

Following a six-day visit to Oman in September, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association stated that limits on peaceful assembly in Oman were “quite restrictive, to the point where they often annul the essence of the right”.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women were not accorded equal rights with men under the criminal law, which attached less weight to the evidence of a woman than to the evidence of a man, and under personal status law, which accorded men greater rights in relation to divorce, child custody and inheritance.

MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Migrant workers received inadequate protection under labour laws and faced exploitation and abuse. In May and November,, the government renewed for a further six months a bar on the entry of most foreign migrant workers for construction and other work sectors. In July, a new decree amended the labour law to prevent the employment of expatriates in professions reserved for Omani nationals. The government also stated that it would begin to strictly enforce a rule barring migrant workers who leave Oman from returning for two years, which was reported to facilitate labour exploitation.

DEATH PENALTY

Oman retained the death penalty for murder and other offences. In June, the State Council approved proposals to extend its use to drug trafficking offences. No executions were reported.

PAKISTAN

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Head of state: **Mamnoon Hussain**

Head of government: **Muhammad Nawaz Sharif**

In December, the Pakistani Taliban-led attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar resulted in 149 deaths, including 132 children, marking the deadliest terrorist attack in Pakistan's history. In response, the government lifted the moratorium on carrying out death sentences and swiftly executed seven men previously convicted for other terror-related offences. The Prime Minister announced plans for allowing military courts to try terror suspects as part of the government's National Action Plan against terrorism, adding to concerns over fair trials. In October education rights activist Malala Yousafzai jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in October along with Indian child rights activist Kailash Satyarthi. The National Assembly approved the Protection of Pakistan Act in July and other security laws during the year that enshrined sweeping powers for law enforcement and security forces, expanding the scope for arbitrary arrests, indefinite detention, the use of lethal force, and secret court proceedings which go well beyond international law enforcement and fair trial standards. Pakistan's media faced sustained harassment and other abuse, and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority briefly ordered the closure of the two largest private broadcasters because of content critical of the authorities. Religious minorities continued to face discrimination and persecution, especially due to the blasphemy laws.

BACKGROUND

Hearings in the treason trial of former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf continued to be delayed, creating tensions between the

democratically elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the powerful military. The government and opposition political parties failed to secure a peace deal with the Pakistani Taliban, culminating in the latter carrying out an attack on Karachi International Airport that claimed at least 34 lives, mostly of security forces and Taliban fighters. That attack and continued pressure from the USA resulted in the Pakistan Army launching a major military operation against Taliban and al-Qa'ida sanctuaries in North Waziristan tribal agency in June, which was continuing as of the end of 2014.

Following their claims of rigging in the 2013 general elections, and disaffection with independent inquiries into these claims, demonstrators led by the opposition politician Imran Khan and the religious cleric Tahir ul Qadri held protests across the country calling on the government of Nawaz Sharif to step down and for fresh elections. After the killing of 12 political activists by police in Lahore's Model Town neighbourhood on 17 June, the protests became increasingly confrontational, peaking in August and September. Demonstrators briefly stormed the National Assembly and threatened to occupy the Prime Minister's official residence, creating a crisis that risked forcing the collapse of the government, until the military publicly backed the Prime Minister.

For the fourth year in a row major floods across Pakistan displaced hundreds of thousands, creating a major humanitarian crisis.

Attempts by the government to improve relations with India early in the year stalled as the armed forces of the two countries engaged in regular clashes across the Line of Control across Jammu and Kashmir.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

Armed groups were implicated in human rights abuses across the country. On 16 December, several men claimed by the Pakistani Taliban as its members attacked the Army Public School in the northwestern

city of Peshawar, where 149 people were killed, 132 of them children, and dozens injured in shootings and suicide bombings. The Pakistani Taliban said the attack was in response to recent Pakistan Army operations in nearby North Waziristan in which hundreds of Taliban fighters had been killed.

Various factions of the Pakistani Taliban continued to carry out attacks, including against activists and journalists for promoting education and other rights, or for criticizing them. Ahrar ul Hind, a breakaway group from the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the 3 March gun and suicide bomb attack on a court house in Islamabad that left 11 dead and several others injured, reportedly in response to the Pakistani Taliban's decision to enter peace talks with the government. Jamat ul Ahrar, another breakaway group from the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the 2 November suicide bomb attack following the daily flag lowering parade at the Wagah Border Post between Pakistan and India, which left 61 dead and more than 100 injured.

