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Pakistan: New government must seize the opportunity to reveal the truth about enforced disappearances

"The new government of Pakistan should immediately reveal details of where hundreds of missing people, the victims of enforced disappearances, are being held, investigate all cases and hold to account those responsible -- including the country's security and intelligence agencies," said Amnesty International in a report released today.

Amnesty International also demanded that Pakistan's new government leaders reinstate deposed judges who had previously been investigating disappearance cases. When President Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency in November 2007, he deposed key judges who had demanded answers from the state on enforced disappearances.

In its new report '[Denying the undeniable, enforced disappearances in Pakistan](#)', Amnesty International uses official court records and affidavits of victims and witnesses of enforced disappearances to confront the Pakistan authorities with evidence of how government officials, especially from the security and intelligence agencies, obstructed attempts to trace those who had disappeared.

Hundreds of people who have "disappeared" were detained under counter terrorism measures justified by Pakistan as part of the US-led 'war on terror'.

The report also calls on other governments -- most notably the US -- to ensure that they are not complicit in, contributing to, or tolerating the practice of enforced disappearances. Many people who have been secretly held in detention centres in Pakistan say they were interrogated by Pakistani intelligence agencies but also by foreign intelligence agents.

"Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani has emphasized the coalition government's commitment to upholding human rights. We urge him to act immediately to resolve all cases of enforced disappearance", said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific director.

"As a first immediate measure, the new government should ease the suffering of the relatives of the 'disappeared' by either releasing the detainees or transferring them to official places of detention."

Enforced disappearances, by their nature, are shrouded in secrecy, making it impossible to provide accurate numbers of victims. Pakistani organizations working on behalf of families of those who have disappeared claim there are at least 563 cases.

From affidavits and testimonies the report reveals a pattern of security or other forces arbitrarily detaining people (some of them children, in one case a nine-year-old boy), blindfolding them, and moving them around various detention centres so they become difficult to trace.

"We don't know if those subjected to enforced disappearances are guilty or innocent, but it is their fundamental right to be charged and tried properly in a court of law," said Sam Zarifi.

"By holding people in secret detention the government of Pakistan has not only violated their rights, but also failed in its duty to charge and try those suspected of involvement in attacks on civilians."

Background

This report ([ASA 33/018/2008](#)) is the latest in an ongoing campaign by Amnesty International to end the practice of enforced disappearances worldwide.

In 2006, Amnesty International documented dozens of cases of enforced disappearances in Pakistan, focusing on people who were picked up in the counter terrorism measures adopted by Pakistan in the context of the US-led 'war on terror'.

At the time, President Musharraf dismissed Amnesty International's allegations by stating: "I don't even want to reply to that, it is nonsense, I don't believe it, I don't trust it." He added that his government had detained 700 people but that all were accounted for. In March 2007, President Musharraf again asserted that the claim that hundreds of persons had disappeared in the custody of Pakistani intelligence agencies had "absolutely no basis" but that in fact these individuals had been recruited or lured by "jihadi groups" to fight. "I am deadly sure that the missing persons are in the control of militant organizations," he said.

Case studies from the report

* Asad Usman, a nine-year-old boy, was picked up by the Balochistan Frontier Constabulary who are on the record as saying that he would be released after his wanted elder brother surrendered. He was detained in Tump or Mand, near Turbat in Balochistan province. The Supreme Court ordered his release on 27 April 2007.

* Masood Janjua, a 45 year old businessman and father, was apprehended by Pakistani security forces while on a bus in July 2005 with his friend Faisal Faraz, a 25-year-old engineer from Lahore. The government has not acknowledged that it is holding Mr Janjua, despite testimony from several former detainees -- including Dr. Imran Munir -- who saw him in custody. Masood's wife, Amina Masood Janjua, co-founded the Defence of Human Rights group with Faisal's mother.

* Dr. Imran Munir, a Malaysian citizen of Pakistani origin, was arrested in July 2006 and his whereabouts remained unknown until the Supreme Court was informed in its hearing on 4 May 2007 that he was facing a court martial on charges of "spying against Pakistan". A month later the Court was informed that Dr. Munir had been sentenced to eight years imprisonment. The Court ordered his appearance in court and, on finding that his health was deteriorating, ordered his admission into hospital. Dr. Munir was set to record his statement regarding his enforced disappearance when the hearing was disrupted with the imposition of the state of emergency in November last year. Dr. Munir's conviction was set aside by military authorities after the Supreme Court questioned the conviction. Amnesty International has been informed that Dr. Munir has

not yet been retried on spying charges, which remain pending against him, and that he is still confined to hospital.