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Pakistan: UN experts demand release of Baloch human rights defenders, and an end to crackdown on peaceful protest

GENEVA- Pakistan must immediately release detained Baloch human rights defenders and cease its crackdown on peaceful protesters, a group of independent human rights experts* said today.

“We have been monitoring with growing concern reports of alleged arrests and enforced disappearances of Baloch activists over the past number of months, and the violent incidents in the past few days have significantly increased our concerns,” the experts said.

The experts expressed concern about an escalating series of actions by the Pakistan police against the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), a network advocating for the rights of the minority Baloch community. These actions intensified after a terrorist attack by Baloch separatists on a passenger train on 11 March 2025, after which several prominent Baloch human rights defenders from the BYC were allegedly arrested by Pakistan’s Counter Terrorism Department or forcibly disappeared.

On 21 March 2025, Quetta Police stormed a peaceful BYC protest in front of the University of Balochistan calling for the release of detained and forcibly disappeared activists. Three people were reportedly shot and killed while others were injured, and dozens more were arrested.

“Once again we see the use of excessive force as a first response to peaceful protests,” the experts said. “We understand the deeply traumatic impact of the 11 March terrorist attack, and we express our deepest sympathy to the victims of this attacks, yet a response which relies on arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and violent crackdowns on freedom of assembly cannot alleviate that trauma.”

In response to this incident, BYC, including Mahrang Baloch, a woman human rights defender and a leader of the movement, organised a sit-in, with the bodies of those killed in the police operation on 21 March 2025 to protest police violence. At around 5:30 am on 22 March 2025, this demonstration on Saryab Road, Quetta was raided by police, who used batons and tear gas to disperse protesters. Several BYC activists, including Mahrang Baloch, were detained. The whereabouts of Mahrang were reportedly unknown for nearly 12 hours, and she was allegedly denied access to family visits or legal counsel. Mahrang and numerous other BYC members have been reportedly charged under sections of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

On 24 March, another prominent BYC member and woman human rights defender, Sammi Deen Baloch, was arrested alongside others in front of the Karachi Press Club by the Karachi Police as she protested against the crackdown. Her detention has been reportedly ordered for 30 days under the Sindh Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance.

“We are extremely concerned for the welfare of Dr. Mahrang Baloch, Sammi Deen Baloch and other human rights defenders detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly. We urge the Pakistani authorities to immediately release them and to refrain from abusing counter-terrorism or public safety measures against human rights defenders, and we call on the authorities to clarify without delay the fate and whereabouts of all those reportedly subjected to enforced disappearances,” the experts said.

The experts also called on the Government of Pakistan to address conditions conducive to terrorism, in line with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The experts are in contact with the authorities of Pakistan regarding their concerns.

