

AI INDEX: ASA 33/15/96
5 NOVEMBER 1996

News Service 206/96

PAKISTAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON CARETAKER GOVERNMENT OF
PRIME MINISTER MERAJ KHALID TO RESTORE HUMAN RIGHTS

Following today's dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government, Amnesty International is calling on the caretaker government of Prime Minister Meraj Khalid to take prompt and effective measures to provide redress for past human rights violations and to prevent their recurrence.

Among the grounds for dismissing the former government cited by President Farooq Leghari was that *"during the past three years thousands of persons in Karachi and other parts of Pakistan have been deprived of their right to life no meaningful steps have been taken ... to put an end to the crime of extrajudicial killings which is an evil abhorrent to our Islamic faith and all canons of civilized government"*.

"To our knowledge, this is the first time that the Pakistan head of state has publicly acknowledged that a government may not continue in office if it systematically disregards the human rights of people in Pakistan," Amnesty International said.

"We hope that the caretaker government will take its cue from the President's words: it should restore respect for human rights by tackling the problem at its root -- the impunity of offenders. Only if justice is seen to be done by holding perpetrators of violations to account will the cycle of violence be broken, allowing people the freedom to enjoy their rights."

President Leghari said the government of Benazir Bhutto had been guilty of a *"sustained assault"* on the judiciary and had permitted *"corruption, nepotism and violation of rules"* to become *"extensive and widespread"* preventing the *"orderly functioning of Government in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the law"*.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern at the scale of human rights violations in Pakistan -- arbitrary detention of political opponents, torture including rape, unlawful killings and "disappearances" in custody -- and the impunity with which they have been committed.

Following meetings with government officials in May, an Amnesty International delegation said that it was shocked at the complacency with which government ministers had acknowledged that human rights violations were a fact of life in Pakistan.

Amnesty International urges the caretaker government to ensure that all allegations of human rights violations are subjected to impartial and independent inquiry and that all those found responsible for such violations are brought to justice.

The government should further ensure that existing constitutional and legal safeguards protecting human rights are adhered to and strengthened so that no further human rights violations are committed.

ENDS\