

AI INDEX: ASA 33/21/95
17 AUGUST 1995

PAKISTAN: VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES NOT ABATING IN KARACHI

Every day a dozen deliberate and arbitrary killings are reported from Karachi -- in July the city's death toll was a staggering 279, according to Amnesty International.

Against this backdrop of escalating violence, Amnesty International today held the Government of Pakistan responsible for serious human rights violations committed in the context of concerted campaign for law and order in the city.

"The government is simply not doing enough to protect innocent citizens from targeted killings by armed opposition groups," Amnesty International said. "Armed opposition groups should respect minimum humanitarian standards, but if they don't the government should not use their violence as an excuse to commit torture or killings."

In recent days, several people have reportedly been extrajudicially executed. Farooq Putney and three other workers of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) were shot dead on 2 August by police in what was described as an "encounter". Family members, however, claimed that the men were earlier arrested from their homes.

Every day both party activists and citizens not involved in politics die as a result of targeted killings by armed groups few of whom are ever held to account. Dead bodies, blind-folded with their hands bound, showing marks of torture or mutilation are often dumped in the streets of Karachi indicating the torture that caused their deaths.

During police sweeps, hundreds of people were reportedly arrested in the last few weeks; some were blind-folded and beaten then released within a short period but an unknown number of people continue to be held.

Reports of arrests of family members of wanted persons belonging to various political parties continue to be received. The victims are mainly family members of MQM activists, but families of members of other parties are reportedly affected as well.

Several people have reportedly "disappeared" in custody. These include Rais Fatima, a 26-year old MQM activist, who on 4 June in Karachi boarded a train for Lahore never to arrive there. Qamar Mansoor Siddiqui, a MQM parliamentarian who had accompanied her, also disappeared but on 7 July the Lahore High Court, hearing a *habeas corpus* petition, was told that Qamar had been arrested on 20 June by the Federal Investigation Agency on charges of sedition. Despite High Court orders, lawyers have not been given access to the prisoner in Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi; contact with Qamar could have thrown light on Rais Fatima's whereabouts.

Other "disappeared" persons include detained MQM workers who are often transferred to

unknown prison locations. Three such prisoners, including an MQM senator, Zahid Akhtar, who had been secretly transferred from Peshawar Jail to Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail were later shown on TV confessing various acts of terrorism.

Amnesty International fears that these detainees -- kept during such periods of unacknowledged detention and before such "public confessions"-- may be subjected to torture and ill-treatment and calls for an end to such practices.

People who have spoken up against the alleged collusion of the government with a faction of the MQM, the MQM Haqiqi, have not been protected against threats and harassment. Farooq Sumar had in May accused the government of an "alliance with crime" by condoning the criminal activities of the Haqiqi group of the MQM. On the basis of his complaint, the Home Ministry ordered the arrest of the Haqiqi leader, Afaq Ahmed Khan, which was rescinded upon the personal intervention by the Sindh Chief Minister.

The non-governmental Human Right Commission of Pakistan confirmed that Sumar and members of his family "face a serious threat to their lives and security"; nevertheless no protective steps were taken by either the federal or provincial government. Continued impunity enjoyed by armed political groups has emboldened them to further harass and threaten those who seek to stop them.

Amnesty International urges the armed opposition groups to refrain from hostage-taking, torture, and deliberate and arbitrary killings. The organization also calls on the government to set up independent and impartial inquiries into every single case of torture, death in custody and extrajudicial execution reported.

Amnesty International believes that all persons who are not charged with a recognizable criminal offence, such as relatives of wanted persons, should be immediately and unconditionally released. The government should also ensure that political prisoners held on criminal charges are treated in accordance with international standards for fair trial, granting them prompt and regular access to family, lawyers and appropriate medical attention. No one should be held in unacknowledged detention and subjected to torture.

ENDS\