

## PAKISTAN

the long wait for human rights

8 years old and...

...condemned to hard labour

Around 11 to 12 million child labourers, half of them under 10, work for little or no pay in Pakistan, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Many are bonded to factory owners. State agents have been complicit in these practices.

The long wait for human rights

Pakistan marks the 50th anniversary of its creation on 14 August 1997. But for the majority of its people there is little to celebrate.

Successive governments' disregard for the rule of law, abuse of office and widespread corruption have taken their toll: ordinary citizens continue to suffer human rights abuses, poverty and illiteracy. All too often state agents are complicit in pernicious forms of violence and exploitation, such as tribal justice systems and child labour.

Many people in Pakistan use the term "law enforcement personnel" with bitterness. They say that the only law the police enforce is their own will — to torture, rape, intimidate or humiliate people in their custody, or to extract bribes. Police beat, kick and use electric shocks on detainees, hang them upside down and deprive them of food and sleep. Scores of people die from torture every year, and their relatives face official obstructions if they try to seek redress. Virtually no police officer has ever been brought to justice for torturing or killing detainees.

Police often take the law into their own hands. Instead of arresting suspects, they shoot them dead. Scores of people die this way every year. The official story is always that police fired in self-defence — even when their victims were seen being arrested, disarmed and handcuffed.

Ordinary people not only fear the police. They also fear the law. Under the Zina Ordinance, women can be sentenced to death for rape or zina (fornication) without their testimony being heard. Other laws make it a criminal offence for specific religious groups to profess, practice and propagate their faith. Several laws prescribe cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments, including fettering, whipping, judicial amputation and stoning to death. And the scope of the most cruel punishment of all, the death penalty, is continually being expanded, despite the worldwide trend towards abolition and the lack of proof that it has a deterrent effect.

While some of those in office act as if they are above the law, most people find it impossible to obtain redress provided by the law when their rights are violated. Women, children and members of particular ethnic or religious groups are virtually condemned to suffer in silence. Despite ratification by Pakistan of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, relevant legal safeguards have not been put in place. Children are still being sentenced to death; women are sentenced to death or whipping if they fail to prove that they were raped.

A new report by Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Time to take human rights seriously*, calls on the Government of Nawaz Sharif to use its strength in parliament to protect and promote human rights — not as a birthday present to the people in Pakistan but as something to which they have had a right for the past 50 years.

The aspirations

'It is the will of the people of Pakistan to establish an order...

'Wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam, shall be fully observed...

‘Wherein shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social economic and political justice, and freedom of thought...

‘Wherein the independence of the judiciary shall be fully secured...’

Preamble to the 1973 Pakistan Constitution

The reality

1 The fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution are habitually abused.

- \* Official disregard for the rule of law is endemic.
- \* Most people grow poorer, while a small elite controls wealth and monopolizes political power.
- \* Human rights violations, such as torture, extrajudicial executions and “disappearances”, go virtually unpunished.
- \* The authorities connive in unlawful practices such as bonded labour, child labour and widespread domestic violence.

14 years old and...

...condemned to death

Salamat Masih, a Christian, was sentenced to death in 1995 for allegedly scribbling blasphemous words on a mosque, even though he was illiterate and still a child. An angry mob in the court demanded his death and a co-accused was shot dead after a court hearing. Salamat was acquitted on appeal as there was no evidence against him.

Under Pakistan law, the scope of the death penalty is continually being expanded: it now covers offences including murder, zina and rape, hijacking and sabotaging the railway system.

What the government should do

Amnesty International is calling on the Pakistan Government to:

- \* release unconditionally and immediately all prisoners of conscience;
- \* publicly and unequivocally condemn torture and extrajudicial executions;
- \* investigate every instance of torture, death in custody or extrajudicial execution and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- \* replace all cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments, including flogging, fettering, judicial amputation and stoning to death, by punishments which are permitted under international human rights standards;
- \* introduce legislative measures to curb the abuse of the blasphemy laws as a first step towards their abolition;
- \* abolish the Zina Ordinance;
- \* implement protection of women and children to which Pakistan has committed itself internationally;
- \* stop all executions and abolish the death penalty;
- \* ratify international human rights instruments, beginning with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

What you can do

- \* Approach your political representative to raise with your government Amnesty International’s human rights concerns in Pakistan.
- \* Send a copy of this leaflet to your local business association or national chamber of commerce to highlight violations of human rights in Pakistan, including of women and children, and urge that they use any links with Pakistan to combat these problems.
- \* Ask your local library, college or place of worship to display this leaflet.
- \* Write politely to the Government of Pakistan: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Office of the Prime Minister, Islamabad, Pakistan.

\*Write politely to the Pakistan Embassy in your country about the issues raised in this leaflet.  
\*Join Amnesty International in its worldwide fight against human rights violations of this kind.  
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