship, and the infant mortality rate remained high.

International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) continued to face restrictions on their ability to operate (see July to December 2015 update). A new registration process, due to conclude in March 2016, was not completed leaving around 70% of INGOs remained unregistered. INGOs also faced considerable difficulties obtaining permission to access rural areas and obtain visas for international staff.

Over the period, Pakistan took some positive steps aimed at improving the rights of minorities and women. Building on legislation enacted in provincial assemblies earlier in the year (see January to June 2016 update), the National Assembly passed the Hindu Marriage Act in September. The Act granted Hindu women greater legal rights making them less vulnerable to forced marriage and conversion, and associated violence. In October, the National Assembly passed the Anti Honour Killings Bill which introduced stiffer sentences for offenders and removed a provision allowing relatives to pardon perpetrators. At the same time, the Assembly passed the Anti Rape Bill requiring forensic evidence to be taken in all allegations of rape. In November, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed the Anti Forced Conversion Bill giving greater protection to religious minorities in Sindh. Progress against the Human Rights Action Plan (see January to June 2016 update) and implementation of existing human rights legislation was patchy.

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, during the final 6 months of 2016. At the highest level, ministers and officials raised our human rights concerns, including minority and women's rights, and reiterated UK opposition to the death penalty urging that the moratorium on its use be re-instated. During his visit in November, the Foreign Secretary raised religious tolerance and the importance of safeguarding the rights of all Pakistan's citizens. The FCO's Magna Carta Fund supported projects to promote greater tolerance and religious freedom. Pakistan remained a priority for UK development assistance with programmes designed to improve human rights.