Health workers involved in polio and other vaccination campaigns were killed in various parts of the country. Killings were particularly prevalent in parts of the northwest and the city of Karachi, areas with an active presence of Taliban and aligned groups which oppose vaccinations. Ethnic Baloch armed groups calling for a separate state of Balochistan were implicated in the killing and abduction of security forces and others on the basis of their ethnic or political affiliations, and carried out attacks on infrastructure. The anti-Shi'a armed group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for a series of assassinations and other attacks on the Shi'a Muslim population, particularly in the province of Balochistan and the cities of Karachi and Lahore. Rival armed groups frequently clashed, resulting in scores of fatalities.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Despite clear rulings by the Supreme Court to the government in 2013 demanding

the recovery of victims of enforced disappearances, the authorities did little to meet its obligations under international law and the Constitution to prevent these violations. The practices of state security forces, including actions within the scope of laws such as the Protection of Pakistan Act, resulted in men and boys being subjected to enforced disappearance across Pakistan and particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh. Several victims were later found dead, bearing what appeared to be bullet wounds and torture marks. The government did not implement Supreme Court orders calling for security forces responsible for enforced disappearances to be brought to justice.

Zahid Baloch, Chairman of the Baloch Student Organisation-Azad, was abducted in Quetta, Balochistan, on 18 March. Witnesses claimed he was taken at gunpoint in the city's Satellite Town area by personnel of the Frontier Corps, a federal security force. The authorities denied knowledge of his arrest and failed to investigate his fate or whereabouts or to investigate the abduction adequately. No new information was known at the end of the year.¹

The bodies of men and boys arbitrarily detained by the Pakistan armed forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) continued to be recovered months or years later, while the authorities generally failed to abide by Peshawar High Court orders either to release those suspected of terrorism or charge them promptly and bring them to trial. Detainees continued to have limited access to families and lawyers. There were some rare instances of activists subjected to enforced disappearance being returned alive. On 5 February, Kareem Khan, an anti-drone activist and a relative of victims, was abducted by up to 20 armed men, some in police uniforms, from his home in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, days before he was due to travel to Europe to give testimony before the European Parliament on the impact of

US drone strikes on Pakistan's tribal areas. He was released nine days later following pressure from local and international rights groups and foreign governments. He claimed that he had been subjected to torture and repeatedly questioned about his activism and his investigation of drone strikes. The authorities failed to investigate the incident adequately and did not bring those responsible to justice.

Human rights groups criticized a judicial inquiry into mass graves discovered in Totak Balochistan on 25 January for failing to investigate state security forces adequately. Baloch activists claimed that the graves belonged to ethnic Baloch activists who had been subjected to enforced disappearance.²

INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

Parts of FATA in northwestern Pakistan continued to be affected by internal armed conflict, facing regular attacks by the Taliban and other armed groups, the Pakistan armed forces, and US drone aircraft that claimed hundreds of lives. In June the Pakistan Army launched a major military operation in North Waziristan tribal agency, and carried out sporadic operations in Khyber tribal agency and other parts of FATA. Affected communities routinely complained of the disproportionate use of force and indiscriminate attacks by all sides to the conflict, especially the Pakistan armed forces. The fighting displaced over a million residents, most of whom were forced to flee to the district of Bannu in neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province during the hottest period of the year. US drone strikes continued sporadically from 11 June onwards after a hiatus of nearly six months, reigniting concerns of unlawful killings. On 5 June the Islamabad High Court ordered the arrest of a former CIA station chief for Pakistan over his alleged responsibility for unlawful killings due to pilotless drone aircraft in the tribal areas. On 12 September, security forces announced the arrest in North Waziristan of 10 men allegedly involved in the 2012 assassination

attempt on education rights activist Malala Yousafzai. Questions remained as to how they were arrested, their treatment in detention and whether they would receive a fair trial.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION - JOURNALISTS

At least eight journalists were killed across Pakistan during the year in direct response to their work, marking the country out as one of the most dangerous in the world for the media profession.³ High-profile television anchor Hamid Mir claimed that the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, the most powerful intelligence service, was responsible for an attempt on his life which he narrowly escaped in Karachi on 19 April. Following the claims, which were broadcast nationally by Hamid Mir's television station Geo TV, the broadcaster was formally suspended for 15 days on 6 June. Several journalists associated with the outlet received daily threats and harassment by unidentified individuals by phone and in person. Many refused to enter their offices or identify themselves as belonging to Geo TV or associated media for fear of being attacked.

On 20 October, Geo TV's main rival, ARY News, was also suspended after the Lahore High Court held that the broadcaster and some of its journalists had been in contempt of court for airing the views of an individual facing trial before the court.

