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Human Rights and Democracy Report - Pakistan

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2014 was another troubling year for human rights in Pakistan. Severe and wide-ranging violations and abuses continued unabated, with little apparent prospect of improvement. The year began with violent sectarian killings in Balochistan, and ended with one of the worst terrorist attacks in Pakistan's history, when more than 140 people, including 132 children, were killed at the Army Public School in Peshawar. The government, facing challenges across a number of fronts, including increased militancy, responded by lifting the *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty in the case of terrorism offences, and the first executions were carried out on 19 December. The National Commission for Human Rights, signed into law by the National Assembly in 2012, has still not begun operating, and recommendations agreed with the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) during Pakistan's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), were not implemented. Concerns about media freedom, minorities and other issues were highlighted in reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and others. Pakistan remained near the bottom on a number of crucial indicators, including the UN Human Development Index (146 out of 187). Despite some positive moves by federal and provincial authorities to introduce laws to protect vulnerable groups in Pakistan, lack of implementation of these laws, and of political will to tackle human rights, remained a significant barrier to progress.

Last year's report identified several human rights objectives for Pakistan in 2014: freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, democracy and elections, promotion of the rule of law, and women's rights. It is essential that Pakistan takes steps to make progress on these objectives in 2015 to avoid a further deterioration in human rights. The UK will continue to urge the government of Pakistan to guarantee fully the human rights of all of its citizens, as set out in the Constitution of Pakistan, and in accordance with its international obligations.

The UK continued to work with other partners to improve the human rights situation. In 2013, the EU granted Pakistan duty-free access to EU markets under the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) trade scheme. In 2014, the EU initiated a review of Pakistan's progress in implementing 27 international conventions on human rights, good governance and labour standards, as a condition of retaining GSP+ status.

The UK worked with Pakistan to encourage their engagement in this monitoring process. In December, the Commerce Ministry established a Treaty Implementation Cell to ensure compliance with these conventions.

The UK worked with government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, and international development partners to influence policy, leverage Pakistani resources, and strengthen state accountability, in order to bring basic services and entitlements to poor and excluded people. We also supported civil society organisations working with some of the poorest and most marginalised communities, to help strengthen demand for improved government service provision, and promote women and minority group participation and human rights. This included programmes on: education and health, particularly focused on women and girls; economic development, including jobs and skills training; improving citizen access to security and justice; humanitarian support to those affected by conflict and other natural disasters; and working with very poor and marginalised communities, including religious and ethnic minorities, to increase women's participation in politics and local decision making, and support local level dispute prevention.

Elections

The May 2013 elections were widely reported as Pakistan's freest and fairest. However, in November 2014, an Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) report revealed that over 1.5 million votes had been rejected in these elections, the highest number of votes ever rejected during any election in the country's history. In 150 constituencies out of 266, 5,000-10,000 votes were rejected. Election tribunals formed in June 2013, to investigate over 400 allegations of electoral malpractice, had failed to dispose of more than half the petitions after 15 months, and were given a two-month extension in December. In the same month, Balochistan carried out the third phase of local government elections, and is the only province to have complied with a Supreme Court order to form local government bodies. After a delay of over 16 months, a new Chief Election Commissioner was appointed at the end of 2014; one day before the Supreme Court's fourth deadline was set to expire. We welcomed the increased scrutiny and transparency of electoral institutions.

The UK continued to support comprehensive electoral reforms, working with the ECP and national and international civil society organisations to improve the credibility of the electoral process, including increased participation of women, both as voters and as candidates. We supported citizens' groups to hold elected representatives and public institutions to account, and worked with political parties to help them become better organised and more responsive to citizens' needs.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

Pakistan continued to benefit from a diverse and lively media, but remained one of the most dangerous places for journalists to operate. Reporters Without Borders rated Pakistan 158 out of 180 countries in its 2014 World Press Freedom Index, and reported that Balochistan was one of the five most dangerous areas in the world for journalists, caught between terrorist attacks and arbitrary detention by security forces. At least seven journalists were killed in 2014, one remains missing, and dozens received death threats.

At the start of the year, the Pakistani Taliban issued a "hit-list" of more than 20 journalists and publishers it held responsible for misrepresenting them. In March, journalist and TV anchor Raza Rumi, known for his outspoken views against the Taliban, narrowly escaped an attempt on his life in Lahore. A month later senior journalist and GeoNews TV anchor Hamid Mir was critically wounded in an attack in Karachi. The attack was condemned internationally. On World Press Freedom Day in May, the British High Commissioner in Islamabad called on "all in Pakistan to support a free and fair press, where journalists can go about their vital work without fear, intimidation or harassment".

In June, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority suspended the broadcasting licence of private television channel GeoNews for 15 days, and fined Geo TV 10 million rupees (approximately £64,000). This followed a complaint by the Ministry of Defence that the channel's reporting had brought the main intelligence agency into disrepute. During the year, other television channels received similar penalties for alleged controversial or sacrilegious content.

