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Pakistan's new leaders must not allow Taliban peace deal to trump human rights

Pakistan's new government must not surrender respect for human rights in any potential peace talks with the Taliban or other armed groups, Amnesty International said.

The organization also urged the new government, which takes office today (5 June), to make human rights a top priority during its term, starting with investigating election-related killings and other abuses that occurred over the last three months.

"Pakistan has just passed a historic political milestone by seeing through this democratic transition. The new administration must now seize the opportunity to tackle the many human rights challenges facing the country," said Polly Truscott, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia-Pacific Director.

The transition to the new government, led by incoming Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (N) party, marks the first time in Pakistan's history that one elected civilian government is replaced by another, after seeing out a full term in office.

But the campaigning period, from March this year when elections were announced to election day on 11 May, was marred by political violence across Pakistan. More than 150 people were victims of apparently politically motivated killings, including up to 64 people killed on election day alone.

The Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) faced the largest number of attacks. However, members of Pakistan's other major political parties and some independent candidates were also attacked.

While the Pakistani Taliban have claimed responsibility for more attacks than any other group, some of those believed responsible for election-related violence actually belong to some of the political parties which came under attack.

Politically motivated violence has also continued in the three weeks since elections ended, particularly in Karachi, where several individuals affiliated with the MQM have been abducted or killed.

A senior member of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf party was also killed in broad daylight in Karachi on 19 May.

"The killings and other violence seen over the weeks leading up to the polls, and the failure of the authorities to carry out effective investigations into such apparently politically motivated killings, are a sad reminder of the impunity enjoyed by Pakistan's human rights abusers," Truscott said.

The authorities must investigate all election-related killings and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice in trials which comply with international human rights standards.

“Pakistan has a poor record of holding perpetrators of human rights abuses to account. By taking this issue seriously, the new government will signal it is no longer business as usual – human rights abuses will no longer be tolerated,” said Truscott.

“In contrast, talk of a negotiated peace deal with the Taliban that might compromise human rights sends precisely the opposite signal.”

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Pervez Khattak have indicated their intention to invite leaders of the Pakistani Taliban from the country’s insurgency-hit tribal areas for talks with a view to an eventual peace agreement.

Amnesty International has documented extensive human rights abuses by the Taliban and affiliated armed groups throughout Pakistan – including apparent war crimes – resulting in thousands of deaths.

“The Taliban have consistently breached the terms of past peace deals, using the respite provided to expand their control over territory and impose harsh social policies that have had a serious impact on human rights – particularly the rights of women, girls and religious minorities.”

“The government must bear in mind the significant mistakes made in the past when negotiating with the Taliban,” said Truscott.

“The only road to durable peace is enforcing human rights protections without discrimination because of gender, ethnicity, religious or political affiliation, or other grounds, and ensuring those responsible for abuses are brought to justice in fair trials.”

More information

[“Will Pakistan seize chance on human rights?”](#), Op-ed (Mustafa Qadri for CNN), 14 May 2013

[“Pakistan: Election candidates must prioritise human rights”](#), Open Letter, 25 April 2013.

[“Pakistan: End election-related violence, prioritize human rights in election campaigning”](#), Press Release, 24 April 2013.