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## **Pakistan: Military coup -- urgent need for comprehensive legal and institutional reforms**

Human rights protection must not be ignored by those in control of the country during this current political crisis, Amnesty International said today following the dismissal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government in a military coup.

"All the political forces in Pakistan must make every effort to institute reforms which enable full enjoyment of civil and political freedoms and make human rights a reality," Amnesty International said

While deeply concerned about the military takeover and the bypassing of the constitutional process, Amnesty International believes that the current crisis should be a wake up call to Pakistan's civil society and the international community of the need to halt and reverse the slide into massive human rights abuses for which successive governments must be held responsible.

"This is a time to evaluate where things have gone wrong over the last decades and to urgently put constitutional, legal and institutional reforms in place which will at long last ensure that all people in Pakistan can enjoy the full range of human rights free from discrimination and fear," the human rights organization added.

Amnesty International believes that it is not enough to call for respect for the constitution to be restored when the constitution itself has been grossly distorted over time. Similarly, a call for the restoration of the rule of law is meaningless when the law itself has become flawed and does not ensure the enjoyment of all rights to all, without discrimination.

"Institutions, including the judiciary and the police have been lastingly weakened and made to subserve the executive," the organization said. "Real accountability and genuine respect for the rule of law should be the guiding principles of comprehensive reforms."

The human rights organization calls on the military to take all possible measures to ensure that no one is arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured or extrajudicially executed.

"The military leadership must guarantee the life and physical integrity of members of the dismissed government, believed to be in the army's 'protective custody', and release them immediately."

## **Background**

The human rights situation in Pakistan has been grave under successive governments as arbitrary arrests, detention of political opponents and the routine use of torture has been widespread -- over one hundred people die each year in Pakistan as a result of torture. Reports of extrajudicial executions have risen from all provinces and the use of the death penalty, often imposed by special courts following procedures not commensurate with international standard for fair trial, has spiralled.

Women, children and ethnic and religious minorities have suffered persistent discrimination and inadequate protection. Corruption and lack of accountability at all levels of the state have further contributed to massive human rights violations committed with virtual impunity.

During Nawaz Sharif's tenure, civil society came under increasing pressure as democratic institutions were weakened and the rule of law increasingly disregarded. One of his first moves was to remove the president's powers to dismiss the government and to make it mandatory for parliamentarians to vote in accordance with party policy. The judiciary was weakened making redress for human rights violations more difficult to obtain. The press was intimidated by repeated arrests and threats and non-governmental organization, including human rights organizations, were hampered by government interference.

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