The government ban on YouTube entered its third year. In November, Facebook revealed that requests from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and IT Ministry, to restrict access to blasphemous content, increased almost tenfold from January to June, compared to the previous six months. In December, Freedom House ranked Pakistan 69 out of 100 for Internet freedom, down two points from 2013, and the lowest in Asia after Vietnam and China. We continued to call on Pakistan to allow space for a free media.

From August to December, there were widespread opposition-led protests against alleged rigging of the 2013 elections. Although numbers were not huge by Pakistan standards, the length of the protests was unprecedented. The resultant media coverage increased the level of debate, and awareness amongst ordinary Pakistanis on issues of elections reform, corruption, rights, VIP culture, and dynastic politics. This tested the commitment of the government, law enforcement agencies and army to democracy and the right to peaceful protest. Despite some criticism of the police response to an escalation in protests, the authorities showed considerable restraint during the protests.

Access to Justice and the Rule of Law

In 2013, we reported our concerns about the Protection of Pakistan Ordinance (PPO) which aimed to tackle militancy. The Protection of Pakistan Citizens Act was approved by parliament in July after opposition amendments to provide a number of human rights safeguards, including greater judicial oversight and a time-limited period of application. Under the act, suspects may be held for questioning for 90 days instead of the current limit of 15. The UK, along with EU partners, regularly raised concerns on the provisions of the PPO and the act as inconsistent with international human rights standards. We continued to urge the Pakistani authorities to ensure that implementation complies with these standards.

On 24 December, in response to the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Prime Minister Sharif announced a 20-point National Action Plan to tackle terrorism. The plan included the establishment of military courts to fast-track the most serious terrorist cases. There are concerns that these courts, not subject to civilian oversight, could undermine international fair trial standards.

The UK continued to work with Pakistani police, prosecutors and the judiciary to enhance their capacity for investigating, prosecuting and sentencing terrorist suspects in line with international human rights law and standards.

At the federal level, activities focused on building political support for counter-terrorism (CT) prosecution reform, and efforts to improve the legal framework for CT in Pakistan. Our aim was to ensure that law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges had the tools they needed to tackle terrorism in a human rights compliant manner.

Longer term, we are working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to improve security and access to justice through strengthening civilian security (police, prosecution and correctional services) and the formal and informal justice sectors. Our programme aims to make these institutions more human rights compliant, more accountable, and more responsive to citizens, particularly women.

Death Penalty

Throughout 2014, death sentences were handed out across the country. There were more than 8,000 prisoners on death row. Following the attack in Peshawar on 16 December, the year ended with the resumption of executions for terrorism cases, with seven executions being carried out. The Pakistani government estimated 500 people were sentenced on terrorism charges. The UK opposes the death penalty as a matter of principle in all circumstances, and believes there is no conclusive evidence that it is an effective deterrent. Working with our EU partners, we will continue to urge the Pakistani authorities not to continue with executions, and to re-establish the moratorium.

Conflict and Protection of Civilians

High rates of terrorist and sectarian violence continued in 2014, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and wider Balochistan. State security forces, supporters of political parties, and sectarian groups are the most frequent targets. The perpetrators are rarely caught and brought to justice.

In June, Pakistan's army launched a large-scale operation to clear North Waziristan of militants. Over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were forced out of the region. The UK provided over £10 million to expand its support, providing over one million IDPs in 2014 with assistance such as food packages and access to protection services. Following the displacement from North Waziristan, this support enabled tens of thousands more people to benefit from further assistance, including clean water, sanitation and skills training.

17 healthcare workers and 28 security personnel were killed by militants alleging that polio vaccination was a western conspiracy; by December, End Polio Pakistan reported almost 300 cases of polio compared to 93 in 2013.

There were allegations of human rights violations in Balochistan, particularly reports of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. A march from Quetta to Islamabad to protest against enforced disappearances and killings of Baloch, which started in November 2013, continued until the end of February 2014. The "Voice for Baloch Missing Persons" alleged that more than 18,000 Baloch were "missing". In January and March, mass graves containing more than 20 mutilated bodies were discovered in Khuzdar, Balochistan. In September, the Asian Legal Resource Centre, an NGO, made a written submission to the HRC alleging incidents of extrajudicial killing throughout Pakistan.

In December, the National Human Rights Commission expressed alarm at the increasing reports of enforced disappearances in Sindh. Between August and December, at least ten activists of Sindh nationalist political parties were reportedly abducted by security agencies; their bodies were later found dumped. The commission urged the government to ratify and implement the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. In the same month, the World Sindhi Congress condemned the extrajudicial killing, abduction, disappearances and torture of Sindhi and Baloch people.

