



# amnesty international news release

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## PAKISTAN: HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IMPROVES BUT FURTHER SAFEGUARDS NEEDED

Pakistan's human rights record has improved since the change of government in 1988 but further safeguards are needed to eliminate continuing abuses, Amnesty International said today (23 May 1990).

When Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto came to power in December 1988, 2029 death sentences were commuted and thousands of prisoners were released in an amnesty, including many political prisoners convicted by special military courts. The government has also announced compensation for torture victims and set up a board to review remaining martial law convictions.

However, Amnesty International said further steps must be taken to redress human rights violations which took place under previous governments and which continue today.

In its latest report, the organization said torture, including rape, still frequently occurs in police stations; whipping remains as punishment for certain crimes; fetters are used in prisons; imprisonment on religious grounds continues; and special courts which do not conform to international standards for fair trials can impose the death penalty and try certain political offences.

Scores of people were reportedly tortured in police stations last year, including at least eight women who were allegedly raped. Torture in prisons has decreased but is still likely to recur as those responsible have not been brought to trial.

"The government has taken some steps to monitor police abuses by setting up a body to monitor police atrocities but further safeguards are clearly needed," Amnesty International said. These include strict limits on incommunicado detention; prompt and regular access to lawyers, doctors and relatives; prompt referrals to magistrates; independent investigations into reports of torture; and special provisions to protect women and children in custody.

Whipping, amputation and stoning to death remain in Pakistan's statute books and two public whippings occurred last year. Fetters are still used on prisoners, including children. Executions have ceased in Pakistan since December 1988 but the death penalty remains in law and there is no ban on executing minors. Amnesty International is calling for the abolition of all these punishments.

Sectarian imprisonment and attacks continue in Pakistan, where Ahmadis can be imprisoned for up to three years for claiming to be Muslims. The authorities have failed to investigate fully an attack on Ahmadis in July 1989 which resulted in several deaths.

Special courts set up under the Suppression of Terrorist Activities Act are increasingly used in Sind Province and fail to fulfill international standards for fair trial by presuming the guilt of the defendant in certain circumstances. Amnesty International is urging that this legislation be reviewed.

The organization welcomed the release of thousands of prisoners in December 1988, including many political prisoners convicted by special military courts. These courts had restricted defence rights and reportedly accepted evidence extracted under torture. However, several hundred martial law convicts remain imprisoned, including possible political prisoners. Amnesty International is urging that their cases be reviewed fairly "to ensure no prisoner remains wrongly jailed on convictions from politically-motivated charges secured in unfair trials."

The organization is also calling for a review of administrative detention provisions which currently allow authorities to detain people without charge or trial for up to eight or twelve months, depending on the grounds for detention.

Amnesty International's report, Pakistan - Human Rights Safeguards, was compiled after a delegation visited Pakistan in July/August last year and was submitted to the government in early April.

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