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Pakistan: Mass executions, particularly of juvenile offenders, serve neither deterrence nor justice – High Commissioner Zeid

11 June 2015

GENEVA (11 June 2015) – United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein today expressed deep regret that Pakistan has executed more than 150 individuals, including juvenile offenders, since it cancelled its moratorium on the death penalty in the aftermath of the Peshawar school attack in December.

"I share Pakistan's outrage and grief at the senseless killing of 145 people, including 132 schoolchildren, by the Pakistani Taliban in December last year, but I am very disturbed that the response of the Pakistani authorities has been to execute just as many people in the six months that have passed since the massacre," High Commissioner Zeid said.

"Pakistan has gone from zero to 154 executions in just six months, making it the third most prolific executioner in the world."

"Yesterday's execution of Aftab Bahadur who was only 15 when he was convicted of a murder 23 years ago, and whose claims that he was tortured into confessing were unheeded, suggests a very troubling approach to the use of the death penalty in the country. Reports indicate that two witnesses who testified against Bahadur recanted their testimony, but were simply ignored," the High Commissioner said.

More than 8,000 people remain on death row in Pakistan, of whom approximately 800 were reportedly juveniles at the time of the offense. The Government initially lifted the moratorium only for terrorism-related crimes but in March 2015, lifted it generally.

"The idea that mass executions would deter the kinds of heinous crimes committed in Peshawar in December is deeply flawed and misguided, and it risks compounding injustice," High Commissioner Zeid said. "No justice system in the world is infallible. And even if it were, experience has clearly shown that the use of the death penalty cannot and does not debunk violent extremist ideologies. More often than not, the masterminds and financiers of such attacks remain at large – and may even use examples of possible miscarriages of justice as tools to recruit more individuals to their twisted causes."

High Commissioner Zeid acknowledged the massive challenges faced by Pakistan in combatting terrorism but

stressed that the country's response must be rooted in international human rights law.

"The best deterrents of serious crimes lie in ensuring respect for the rule of law and due process; ensuring that those suspected of such crimes are promptly and properly investigated and prosecuted; and in ensuring that the authorities engage closely with the communities affected by such violence," he said. "Compromising on human rights may foster a sense of impunity and injustice, potentially leading to increased radicalisation towards violence and ultimately undermining the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures."

The High Commissioner urged the Government of Pakistan to reintroduce its moratorium on the death penalty.

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