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Pakistan urged to end enforced disappearances

Authorities in Pakistan must urgently end the widespread practice of enforced disappearance and ensure anyone detained has full access to lawyers and the courts, Amnesty International said in a new briefing today.

“The Pakistan government has made little progress in resolving hundreds of cases of alleged disappearance, while new incidents are being reported around the country,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific director.

The briefing, *The Bitterest of Agonies: End enforced disappearances in Pakistan*, published on the International Day of the Disappeared, highlights the plight of hundreds of people who have been arbitrarily detained and held in secret facilities in Pakistan since late 2001, when the country became a key ally in the US-led “war on terror”.

The whereabouts of all of these victims remains unknown.

People accused of involvement in terrorism and political opponents of the Pakistani government – such as members of Pakistan’s Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups – are among the groups increasingly subjected to enforced disappearance.

“Despite three years of promises to resolve this crisis, hundreds of families are desperate to learn about the fates of their loved ones,” Zarifi said.

“It’s not just the victims who are directly affected. Their families cannot move on, emotionally, but also legally and practically, until they can concretely discover what has happened to the disappeared.”

Amina Masood Janjua, wife of Masood Ahmed Janjua, has not seen her husband since he was apprehended during a bus journey to Peshawar in July 2005.

Amina told Amnesty International: “This is the worst thing to happen to anyone. If someone dies, you cry and people console you and after some time you come to terms with it, but if someone disappears, you cannot breathe, it is the bitterest of agonies.”