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PAKISTAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION OF SPATE OF DELIBERATE AND ARBITRARY KILLINGS

A wave of killings in Pakistan could plunge the country into a cycle of human rights abuses unless the government acts now, Amnesty International said.

The killings have been concentrated in Karachi over the past 11 months, according to official statements, where more than 650 people have been killed and many more injured because of their ethnic or religious identity or their political views.

Only a very small fraction of these killings and attacks appear to have been investigated by police or official inquiries and very few offenders have been charged and arrested.

Amnesty International is calling on Pakistan's government to establish independent and impartial investigations into these deliberate and arbitrary killings and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Failure to do so will only encourage speculation that the government condones such killings.

"By bringing criminal charges against perpetrators of human rights abuses Pakistan's government would send a clear message that such violations will not be tolerated and that those found responsible will be held fully accountable," Amnesty International said.

On 4 December, Muhammad Salahuddin, editor of the Urdu weekly "Takbeer" was shot dead as he got into his car outside his office in Karachi. He was highly critical of the policies of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) which reportedly led to his office being ransacked and to his house being set on fire in late 1991, allegedly by MQM activists. On 6 December, Mohammad Samdani Warsi, manager of the Urdu daily "Parcham", -- a newspaper which is understood to be close to the MQM -- was shot dead in his office.

Earlier this month, Maulana Sattar Edhi, the founder of a country-wide network of social and health services whose ambulances have often been the only neutral entity to salvage the seriously injured, left Pakistan after threats to his life.

On 8 December 15 people were killed in Karachi, including five supporters of a party of the Shia religious minority, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh Jafria Pakistan. On 6 December eight people were shot dead inside a mosque in Karachi; its prayer leader was known to be a supporter of a party of the Sunni majority, the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. Dozens of people belonging to the warring factions of the MQM, the MQM (Altaf) and the MQM (Haqiqi), have reportedly been shot dead in targeted killings in recent weeks.

Earlier in the year at least six members of the Ahmadiyya community were deliberately killed in different towns of Pakistan, apparently solely because of their exercise of their right to freedom of religion. In all the cases reported to Amnesty International, the police had been very reluctant to register complaints. Police enquiries were reportedly very perfunctory and no one has been arrested in connection with the deliberate and arbitrary killing of the Ahmadis.

Amnesty International is urging the Government of Pakistan to set up an independent and impartial inquiry into the deaths of the two journalists and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

Other reports of politically, religiously or ethnically motivated deliberate and arbitrary killings, including those of the six Ahmadis, should also be promptly investigated and those responsible should be held accountable in order to break the patterns of human rights abuses that has been allowed to develop.

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