

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 33/038/2006 (Public)  
News Service No: 246  
29 September 2006

**Embargo Date: 29 September 2006 00:01 GMT**

### **Pakistan: Enforced disappearances in the 'war on terror'**

In cooperating in the US-led 'war on terror', the Pakistani government has systematically committed human rights abuses against hundreds of Pakistanis and foreign nationals. As the practice of enforced disappearance has spread, people have been arrested and held incommunicado in secret locations with their detention officially denied. They are at risk of torture and unlawful transfer to third countries.

"The road to Guantánamo very literally starts in Pakistan," said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director of Research at Amnesty International.

"Hundreds of people have been picked up in mass arrests, many have been sold to the USA as 'terrorists' simply on the word of their captor, and hundreds have been transferred to Guantánamo Bay, Bagram Airbase or secret detention centres run by the USA."

The routine practice of offering rewards running to thousands of dollars for unidentified terror suspects facilitated illegal detention and enforced disappearance. Bounty hunters -- including police officers and local people -- have captured individuals of different nationalities, often apparently at random, and sold them into US custody.

More than 85 percent of detainees at Guantánamo Bay were arrested, not by US forces, but by the Afghan Northern Alliance and in Pakistan at a time when rewards of up to US\$5,000 were paid for every "terrorist" handed over to the USA. Often the only grounds for holding them were the allegations of their captors, who stood to gain from their arrest. Some 300 people -- previously labelled as "terrorists" and "killers" by the US government -- have since been released from Guantánamo Bay without charge, the majority to Pakistan or Afghanistan.

"Enforced disappearances were almost unheard of in Pakistan before the start of the US-led 'war on terror' -- now they are a growing phenomenon, spreading beyond terror suspects to Baloch and Sindhi nationalists and journalists," said Angelika Pathak, South Asia researcher at Amnesty International.

Many detainees remain unaccounted for, their fate and whereabouts unknown. Three women and five children were arrested alongside Tanzanian terror suspect Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani in Punjab province in July 2004. They included a baby and a 13-year-old Saudi boy called Talha, according to reports. More than two years later, nothing is known about the fate and whereabouts of Talha and the other children and women. Ahmed Ghailani was one of 14 individuals transferred from secret CIA custody to Guantánamo Bay in September 2006.

"These and other children have been detained in Pakistan's pursuit of the 'war on terror' -- and not even the children, let alone the adults, have been presumed innocent and allowed to challenge the legality of

their detention," said Angelika Pathak. "Rather, they have spent months and years imprisoned without trial."

Pakistani politicians, media and civil society need to take a stand and hold the government to account so the practice is ended and the fate and whereabouts of all victims clarified.

The non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has noted a new tolerance to abuses and suggested it might be attributable to the "impact of the war on terrorism on the public psyche".

Terror suspects held in secret are especially vulnerable to torture in Pakistan. Victims have been hung upside down and beaten and deprived of sleep and food. Agents from other countries, including the USA, appear to have known of, or been present during interrogations of people held in arbitrary and secret detention.

"The Pakistani government must set up a central register of detainees and publish regular lists of all recognised places of detention so that in future nobody can be secretly imprisoned and face the risks of torture and other abuses that secret detention involves," said Angelika Pathak. "Foreign governments, including the US, must investigate all allegations of torture in which their agents may be complicit."

Relatives have few places to turn in searching for those who have been abducted. Police have refused to investigate or register complaints. Those who challenge detentions through the provincial high courts find that security forces deny all knowledge of a person's whereabouts and judges have frequently failed to challenge these denials.

Khalid Mehmood Rashid, a Pakistani national, was handed over to Pakistani officials in South Africa on 6 November 2005 and flown to Pakistan. He has not been seen since. Despite official acknowledgements that he is being held by the Pakistani government, the Ministry of Interior has not responded to his family's inquiries as to where he is being held.

The clandestine nature of the "war on terror" makes it impossible to know exactly how many enforced disappearances, other arbitrary detentions or unlawful killings have been committed in Pakistan, but Pakistani military spokesperson Major-General Shaukat Sultan said in June 2006 that since 2001 some 500 "terrorists" had been killed and over 1,000 had been arrested.

## **Background**

To see the report, 'Pakistan: Human rights ignored in the 'war on terror' please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA330362006>

To see the executive summary of the report, 'Pakistan: Human rights ignored in the 'war on terror' please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa330352006>

To see the text of a US flyer offering substantial rewards for the capture of suspected enemies, please go to: <http://www.amnesty.org/resources/pakistan/flyer.html>

For more information about Amnesty International's campaign against the use of torture and other ill-treatment in the "war on terror", please go to: [www.amnesty.org/stoptorture](http://www.amnesty.org/stoptorture).

## **Public Document**

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