We continued to raise with senior military and government figures the need to protect human rights and implement a criminal justice response to fighting terrorism. Human rights will remain a core consideration in any security and justice sector assistance we give to the Pakistani authorities.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Shia, Hazara, Christian, Ahmadiyya, Hindu, Sikh, Kalash, Ismaili and Sufi communities reported intimidation and violence, kidnap, forced conversion and marriage, attacks on their places of worship, and other forms of targeted persecution. Sectarian killings of Shia and Sunni Muslims,

including members of religious parties, were reported more regularly in 2014 throughout the country.

In January and June, suicide bombers killed Shia pilgrims in Balochistan, close to the Iranian border. Hazaras in Quetta continued to be targeted by militants throughout the year, including attacks in January and October, killing 40. At the end of June, HRW released a report, "We are the Walking Dead", documenting the "alarming and unprecedented escalation in sectarian violence" directed against Shia Hazaras in Balochistan, and urging the government to take immediate measures to investigate and prosecute sectarian killings.

In July, an Ahmadi woman and two children were killed in Gujranwala when a mob set fire to houses, following accusations of Ahmadiyyas posting blasphemous content on social media. The incident was condemned by former Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Warsi, and Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening. In December, an Ahmadi man was shot and killed near Gujranwala, five days after a Muslim leader denounced the Ahmadiyya as the "enemies of Pakistan" on a popular television show. The Ahmadiyya complained that government ordinances, punishing Ahmadis for calling themselves Muslims, were used by extremists to justify violence against the community. At least 11 Ahmadiyya were killed in 2014.

Increasing numbers of Muslims and non-Muslims were charged under the country's controversial blasphemy laws. In May, a lawyer was killed in his office in Multan after defending a university lecturer accused of blasphemy.

On 4 November, a Christian couple in Punjab accused of desecrating the Quran were beaten to death by a mob, and their bodies burnt in a kiln at their workplace. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif immediately condemned this incident and Chief Minister of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, ordered an investigation.

On 5 November, FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, issued a statement expressing revulsion and urged the Pakistani authorities to bring to justice those responsible. Four of the main suspects, including the owner of the brick kiln, were arrested.

In 2013 we reported on Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. On 16 October, after several delays and postponements, Asia Bibi's death sentence was upheld at an appeal hearing in the Lahore High Court. The EU, supported by the UK, issued a statement of concern and hoped the sentence would be overturned on appeal. Asia Bibi's lawyers filed an appeal to the Supreme Court in November. We will continue to raise our concerns with the Pakistani authorities where these laws have been misused.

Women's Rights

During 2014, Pakistan further slipped from 123 to 126 (out of 149) in the UN Gender Inequality Index, and was ranked 141 out of 142 in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, with little indication of serious attempts to reverse this trend. Increasing incidents of so-called honour killing, rape, acid burning, domestic violence and assaults were reported. The Acid Survivors Foundation estimated that there were 114 cases of acid attacks in Pakistan in 2014, involving 159 victims. Women and couples were murdered, often in extremely brutal circumstances, in so-called honour killings across Pakistan.

In May, Farzana Parveen was stoned to death by her family outside the Lahore High Court for marrying a man of her choice. The brutal nature of Parveen's killing triggered outrage around the world. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond condemned the murder as "barbaric", commenting that "there is absolutely no honour in honour killings", and urged the Pakistani authorities to bring

those responsible to justice. At the end of the year, four of Parveen's male relatives were sentenced to death for her murder.

In a more positive development, in April, the Sindh Assembly unanimously passed the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Bill, becoming Pakistan's first elected assembly to pass legislation prohibiting child marriage. In June, the then Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and the Special Envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie, co-hosted the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. Pakistan sent a senior representative to the summit and endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. In July, Prime Minister David Cameron and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) hosted the Girl Summit, which addressed child, early and forced marriages; Pakistan attended at ministerial level.

UK aid was targeted at gender rights in 2014, particularly in the fields of education, health and empowering girls and women. The Department for International Development (DFID) worked with public sector and low-cost private schools to support more girls in primary and lower secondary schools. In 2014 over six million children in primary school benefited from DFID's support. For example, in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, marginalised girls were provided with stipends to increase their participation and retention in secondary education. On health, work included efforts to increase the uptake of reproductive health and family planning services. We also supported the development and implementation of provincial legislation to protect women and strengthen their rights through the Aawaz Voice and Accountability Programme. This included the establishment of the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

The UK expanded our support to the government of Pakistan's Benazir Income Support Programme. To date, the programme has supported 4.7 million women in the poorest families, out of which 235,000 families are attributed to DFID support. We also encouraged greater economic participation by women through supporting training in new skills (68,770 people trained in skills of which 36,800 attributable to DFID, 40% women), helping women to access financial services such as micro-loans, and supporting 1.49 million micro-finance borrowers, of which 54% – 804,600 – were women. The UK worked across 45 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces, and through over 5,000 community groups, to empower poor communities, women and minority groups.

We helped to strengthen these groups' political voice and involvement in local decision making, and increased community capacity to engage with state service providers and resolve disputes peacefully and inclusively.

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