In March, the Prime Minister promised to appoint special public prosecutors to investigate attacks on journalists, and he personally visited Hamid Mir in hospital after the attempt on his life. No one had been brought to justice for this attempted killing or any other attack on journalists at the end of the year.⁴

DISCRIMINATION - RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Religious minorities continued to face laws and practices that resulted in their discrimination and persecution. Dozens of ethnic Hazaras were killed in attacks in

Quetta and other parts of Balochistan; the armed group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for many of these, saying they were because the Hazaras were Shi'a Muslims. Members of the Sikh religious community staged several protests throughout the year against killings, abductions and attacks on their places of worship in different parts of the country. They complained that the authorities consistently failed to provide adequate protection from such attacks or bring those responsible to justice.

The blasphemy laws remained in force, in violation of the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of opinion and expression. Abuse connected with the blasphemy laws occurred regularly during the year as demonstrated in several high-profile cases. Renowned human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman was shot dead in front of colleagues in his office in the city of Multan, Punjab province, on 7 May. Prior to his killing, Rashid Rehman had received regular death threats because of his legal representation of a university teacher, Junaid Hafeez, who had been arrested on charges of blasphemy. On 18 September Professor Muhammad Shakil Auj, a noted religious scholar and dean of Islamic Studies at Karachi University, was gunned down by unidentified assailants while travelling to a meeting. He had faced death threats and charges of blasphemy from rival religious scholars in the months prior to his killing.

A mob burned down the homes of a small Ahmadiyya community in Punjab province on the evening of 27 July, after a resident was accused of blasphemy - two children and their grandmother died of smoke inhalation and several others were seriously injured. On 16 October the appeal bench of the Lahore High Court rejected an application by a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, to have her 2010 death sentence for blasphemy overturned.⁵ In March, a Christian road sweeper, Savan Masih, was sentenced to death for blasphemy after a friend accused him of making blasphemous remarks during an argument.

The accusations provoked a two-day riot in his neighbourhood in Lahore, known as Joseph Colony, when a 3,000-strong mob burned around 200 homes of Christians. Police were warned of the impending attack but failed to take adequate measures to protect the community.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

A handful of high-profile so-called “honour” killing cases highlighted the risks to women from their own families for seeking to marry partners of their choice. On 27 May, Farzana Parveen was shot and beaten to death with a brick by members of her family, including her father and her ex-husband, outside the entrance to the Lahore High Court, after she had fled and married a man of her choosing. Several of her male relatives were arrested for the killing, as, separately, was her husband, Mohammad Iqbal, after he admitted to killing his first wife in order to be with Farzana Parveen.

Women also risked abuse while seeking to exercise their rights. For example, in September a *jirga* (traditional decision-making body) of male Uthmanzai tribal chiefs from North Waziristan tribal agency threatened women with violence for seeking access to humanitarian assistance in displaced persons camps in Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where the vast majority of people fleeing the conflict in the tribal agency were based.

DEATH PENALTY

The attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar on 16 December led to a resumption of executions after the six-year moratorium was lifted by Prime Minister Sharif. He announced plans for the execution of 500 people convicted for other terrorism-related offences. Seven men convicted previously were hanged in December in a swift series of executions, after President Hussain summarily rejected their appeals. The government also announced plans for early 2015 for the use of military courts in

trying terror suspects, as part of its National Action Plan against terrorism.

People continued to be sentenced to death. Shoaib Sarwar, a death row prisoner convicted of murder in 1998, was ordered to be executed in September after exhausting all his appeals. However, the execution was postponed several times by the authorities under pressure from anti-death penalty campaigners at home and abroad.⁶

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1. Pakistan: Abducted political activist at risk of death (ASA 33/008/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/008/2014/en
 2. Pakistan: Mass graves a stark reminder of violations implicating the state in Balochistan (ASA 33/001/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/001/2014/en
 3. “A bullet has been chosen for you”: Attacks on journalists in Pakistan (ASA 33/005/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/005/2014/en
 4. Pakistan: Open letter to the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif: Joint statement of shared concerns about attacks on journalists in Pakistan (ASA 33/010/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/010/2014/en
 5. Pakistan: Woman sentenced to death for blasphemy - Asia Bibi (ASA 33/015/2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/015/2014/en
 6. Pakistan: Stop first civilian execution in six years (Press release)
www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/pakistan-stop-first-civilian-execution-six-years-2014-09-15

PALESTINE (STATE OF)

State of Palestine

Head of state: **Mahmoud Abbas**

Head of government: **Rami Hamdallah**

Authorities in the West Bank and Gaza restricted freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, carried out arbitrary arrests and detentions, and tortured