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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Listen to Pakistan’s Marginalized Pashtuns

This week, police in Pakistan (<https://www.hrw.org/asia/pakistan>)’s province of Balochistan registered a criminal case against Pashtun activist Manzoor Pashteen (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1395002/pakhtun-protest-leaders-booked-in-balochistan>) for criticizing the government and state security agencies. Pashteen’s alleged crime is to demand equal citizenship for Pashtuns, the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan, who have been protesting for the past two months (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/06/world/asia/pakistan-pashtun-long-march.html>), calling for an end to discrimination and ethnic stereotyping.

The protests were sparked by the alleged extrajudicial killing by police of Naezeebullah Mehsud (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/world/asia/karachi-police-rao-anwar-naezeebullah-mehsud.html>), 27, in Karachi in early January. The peaceful demonstrations have now spread across the country. For instance, last week, a group of Pashtun students held a sit-in outside the office of the vice-chancellor of the Punjab University Lahore, protesting discrimination by the university administration.

Many Pakistani Pashtuns live in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the embattled area bordering Afghanistan (<https://www.hrw.org/asia/afghanistan>) that in recent years has endured attacks by the Taliban armed group, government military offensives, and US (<https://www.hrw.org/united-states>) drone strikes. FATA is still governed by colonial era regulations (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/06/world/asia/pakistan-pashtun-long-march.html>) that allow “collective punishment” for entire communities, including property destruction, and largely denies people access to courts to enforce their rights. In 2016, when about a million displaced residents returned home following 2014 military operations against the Taliban, they had to produce special identification cards (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/opinion/pashtun-pakistan-young-killing.html>) not required of other Pakistanis.

Provincial governments have added to the tensions. In February, the Punjab government issued a notification “asking the population to keep an eye on suspicious individuals who look like Pashtuns or are from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1316244>), and to report any suspicious activity by them.”

Pakistani officials should recognize the country’s diversity as a strength and not a weakness. All persons are equal before the law. Critically, the government needs to end its longstanding discriminatory laws and practices against Pashtuns and act to end hostile attitudes toward them. This process could start by dropping the criminal cases against Manzoor Pashteen and other protest leaders wrongfully charged, fully investigating and fairly prosecuting those responsible for Nageebullah Mehsud’s death, and letting Pashtun voices be heard.

ecoi.net summary:

Balochistan province: Prosecution of activist who demands equal rights for marginalised ethnic Pashtuns



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